



Congressional Research Service (Washington, DC)

Somalia: The Crisis and Prospects for Lasting Peace

Ted Dagne
26 June 2009

DOCUMENT

The following is the prepared testimony of Ted Dagne of Congressional Research Service before the United States House of Representatives Subcommittee on Africa and Global Health on June 25, 2009 in Washington, DC. The hearing was entitled, "Somalia: Prospects for a Lasting Peace and Unified Response to Extremism and Terrorism."

Chairman Payne, Ranking Member Smith, and members of the sub-committee, let me first express my appreciation for the opportunity to testify before your sub-committee. I am sure some of you have seen the images on TV, read about it in the newspapers, and some of you have witnessed the untold suffering of many Somalis over the years. I have stopped counting how many innocent civilians have been killed, maimed, or how many more people displaced from their homes because of fighting. Unfortunately and sadly, many more people will die in the coming weeks and months. A Somali friend recently told me that he has given up dreaming about a better future for his family.

In April, Chairman Payne and I traveled to Mogadishu to obtain a firsthand account of conditions in Mogadishu. Some questioned the delegation's decision to go to Mogadishu, while others praised it. An important thing to remember is the fact that children and the most vulnerable live in these conditions everyday. The day we arrived in Mogadishu five innocent civilians were killed and over a dozen injured.

Almost three years ago this week in a testimony before this sub-committee, I read a short Somali proverb in an attempt to describe conditions on the ground. The proverb: "Sorrow is like rice in the store; if a basketful is removed everyday, it will come to an end at last." I stated then that Somalia's tragedy would come to an end, we just don't know how soon. Three years later, I still cannot tell you with certainty what the future hold for the millions of Somalis.

One thing is clear: the determination and commitment I saw 15 years ago at the height of the civil war by Somali women, human rights advocates, and Somali nationalists, is still very much alive. The leadership of the current government is not staying at the Serena Hotel in Nairobi, Kenya. They are in Mogadishu facing the challenges and risks everyday with their people. Some left family members, friends, and safe environment here in the U.S. so that they can help their people and help secure a lasting peace in Somalia.

Hundreds of thousands of Somalis have died due to factional fighting, famine, or disease over the past decade. I have witnessed the untold suffering of the people of Somalia over the past decade in the refugee camps in Kenya and in Somalia. A generation of Somalis is growing up surrounded by

violence, poverty, and face a very bleak future. Many have been internally displaced or forced to flee their country. In the refugee camps in Kenya, you find Somali teenagers, some of them born there, who have never been able to see their country or the opportunity to live a normal life.

Indeed the most affected by the violence and chaos in Somalia are women and children. Many Somali girls have been raped and violated by the so-called militia. And even a rape victim is stoned to death for reporting what happened to her. If the extremists waging the war against the Transitional Federal Government (TFG) succeed, we are likely to see more of these acts by Al-Shibaab.

Recent Developments

In early May, Somali extremist groups backed by foreign fighters launched a major offensive against the Transitional Federal Government (TFG) of Somalia and the African Union peacekeeping forces (AMISOM). Over the past six weeks, more than 300 people have been killed and many more wounded. The primary objective of this offensive is to oust the TFG from power and force AMISOM to leave Somalia. Several Al-Shibaab factions, Hizbul al-Islam, and foreign fighters have been engaged in a series of battles against government forces. Al-Shibaab has also carried out a number of assassinations, including the police Chief and the Minister of Interior, who were killed last week, in an attempt to create a leadership crisis.

More than 400 foreign fighters reportedly from Afghanistan, Yemen, Pakistan, the United States, Canada, Britain, Kenya, and several other countries have been engaged in the fighting in support of the Al-Shibaab forces. More than 290 fighters reportedly entered Mogadishu in early May, while an estimated 50 fighters were in Mogadishu for much longer. Some of these fighters have been killed in battles in Mogadishu. Some of the fighters characterized as foreign fighters are actually Somalis who look like foreigners. The insurgents receive support from the outside and from some Somali businessmen, who are unhappy with the TFG leadership. In May 2009, the spokesman of Al-Shibaab admitted that foreign fighters have joined the fighting.

In early June 2009, Al-Shibaab and Hizbul Islam made important gains in Mogadishu and other parts of Somalia, in large part due to defections to the insurgency and lack of resources. The TFG forces regrouped, and by mid-June managed to regain some lost grounds in Mogadishu. But the TFG remains vulnerable and its ability to defeat the insurgents depends on resources, including Armored Personnel Carriers (APCs), mobility, and a well organized and sustainable military operations.

The presence of the African Union force has helped prevent the takeover of Mogadishu by the insurgents. But the African Union force does not have a Chapter 7 mandate, requiring the force to be on the defensive rather than taking offensive measures against the insurgents. The African Union force has used its long range artilleries against the insurgents. These measures have weakened and forced the insurgents to remain outside the range of these weapons. But the most serious challenge facing the TFG forces and those of the AU is that the insurgents are highly decentralized and move in small units, and operate independently of one another.

