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Somalia: Ten Years Later

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A decade ago Somalia dominated U.S. attention. An American humanitarian intervention had evolved into an effort to restore order to the country. On October 3, 1993, eighteen American soldiers and hundreds of Somalis died in a street battle in Mogadishu, an event vividly reported by the international media and dramatized much later in the book and movie *Black Hawk Down*.

The incident led to the departure just a few months later of American troops and a period of general U.S. disengagement from Somalia that persists to this day. More broadly, the failure in Somalia sharply diminished the appetite of the American public for nation-building and made it politically impossible for the United States to take action in the next big African crisis to emerge, the Rwandan genocide that broke out in April 1994.

The Somalis have yet to create a central government. Years of negotiations marked by bickering among various Somali factions have produced little. One region of Somalia, Somaliland, declared independence but has not been recognized internationally. Just recently, some hope has emerged that an agreement to create a national government might be in sight. To discuss these prospects for hope, the United States Institute of Peace organized a panel of experts on February 11, 2004 to discuss "Somalia: Ten Years Later."

The views summarized below reflect the discussion at the meeting; they do not represent formal positions taken by the Institute, which does not advocate specific policies.

Economic, Social, and Political Trends

Despite the lack of a central government for over ten years, Somalia has evolved in some positive directions.

- The Somali economy is embracing globalization. A widespread Somali diaspora supports the economy through remittances that total about half a billion dollars a year. The diaspora's buying power also allows Somalia to sustain strong trade figures. Thriving telecom companies keep the country wired with cell phones, email, and satellite television. Privatization is widespread in all areas from seaports to education to health care. Within this growing economy, however, collective goods such as security and roads are suffering.

- Somali society is also opening itself to more outside influences. Through the diaspora, the country is involved more with the western world. Interaction is also increasing within its own region in the Muslim World. In the education system, English is replacing Somali in many classrooms even as Islamic schools are becoming more popular.
- As the economy and society are globalizing, the political system remains localized and fractured. Over the last decade, traditional leaders such as tribal factions, warlords, and militia leaders have become weaker and have less financial backing. New actors such as businessmen, clan elders, civil society groups, and Islamic charities, are growing in strength.

State Collapse

Rule of law is still almost non-existent in Somalia. This state collapse can be broken down into three components.

- The first component is lawlessness. While there is little gratuitous violence, street crime continues to some degree. Women are generally afraid to walk around alone. Kidnapping is a real concern, and there has been a rise in counterfeiting money and white-collar crime. The Sharia court system that might bring a stop to this lawlessness is only functioning at a third of its potential capacity.
- The second component is armed conflict. The long, sweeping battles of the early 1990s are over. Fighting, however, continues within clans. These battles are often localized between sub clans and are shorter and less lethal, yet dangerous all the same.
- The third component of state collapse is the lack of a central government. Several factors persist in stalling the creation of a new government. First, Somalis fear the return of a government that in the past strong-armed and stole from its citizens. Moreover, powerful figures benefit from the status quo. They prosper in a state without a central government, partly because there is no central government taxation, and they fear losing their status if a government returns. The status quo also tends to protect those who might face arrest for various crimes, including crimes against humanity. These beneficiaries, taken together, constitute Somalia's spoilers, and there is an abundance of them. Another internal spoiler is private business owners, such as seaport owners, who do not want a new state to take over their business. External spoilers include Ethiopia, which does not want a strong Somalia for fear it would revive old claims to large parts of Ethiopian territory.

If a central government is created, where will the money come from to perform all the needed functions expected of it? The U.S. government has turned away from Somalia, European Union support is weak, and no one has a plan for reconstructing the economy of the country.

Kenya Peace Conference

The current Somali peace conference is in its sixteenth month of deliberations. Despite this being the fourteenth such conference held since the state collapse in 1991, there were a few key differences that sparked hope in October 2002 when the conference began. All militia leaders agreed to participate, raising expectations that they would be ready to make a deal. Regional and international support also appeared strong. Kenya was appointed by the Inter-Governmental Authority on Development (IGAD) to lead the negotiations with Ethiopia, Djibouti, and Eritrea as part of the technical committee. The international community provided common backing, and it was thought that the United States would help drive the process.

