

Somalia's Transitional Federal Government at a Crossroads

As a budding state apparatus, Somalia's Transitional Federal Government (TFG) has so far failed to bring about any significant change and is in dire need of reform if it is to have any success. The international community lacks a comprehensive long-term policy towards Somalia. This has led to short-term engagement and one-sided policies that have often caused more harm than good. Several attempted military interventions have shown that military action by itself cannot re-establish Somalia as a viable and stable country. Remedying Somalia's problems will require coherent long-term actions by external actors in the fields of development and reconstruction, avoiding military interventions by neighbouring states, and reforming the TFG to make it more able to fulfil the expectations of a war-fatigued Somali public.

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Roots of the TFG crisis

Following the fall of Mohamed Siyaad Barre's regime in early 1991, Somalia descended into civil war and state collapse, but Somaliland, which declared independence from the rest of Somalia in 1991 but remains unrecognised internationally, and Puntland which created an autonomous regional state in 1998 has escaped much of the violence and remain relatively peaceful. Recently however, beside the enduring civil war, the country have experienced a dramatic growth of piracy and intensified attacks from Islamist insurgent groups.

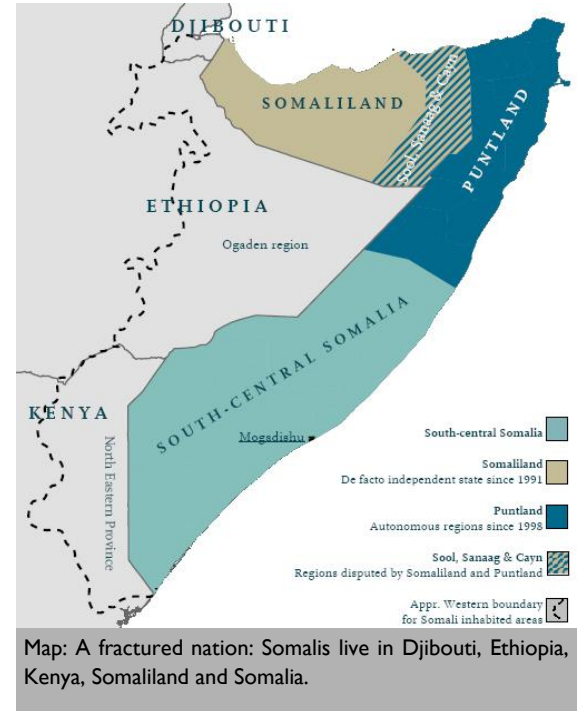
Several attempts aimed at reconciling warring parties and restoring a functioning central authority have since been made. In the past but none of these efforts to end the conflict have been successful. Eventually, after fighting for more than a decade, most of the warlords in South/Central Somalia agreed on the Transitional Federal Charter that established the Transitional Federal Government (TFG) in Kenya in 2004. Since its relocation to Somalia in 2005, the TFG has faced heavy opposition, initially from the warlords that controlled the country, later from the United Islam Courts (UIC) that emerged as a new political actor in June 2006, and currently from the al Shabaab and Hisbul Islam militias.

When the UIC removed the warlords from the South/Central regions including Mogadishu in mid-2006, they brought relative peace to those parts of the country. This was to be short-lived, however, and Somalia was invaded by Ethiopia in late 2006, with the backing of the USA and in alliance with the TFG. The move ousted the UIC from power but closed a window of opportunity for cooperation with the UIC that might have brought an end to the country's conflict. The consequences of this invasion included a serious humanitarian crisis and extreme levels of violence. Soon after its defeat, the UIC fragmented into the Alliance for the Re-liberation of Somalia (ARS), al Shabaab and Hisbul Islam – all of whom started fighting the TFG and the Ethiopian troops. In an attempt to quell the violence, Ethiopian forces withdrew in January 2009 and the TFG reached a power-sharing agreement with the ARS-D (the Djibouti faction of the ARS) that led to the