The Leadership of Al-Shibaab and other Factions

Who are the leaders of the insurgents? The leaders of Al-Shibaab are not well known, with the exception of a few. Some of the key commanders and leaders of Al-Shibaab come from Somaliland. Ahmed Abdi Godane, who is on the U.S. terrorism list and who trained and fought in Afghanistan, is a key commander from Somaliland. Mukhtar Robow, who is also on the U.S. terrorism list, is considered one of the key leaders of the Shibaab and a former spokesman, although in recent weeks he has been marginalized and has been at odd with the other commanders, especially Godane. Another key leader is Ibrahim Haji Jama, who is on the U.S. terrorism list,

reportedly trained and fought in Afghanistan. Hassan al-Turki, a member of the Ogaden clan from Ethiopia, has openly called for Jihad, and works closely with foreign fighters. Indha Adde is another commander, who fought against the Ethiopian occupation and worked closely with Sheik Hassan Aweys, a former leader of the Alliance for the Re-liberation of Somalia (ARS-Asmara). In February 2008, then Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice designated Al-Shibaab as a Foreign Terrorist Organization and as a Specially Designated Global Terrorist group. The TFG was able to win over some Al-Shibaab fighters to join the government side. However, several hundred fighters who recently joined government forces were sent by the extremist groups to infiltrate the government security force. In May 2009, at the height of the recent fighting in Mogadishu, most of these fighters went back to rejoin the militia groups they left earlier.

Sheik Sharif Hassan Aweys.

In late April, Sheik Sharif Hassan Aweys, who is on the U.S. terrorism list, returned to Mogadishu from Eritrea. Sheik Aweys had remained in Eritrea and formed his own faction after the top leadership of the ARS signed an agreement in Djibouti with other Somali parties, which led to the formation of the current government. ARS-Asmara, under the leadership of Aweys, did not garner significant support, although Aweys intensified his support for extremist groups inside Somalia. ARS-Asmara leaders were not in full agreement with Aweys and his support for the extremist groups inside Somalia. They provided written documentation to this effect to a visitor in April 2009. These leaders stated that they formed their own organization and would disassociate themselves from Aweys. These leaders left Eritrea in May.

In late April I met with Sheik Aweys in Eritrea. He seemed confused at times and several times contradicted himself. When asked if he was prepared to state publicly his support for a peaceful participation in the current political process, Aweys responded positively. However, when he was asked whether he would renounce terrorism and call for an end to violence against civilians, Aweys stated that since he considers the American interpretation of terrorism as anti-Islam, he “cannot condemn terrorism.” Doing so, he asserted, is “denouncing his own religion.” When asked if he wished to be removed from the terrorism list, Aweys stated that he will not seek to be removed because that would be going against his religion.

When confronted about his role in support of terrorism and violence in Somalia, he characterized these acts as a struggle against the enemies of Somalia. Upon his return to Mogadishu in late April 2009, Sheik Aweys discovered that the clan elders and militia who had supported him in the past now wanted him to work with the government and end the violence. The militia group he helped create, Hizbul al-Islam, also was split and some have joined Al-Shibaab. Some of the top leaders of the Al-Shibaab also want him to declare an alliance with Osama Bin Laden. Aweys is unlikely to emerge as the leader of the insurgency and he seems to be losing support even within his own inner circle.

Human Rights and Humanitarian Conditions

In 2008, humanitarian and human rights conditions became worse than in previous years. The recent fighting in Mogadishu has added more challenges to already poor conditions on the ground. An estimated 1.1 million people have been displaced and more than 475,000 have fled to neighboring countries in the past two years. Human rights groups and Somali observers estimate more than 22,000 people have been killed over the past two years. Civilians, humanitarian workers, journalists, and human rights advocates have been the primary targets of the insurgents, TFG, and Ethiopian security forces. According to Amnesty International, “rape, killings and looting have become widespread. Entire neighborhoods have been destroyed.” A number of Somali journalists covering the crisis in Somalia have been assassinated by insurgents and security forces over the past eighteen months.

Dozens of humanitarian and human rights advocates have been killed, injured, or imprisoned. Because of these targeted attacks, many human rights advocates and journalists have fled Somalia to neighboring countries for safety. Somalis working for international NGOs and foreign media have also been attacked by insurgents and TFG/Ethiopian security forces. According to the May 2009 Complex Emergency report by the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), an estimated 3.2 million people are in need of emergency assistance. In the first two weeks of May 2009, an estimated 27,500 people have been displaced due to the recent fighting in Mogadishu. The United States has provided an estimated \$177.6 million in humanitarian and peacekeeping assistance to Somalia in FY2009. In FY2008, the United States provided \$318 million in assistance to Somalia. The Obama Administration has requested \$103 million for FY 2010. The United States has also provided material support in support of TFG forces.

