

A stylized world map composed of a grid of grey dots, with several dots highlighted in red to indicate specific geographical locations.

Baffled in Mogadishu?

Europe, the USA and the International Community in Somalia

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- No politically negotiated end to violent intra-Somali conflicts between different viewpoints and interests that could lead to a stable peace are in sight.
- Parochial interests of international actors (UN, EU, USA) fuelled by geopolitical, national and bureaucratic factors are reducing the effectiveness of the commitment by the international community in Somalia, which is wanting in terms of strategy and insufficiently coordinated.
- The question of the future of overall Somali statehood is of secondary importance. A step-by-step enhancement of the legitimacy of all actors is needed. Regional dialogue forums along with educational and training programmes oriented towards basic needs could make a contribution here.

A Sort of Peace

A comprehensive, non-violent, negotiated settlement of the Somali crisis of state that has been ongoing for more than two decades now is not to be expected any time soon. Until recently Al-Shabaab militias controlled the profitable southern ports in this northeast African country, which was founded in 1960. The population of more than ten million, most of them living in poverty, has suffered under the violent rule of clan militias and criminal rings pursuing their own narrow interests. Radicalised Islamists have repeatedly staged bloody attacks. While the national government in Mogadishu is hoping for an end to historical and regional conflicts within the framework of a single unified federal state, the government of relatively peaceful Somaliland – formerly British Somaliland – is looking to form an independent state.

In spite of unresolved conflicts and a still-feeble central state, the international community believes that the Federal Republic of Somalia has been on the right track since President Hassan Sheikh Mohamud took up office (in September 2012). As it were, experts can point to recent military successes – US drones have killed several prominent Al-Shabaab leaders recently, including Ahmed Abdi Godane – and are calling for strategic patience. Opinions thus diverge. Critics view the weak, corrupt and quarrelling transitional government as a construct of the international community void of any democratic legitimacy. Although the downsized cabinet, whose membership was reshuffled in February 2015 – for the third time in two years – is considered to be more representative, inclusive and more technically skilled than its predecessors, an independent electoral commission, a constitutional referendum scheduled for March 2016 or democratic elections slated for September – these would all be firsts in the history of the country – have yet to materialise in spite of calls for such by the international community.

Generally speaking, the question arises as to whether the attempt to form a central state and forge a lasting peace »from above« really makes sense. Traditional Somali society has never had any centralised political structures. Meanwhile Al-Shabaab is increasingly shifting to asymmetrical warfare. There were more than 400 fatalities from attacks in 2014. On 20 February 2015, 28 more persons – among them members of Parliament as well as

high-ranking members of the government – were killed in a suicide attack on the Central Hotel, located in the centre of Mogadishu. 40 persons were wounded, some of them severely, in the bloodiest attack in two years. The masterminds of the strike announced in the Internet that more attacks would be carried out on western facilities. According to media reports, Al-Shabaab has 4,000 to 6,000 combat-ready supporters.

In view of the continued precarious security situation and only marginally successful attempts at state-building, the question arises once again regarding prospects for reconciliation, peace and development based on some sort of strategy. High-ranking military officers and staff working at the African Union (AU) in Addis Ababa consider the objectives and time schedules communicated under international pressure by the transitional Somali government to be unrealistic. Katherine Dhani, the recently appointed US ambassador to Somalia – the first one since 1991 – will initially be performing her job from Nairobi for security reasons. Nicholas Kay, the Special Representative of the UN Secretary General for Somalia, assesses recent political developments in diplomatic terms: he is »excited and worried« at the same time.

Meanwhile, there is much to suggest that the international community is largely uninformed about the reasons and dynamics underlying intra-Somali conflicts, with little in the way of a strategy, and largely guided by parochial interests. Instead of fostering a transformation of the way in which Somali players act and their motives based on an analysis of the matrix of interests and contexts and given the accelerated pace of social change – characterised by growing rifts between rural, primarily nomadic, traditional-religious pastoralists and increasingly mercantile-oriented urban population groups, an operational and short-term mode of thinking prevails – buttressed whenever need be by drones. Sporadic or a complete lack of first-hand experience on the part of international actors accounts for the rest. This is all giving rise to stereotypical perceptions fanned by the media (»the good versus evil terrorists«), thereby impeding – indirectly and unintended – a long-overdue reorientation that would be so desirable. A policy style that attributes any criticism of the government to radical Islamic terrorists runs the danger of underestimating local, social and economic motives influencing marginalised groups of the population.

The Somali Commitment of the International Community

Possibilities for external and regional actors to influence internal Somali decision-making processes and actions are constrained. In addition to the AU, the most influential external actors include the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD), the sub-organisations of the United Nations, the European Union (EU) and Turkey. Besides private security companies, the approximately 22,000 AMISOM soldiers from Kenya, Uganda, Ethiopia, Djibouti and Burundi, with funding above all from the EU and the USA, are of importance in terms of military policy. Their mandate was extended until March 2016 a few days ago. Within the EU, the former colonial powers of Britain and Italy and especially Sweden, where there is an influential Somali diaspora, have made commitments. Recently China and Iran have stated that they intend to devote more attention to Somalia in the future as well.

In retrospect, the experience of the international community in Somalia underscores that attempts to stabilise fragile states primarily by promoting training and funding of government security forces runs up against limits pretty quickly. Claiming to have trained more than 1,800 Somali soldiers since 2011, the training mission of the Somali Army (EUTM Somalia) that is receiving support from the EU in cooperation with AMISOM has a patchy record. First of all, there has been and still is a high rate of desertion, however disinclined officials are to admit such. Several hundred Somalis trained by Ethiopian troops have in the meantime changed sides, lured by more handsome Al-Shabaab rewards for their service. Secondly, the Somali National Army (SNA) is a loose amalgamation of local militia without any accountable command and control structure. Nor do irregular payment of salaries (or no payment at all), the illicit sale of government weapons at the Bakara market in Mogadishu and serious human rights violations by AMISOM and government troops, in which the international law of war is violated with impunity, help matters much.¹ Many Somalis view the internationally funded AMISOM mission by neighbouring states to be a mere tool with which to pursue their own narrow, primarily nationally motivated, interests.