Djibouti peace process endorsed by the UN Security Council. Former UIC and ARS-D leader Sheik Sharif Sheik Ahmed assumed the presidency of the TFG in March 2009. In March 2010, the TFG succeeded in bringing about a second power-sharing agreement, this time together with an alliance of Sufis known as Ahlu Suna Wal Jamaa (ASWJ). Both the Sharif presidency and the ASWJ agreement were welcomed as indications of a possible reconciliation between various actors in Somalia's ongoing conflict and as a widening of the TFG's appeal among the country's population. However, instead of gaining momentum from these events, the TFG has since been weakened and unable to fulfil its political promises, while its territorial control has diminished dramatically. Recently, old lines of division within the TFG have resurfaced, leading to the resignation of Prime Minister Omar Abdirashid Sharmarke. Days after Sharmarke's departure, the ASWJ reputedly quit the TFG, claiming that it had never been properly incorporated in the latter's decisionmaking processes. Despite the appointment of a new prime minister and a smaller cabinet, tensions within the TFG are not likely to disappear in the near future, as the splits that inhibited the ASWJ's incorporation and caused Prime Minister Sharmakre's resignation are still very much present. Meanwhile, al Shabaab and Hisbul Islam continue to exert unprecedented pressure on the TFG, leaving its survival highly questionable and absolutely contingent on the presence of AMISOM (African Union Mission to Somalia) troops. Accordingly, the TFG and the Djibouti peace process have come to a definite crossroads.

What went wrong with the TFG?

Ever since the UIC was still a functioning organization, its members were split into moderate and 'hardline' factions. This split became very evident when the defunct UIC leadership relocated to Asmara under the banner of the ARS. Instead of striving for unity and cooperating with the TFG in the Djibouti peace process, the ARS eventually split in two: the ARS-Asmara faction and the



ARS-Djibouti faction (which moved to Djibouti after reaching an agreement with the TFG). Following the ARS split, as the leader of Asmara faction Hassan Dahir Aweys established Hisbul Islam, while the Djibouti faction joined the TFG. This led to the first attack on the TFG by Hisbul Islam, together with al Shabaab (which also is a UIC remnant), immediately after Sheikh Sharif's assumption of the TFG presidency. At the same time, the newly elected president proved unable to get the TFG and ARS-D elements to work together politically and militarily as well pushing the wider reconciliation forward. ARS-D forces were favoured over regular TFG security forces, which undermined the morale of the latter. In addition, TFG forces were not paid for extended periods of time, which caused members to sell their guns, to desert, or even to join al Shabaab. At the political level, it quickly became evident that TFG officials lacked vision and were more concerned with lining their own pockets than with improving security and expanding their territorial control. The fact that Sheik Sharif spent more time abroad in the wake of his election than at home working for reconciliation and security within Somalia did little to help combat the factionalization that marked the TFG.

At the international level, policies towards Somalia have been inconsistent. In the last two years, the country has attracted increased attention from the international community, but this attention has primarily focused on piracy and the extremist al Shabaab. Constructing a policy for combating Somalia's biggest problem – statelessness – remains an issue on which the international community has yet to take a decisive stand.

At the regional level, the role of Ethiopia and other immediate neighbouring nations is crucial for determining the possibilities of peace in Somalia and the success of the TFG. Since the 2009 withdrawal of Ethiopian troops from Somali soil, only US persistence has kept Ethiopia from redeploying troops to Somalia. Critics argue that neighbouring countries have played a harmful role in Somalia's development, both politically and militarily, and that their activities have not been aimed at bringing about peace and strengthening the TFG.