Somali Piracy in the Horn of Africa

I will now speak briefly to the issue of piracy in the Horn of Africa. Somali pirates have intensified their attacks in the Gulf of Aden, carrying out attacks on over 111 commercial ships, and successfully hijacked an estimated 40 ships in 2008. According to the International Maritime Bureau (IMB), piracy in the first quarter of 2009 has surpassed that of 2008. According to IMB, "in 2008, there were 111 incidents including 42 vessels hijacked. So far in 2009, there have been 29 successful hijackings from 114 attempted attacks." In January-February 2009, Somali pirates released several ships, including a Japanese-owned ship, MV Chemstar, and the MV Faina. The pirates have reportedly earned more than \$120 million in ransom payments, and in return have released a number of ships and crew members.

On December 16, 2008, the United Nations Security Council passed a resolution authorizing the use of "all necessary measures" by foreign military forces to stop piracy in Somalia. The resolution authorizes military operations inside Somalia and in its airspace for one year, with the consent of the TFG. The United States, Russia, India, and several other countries have deployed warships to tackle piracy in the Horn of Africa region. In February 2009, the U.S. Navy arrested 16 suspected Somali pirates. In December 2008, the Indian Navy reportedly arrested 23 Somali and Yemeni pirates. Moreover, the Russian Navy also arrested a number of suspected Somali pirates. In January 2009, the United States and Britain signed legal agreements with the Government of Kenya to extradite suspected pirates to be prosecuted in Kenya. Some insurgent leaders have warned the pirates to end the piracy and to release crew members and ships currently controlled by the pirates.

Who Are the Pirates?

The number of Somali pirates is unknown. While there are more pirates now than previous years, the pirates do not seem to have a unified organization with clear command structure. Many of these pirates are reportedly fishermen and former militia members of the Somali warlords. The pirates primarily come from Puntland region of Somalia and are members of different clans. Some press reports have suggested that the pirates are being controlled and directed by the Islamic insurgents in south-central Somalia. I am not aware of any evidence, however, to support this assertion.

What do Somalis say about the piracy problem? Some Somalis view the piracy crisis as a foreign problem with little impact on their daily life. Some argue that the piracy problem will continue as long as the ship-owners are willing to pay the pirates ransom. In the face of difficult economic conditions and growing humanitarian crisis, many Somalis resent the fact that the piracy problem has received a great deal of international attention. Some Somali community leaders contend that some Somalis get involved in criminal activities in order to survive, while many others have made these kinds of criminal activities a lifetime profession. Many Somalis contend that in the absence of a better alternative, they have come to accept life with all the difficulties they face daily.

Some Somalis argue that the fishermen have become pirates because their way of life was destroyed by illegal fishing and toxic waste dumping that has been ignored by foreign governments. In 2005, the United Nations Environment Program (UNEP) released a report documenting the damages resulting from toxic waste dumping on Somalia's shores. According to a UNEP spokesman, "there's uranium radioactive waste, there's lead, there's heavy metals like cadmium and mercury, there's industrial waste, and there's hospital wastes, chemical wastes, you name it." According to the report, the primary reason for toxic dumping in Somalia is cost. The report states that it costs \$2.50 per ton to dump toxic waste in Africa compared to \$250 per ton to dump waste in Europe.

Policy Options in Dealing with Political and Security Problems

The current government in Mogadishu is generally seen as the last defense against the extremist and terrorist groups currently waging war in south-central Somalia. Effective policy options available to deal with these threats are limited. The international community may consider engagement with the Islamic insurgents and clan elders to deal with the political and security problems facing Somalia. Regional and U.S. officials are convinced that it is pivotal to strengthen the moderate elements of the Islamic movements. Most observers believe that the Al-Shabaab can only be contained by another Islamic movement supported by clan elders.

Some Al-Shabaab leaders are determined to continue their military campaign and are not inclined to participate in negotiations. Targeted measures, including sanctions and other measures against the most extreme elements of Al-Shibaab, might pave the way for other moderate leaders to emerge. However, others believe that harsh or violent measures are likely to backfire in the short term and increase anti-western violence.

A more effective option for containing the extremists may be to look for a Somali-led solution. The TFG, Somaliland, Puntland, and other moderate Somali forces could possibly form a coalition to contain the advances of the most extreme elements of the Al-Shabaab politically and militarily. Such a coalition is likely to get the support of the Somali population. A Somali-led initiative would take away one of the most powerful justifications used by the Al-Shabaab to wage war, the presence of foreign forces. Most observers agree, however, that a unified regional approach is pivotal, however.

In conclusion, there appear to be no easy solutions or options to bring a lasting peace in Somalia. Somalis continue to make great sacrifices to achieve this objective. There is a very telling Somali proverb: The best bed that a man can sleep on is peace. Thank You.