1. Somalia and Eritrea Monitoring Group: Report of the Monitoring Group in Somalia and Eritrea pursuant to Security Council Resolution 2060 (2012): Somalia. United Nations Security Council, S/2013/413.

The United Nations was originally sceptical about combat missions by countries neighbouring Somalia. Indeed, Somalia's neighbours are for the most part pursuing agendas that are only coordinated with the government in Mogadishu to a limited extent. At the same time, domestic political concerns hold sway. Al-Shabaab is said to be planning attacks on the Kenyan Parliament, while the recent recognition afforded to the semi-autonomous Somali »South West State« by Kenya is viewed critically in Mogadishu. Meanwhile Nairobi is seeking to persuade part of the 450,00 Somalis living in the world's biggest refugee camp in Dadaab in northeast Kenya to return to Somalia.

The Ethiopian perspective is also dominated by aversion to difficult-to-calculate risks – ethnic Somalis account for a majority of the population in some southeast regions. This is the main factor accounting for recent proposals to establish a military buffer zone along the Ethiopian-Somali border. By the same token, Addis Ababa can count on the support of the Djibouti government, whose President, Omar Guelleh, recently inaugurated »The East African Somali-speaking Regional Academy« in Mogadishu. Regional economic interests furthermore play a major role here. Expansion of the port and airport in Berbera, located in Somaliland, could from the Ethiopian perspective help lessen its one-sided dependence on Djibouti's expensive port. In general, it is difficult to avoid the impression that Ethiopia, if offered the alternative, would prefer independence for Somaliland – alongside Great Britain.

Another influential factor involves the geopolitical and economic interests of Uganda – which are receiving the support of the EU and the USA. Uganda furnishes half of the AMISOM force, making it possible for its regular soldiers to earn eight times more than their low pay at home in Uganda.

The action of armed European actors is also being dictated by shallow short-term operational considerations – also encouraged by economic incentives. Diplomatically formulated declarations by the military forces involved are usually couched in general terms and tend to culminate in appeals for more money and better equipment. General Massimo Mingiardi, the departing EUTM mission commander, is calling for long-term support to a tune of EUR 2.5 million, thereby obfuscating the question as to how a mission whose training programme is

oriented towards the exigencies of conventional warfare instead of putting an end to civil wars can contribute to a lasting peace.

From an operational mission perspective, the task has above all been to stave off direct situational threats – for example from improvised explosive devices (so-called IEDs). What is to be done, however, when local telecommunications networks (Telesom in Somaliland, Gollis in Puntland or Hormuud in the south), which are considered to be efficient, are at the same time used for reconnaissance purposes by groups with ties to Al-Shabaab? And how should one react when extrajudicial killings and the disappearance of suspects are part of the day-to-day business of Kenyan anti-terror operations affiliated with the EUTM? In other words: what military resources are suited for which peace-policy aims under what conditions and in what contexts?

EUTM officers like to applaud the »formidable instrument« of the EU mission to the Horn of Africa at informal meetings of European ministers of defence – a reference to the approximately 110 mission soldiers stationed at the airport in Mogadishu. The reality of the situation is different. Systematic collection of fingerprints, by means of which Somali soldiers could be identified beyond any doubt as members of the army, is not taking place at all, nor are there any effective training programmes on a continuous basis, military uniforms or boots. European (and German) soldiers flown in for training purposes are only able to perform their training tasks on a very irregular basis if at all as a result of strict security rules.

At the heart of it all is a certain self-delusion. Guided by its own institutional interests, the military is almost completely deaf to political advice, preferring to congratulate itself on imagined successes while engaging in unrealistic discussions of future options.

A Look Forward

Given the underlying conditions described in the foregoing, are there any possibilities for developing instruments to intervene in the support of policy that would be more appropriate, more effective and more expedient? More than half of international aid for Somalia over the past few years has been earmarked for the security

sector. In addition, a key objective has been to make progress in building a central state. This has met with very limited success. What is needed is a comprehensive approach which based on an informed analysis of complex domestic and international causes of conflict views the key to political stabilisation to lie in socio-economic factors. By the same token, there is no alternative to a dialogue-oriented reform strategy of small steps. This should embrace both clan-based militias as well as moderate Al-Shabaab supporters. Progress cannot be achieved overnight and is only possible taking into account the situational factors.

At the same time, the task at hand is to distil common interests, establish networks and bring about an accommodation of interests above all with material support. It would by the same token be helpful to carry out a fragility analysis as called for by Swedish experts with the aim of aligning reconciliation and dialogue programmes with education and training programmes.² Above and beyond this, it is necessary to impose sanctions on violations of human rights and violations of the law committed by any and all actors within the framework of due process of law.

A peaceful future for Somalia presupposes compromise and a political will to achieve peace by all Somali actors. Instead of action being taken for its own sake, greater efforts are needed to develop a uniform approach and training projects for local actors. The »New Deal Compact« recently discussed in Copenhagen provides for the promotion of development projects with local responsibility through partner agreements with international donors.

2. Skeppström, Emma/Per Nordlund: Security, Stabilisation and State Formation in Somali. Challenges for Implementing the Somali Compact, FOIR-R-3899, June 2014.



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