Lessons learned

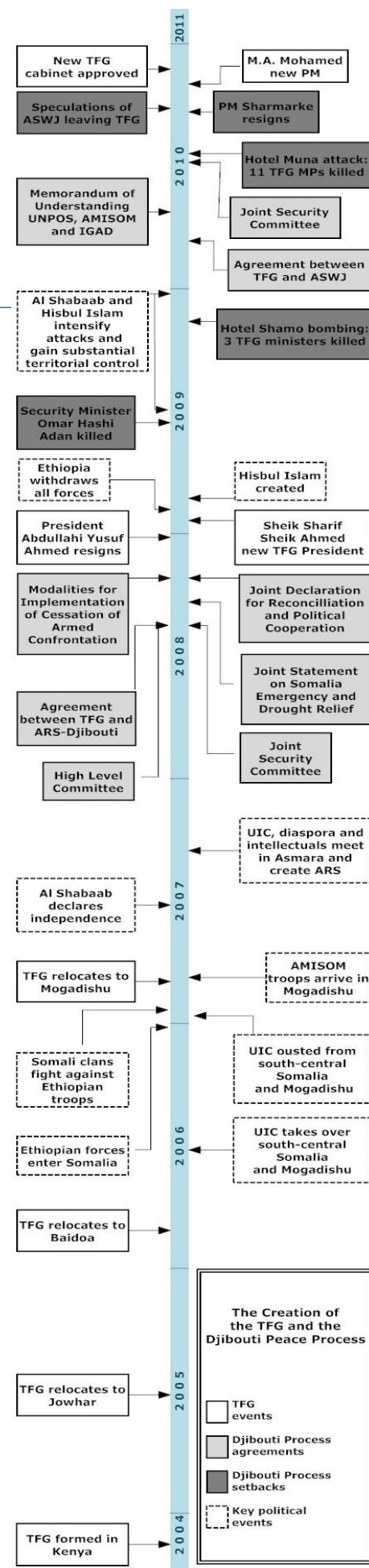
No future for TFG in its current form.

The internal setup of the TFG is also a cause for concern. When Sheik Sharif became president in 2009, many hoped that he would reopen the option of including more moderate Islamists within the ranks of the transitional government. However, although he himself is a moderate Islamist, Sheik Sharif has not fulfilled these expectations and the TFG remains unable to embrace either intellectuals or Islamists within its ranks. In fact, on the few occasions such individuals have been involved, they have soon been ousted, marginalized or killed. Recently, the growing split between the organization's leaders is a sign that the TFG in its current form is struggling to make tangible progress, let alone to incorporate and reconcile conflicting elements. Routine infighting thus threatens to topple the TFG from within. Furthermore, the ASWJ is reputed to have left the TFG because it felt its members had not been given the positions they had been promised.

Including more political leaders in the TFG alliance is not a satisfactory solution to the current problems, however. The TFG's inability to achieve any kind of consensus and its political ineffectiveness and inconsistency

represent major impediments to progress. The last TFG cabinet had a total of 39 members, and the parliament 550 heads. Downsizing was essential to make the TFG more flexible. The new cabinet of Prime Minister Mohamed Abdullahi Mohamed has been reduced in size to combat these problems, but factionalization within the TFG may yet remain a problem. With TFG's mandate ending in August 2011, the TFG has yet to make the considerable headway needed to convince Somalis and the international donors that it is able to move towards the aims it was created for.

Military intervention alone is futile. Given Somalia's recent history, it is clear that military intervention will not properly address Somalia's problems. After all, the extremist and jihadist elements found in the country today do not represent the Somali people. Instead, they should be perceived as a consequence of neglect and disengagement by the international community and the UN, as well as international institutions since the withdrawal of US troops in 1995 and the destabilizing nature of the 2006 Ethiopian invasion. This, in combination with a population being tired of insecurity and lack of order, more holistic measures to tackle the root cause of Somalia's problems than AMISOM's military presence is needed. However, if the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD, the Horn of Africa's regional development organization) decides to deploy more forces to Somalia without such a move being part of a larger political, humanitarian and reconstruction effort, an increase in the level of violence and the ascendance of al Shabaab seem highly probable. This would be dangerous for two reasons. First, Somali youth growing up in a broken nation are being presented with an identity of suffering, retaliation and religious extremism. Second, the stationing of foreign troops in the country without the backing of the Somali population would leave the average Somali dangerously exposed to the influence of al Shabaab. In the search for a path out of war, civilians will often support those who can provide security and some form of justice and order. Currently, this role is filled by al Shabaab rather than the TFG. As such, AMISOM's dubious reputation for causing civilians more harm than good means that prospects for an external military solution to the Somali problem are bleak. At



Timeline: Somalia 2004–10 – the creation of the TFG and the Djibouti Peace Process

the same time, al Shabaab may even gain from this in terms of local popularity by being able to present itself as a nationalist defending Somalia against foreign occupation. While al Shabaab's strict interpretation of Sharia does not appeal to civilians at large, the movement's ability to oppose Ethiopian troops in the past and its current rhetoric towards AMISOM has given it a degree of leverage among civilians. Accordingly, a military invasion without a bigger plan of political reconciliation and future reconstruction might simply push an increasing number of civilians into sympathizing with al Shabaab. As a result, foreign troops may end up feeding the very problems they were supposed to eradicate.