The conference was to follow a three-phase framework. The first phase required the signing of a cease-fire agreement. The second phase concerned the resolution of technical issues such as constitutional structure, economic recovery and transitional justice. The third phase involved power sharing, which was expected to be an easy topic after the technical issues were settled. A cease-fire agreement was signed promptly enough, on October 27, 2002. Following that, discussion soon turned into arguments over conference

procedures rather than negotiation of the substantive issues of technical building blocks and power sharing. Very little dialogue took place, and no compromises were achieved. The Kenyan mediation team was directing delegates to reach consensus on their own rather than facilitating discussion. Key groups withdrew their participation. The talks seemed on the verge of collapse.

January 2004

As the new year began, IGAD showed new initiative toward the Somali peace effort. The delegates moved from Eldoret in northern Kenya to the capital, Nairobi, to restart the talks. Feeling it had lost influence in creating the government it wanted, Ethiopia withdrew its formal presence. Persistence appeared to pay off when, on January 29, 2004, a parliamentary framework was signed. This framework declared that a selection of clan elders would be summoned to Nairobi where they would choose parliamentary members. The parliament would elect the president and the president would choose a prime minister. The euphoria over the success lasted only two days. At that point, several signers of the framework rejected it, saying the document they signed was different from the one presented to them during negotiations. As negotiations continue to resolve this impasse, it has to be conceded that other obstacles still exist. This leaves a huge opportunity for spoilers to leave the talks if they feel they won't have the power they desire in a new government. As matters stand now, delegates are still not engaging in substantive dialogue. In fact, there's still disagreement on who the delegates should be, on who gets to sit at the table. Meanwhile, security in Somalia remains an issue. While the violence is not as intense as it was formerly, it continues to breed uncertainty and discontent. Political Islam is becoming increasingly attractive as the only hope for some Somalis, making the country a potential breeding ground for terrorism.

Terrorism

While Somalia is not currently a site of significant terrorist activity, the possibility exists for the country to become a terrorist hub. The United States is active in counter-terrorist initiatives in the region through its Combined Joint Task Force-Horn of Africa (CJTF-HOA) stationed in Djibouti. This task force was created as part of the preparations for the war in Iraq to guard the back door to the Middle East. Since the Horn of Africa has been the site of previous terrorist activity, the United States felt it prudent to have feet on the ground in the region. The CJTF-HOA has had some initial challenges. It proved difficult at first to coordinate activities among all six Horn of Africa countries--Sudan, Kenya, Ethiopia, Eritrea, Djibouti, and Somalia. In addition, none of these states is transparent, and obtaining needed intelligence is difficult. Much of the work must take place through local intermediaries. As the CJTF-HOA has continued its work, terrorist activity in the area has decreased. Conditions in Somalia that make it difficult for any enterprise to function well also make it difficult for terrorists. In Somalia and elsewhere in East Africa, however, more effort still needs to be made in winning the hearts and minds in the fight against terrorism. Border control also needs to be strengthened. The borders between the countries, especially between Somalia, Ethiopia, and Kenya, are very fluid and allow terrorists to travel easily between countries and escape detection.

Suggestions

As the United States has made strides in reducing terror in the region, the climate has become more favorable for the international community to influence a peaceful settlement in Somalia.

- The United Nations should get more involved, as should the League of Arab Nations.
- Ending the squabble between Ethiopia and Djibouti over port access would help.
- The United States needs to play a role in convincing Ethiopia that a Somali government is in its interest.
- Aid from donors such as the United States and European Union could revitalize the process, and an international aid plan formed now would provide assurance that an eventual Somali government will receive the support it needs.

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Peaceworks, October 1998
- [Progress in Somalia](#)
Peace Watch, August 1997
- [Restoring Hope: The Real Lessons of Somalia for the Future of Intervention](#)
Special Report, 1995

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