Short-term engagement and policies backfiring. So far, international interventions in Somalia have backfired, causing new factions to rise. The international community lacks a comprehensive long-term policy towards Somalia. The June 2006 UIC uprising culminated in successful moves by the UIC to remove almost all of the warlords that were holding the country hostage at the time. Instead of seizing this unique window of opportunity to re-create a Somali state and bring peace to the country, the USA backed an Ethiopian invasion that plunged Somalia back into violence. In addition, despite millions of dollars being pledged by the international community to support TFG structures and institutions, few funds have materialized. For example, thousands of soldiers trained in Ethiopia, Kenya and Uganda and deployed to Somalia have not been paid, or were paid late, and this has been one of the key factors behind the TFG's dwindling territorial control. Without funds to pay its security forces and maintain its institutions, the TFG is incapable of fulfilling its many tasks and expectations.

Emerging recommendations

Reforming the TFG and its institutions is essential. In the current political climate, abandoning the TFG is not an option for the international community simply because there are few other allies to be found in Somalia. Thus, the TFG remains the only hope for combating Somalia's statelessness. This is something TFG officials know all too well. There is little incentive for TFG politicians to reform, as the current climate is economically beneficial to them. However, without reform the TFG is doomed to fail. Continued support for the TFG is crucial, but the support must address the profound pitfalls facing the organization. Corruption, lack of popular appeal and ineffectiveness will need to be addressed if the TFG is ever to pave the way for the re-establishment of Somalia as a functioning state. To this end, downsizing the cabinet to make it more coherent and effective is essential. Moreover, the TFG must appeal to a broader selection of political leaders than it does today.

Regional and international actors should implement UN resolutions. UN Security Council Resolutions 733 and 1725 called for Somalia's immediate neighbouring nations not to intervene militarily in the country. The implementation of the resolutions can be interpreted from a military and a political perspective. Militarily, given the strained history between Somalia and its neighbouring nations, the presence of neighbouring forces in Somalia will return Somalia to its 2006 state. However, it will be necessary for the international community to convince frontline states that their security is best served through the emergence or the establishment of a Somali government that is able to function and has control over its own territory. Politically, following the UN resolution means establishing a programme for reconstruction that is seen as legitimate by the Somali public. The establishment of such a programme in accordance with UN Security Council Resolutions

733 and 1725 would make it difficult for al Shabaab and other extremist elements to portray themselves as the sole defenders of Somalia and protectors of its people against foreign occupation.

External engagement important for safeguarding commitment. The TFG cannot gain a legitimate position within the Somali polity unless it takes measures to counter widespread perceptions that it is corrupt and unjust. The UN should re-establish a presence in Mogadishu in order to help reform the TFG. While such a presence seems unlikely in the current security situation, the presence of international experts would be valuable for several reasons. First, UN personnel would be able to give the TFG much-needed advice and embody the international community's commitment to Somalia. Second, a UN presence would be important in monitoring TFG spending and fighting corruption. Third, in cooperation with NGOs, a UN presence would be able to assist the population with meeting basic needs.

Comprehensive, coherent and long-term commitment is crucial. Actors involved in devising peace and state-building policies for Somalia should keep a careful eye on the possible future impacts such policies may have. Such policies require both commitment and resources from international actors. These actors need to speak with one voice and accordingly adopt a common approach for dealing with Somalia's compounded problems. If it is to have any chance of success, such an approach cannot ignore the interests of the Somalis themselves, and must therefore emphasize humanitarian aid, development and reconstruction, not just security. Finally, all actors interested in recreating a functioning Somali state and bringing stability to the Horn of Africa must acknowledge that Somalia's problems are fundamentally political and will need to be addressed as such. ■

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