

A stylized world map composed of a grid of grey dots. Several dots are highlighted in red, indicating specific geographical locations. The title 'Somalia – The light at the end of the tunnel?' is overlaid on the map.

Somalia – The light at the end of the tunnel?

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- The end of the transition in Somalia has ushered in a new political era, bringing hope for a lasting stabilization of the southern part of the country, which has been beset by a vicious circle of poverty, clan rivalries, and sectarian violence.
- The new national government will require substantial and sustained international assistance to tackle the challenges ahead and to succeed in its endeavor to bring peace, reconciliation, and effective administration back to the country.
- The international community should review its institutional architecture in support of Somalia and quickly adapt it to the new reality.



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The successful conclusion of the Mbagathi transition: a case for scaling up the UN's involvement

On 10 September 2012, Hassan Sheikh Mohamud was elected president of Somalia by a newly created parliament in an act concluding the political transition initiated with the adoption of the Mbagathi charter in 2004.¹ Unlike the established politicians, Islamist leaders, and warlords who had dominated the preceding eight-year transition, Mohamud had served as an academic, civil society activist, and international civil servant. The choice of someone from the diaspora—Mohamud had trained in the United States and India—may signal a substantive change of course in Somali politics, rather than just another episode in the seemingly interminable process of stabilizing Somalia.

The new leader and the government formed during the last quarter of 2012 face daunting challenges: to rally and reconcile the major political and military forces of southern Somalia, stabilize the security situation, and bring an end to a vicious circle of poverty, clan rivalries, and sectarian violence. The adoption of a new constitution on 1st of August 2012 and the president's election were made possible by the protection of the African Union Force in Somalia (AMISOM), which the UN Security Council mandated in February 2007 and which struggled for several years to wrest control of Mogadishu from the extremist al-Shabaab militia that still controls vast swaths of territory in southern Somalia.² Even after al-Shabaab's departure from the capital in August 2011, security remained tenuous there and in other areas patrolled by AMISOM and its local or foreign allies. The creation of new national security forces out of the patchwork of clan-based militias is in its early stages. The country's administrative and judicial structures remain rudimentary at best. Drought in the Horn of Africa continues to regularly create famine in Somalia, in part because so many people live on the edge of survival in normal times. Amid this gloomy picture, however, there have been signs of hope in recent years.

1. The Transitional Federal Charter was adopted in February 2004 at Mbagathi, a suburb of Nairobi, after two and a half years of negotiations during the Somali National Reconciliation Conference.

2. Harakat al-Shabaab al-Mujahidin was one of several militias allied to the Islamic Courts Union, which dominated Mogadishu and much of southern Somalia before the Ethiopian invasion in late 2006 and 2007. When the political leaders of the union fled abroad, al-Shabaab became the rallying point for various groups and launched a guerrilla war against the Ethiopian occupation. It eventually succeeded in absorbing all other groups and asserting its control over most of southern Somalia.

The fact that for the first time in two decades, a political process has been brought to a successful conclusion is the most important reason for hope. In addition, considerable parts of Somalia, that is, the north and northeast, have largely been peaceful for more than a decade and have established functioning regional administrations and experienced a modest economic recovery. Of particular note, the regional government of Somaliland sent food aid to southern Somalia during a drought in 2011. This response, along with al-Shabaab's mishandling of the drought, helped roll back the militia's control of the area. Growing popular discontent over the group's harsh rule in addition to military pressure from AMISOM and local forces (often operating under the loose umbrella of Ahlu Sunna Wal Jama'a³) also contributed to the militia's setback. The joint forces of the government, AMISOM, and allied militias took the southern port of Kismayo in October 2012, depriving al-Shabaab of its most important source of income and its gateway to the Indian Ocean.

The opportunities offered by these developments should not be wasted. Somalia had been left largely to itself, and to humanitarian organizations, after the 1995 withdrawal of the UN's mission, UNOSOM, which had been successful in opening access to humanitarian assistance to hundreds of thousands of drought victims, but had failed to prevent the country from descending into civil war after the collapse of the Siad Barre regime in 1991. The international community, in particular neighboring countries, paid a high price for this neglect, as Somalia became a hotbed of Islamist extremism in the Horn of Africa, a launching pad for piracy in the Indian Ocean, and the source of a steady flow of refugees. Reversing these trends requires careful, timely, and sustained engagement by the international community in support of viable processes and structures.

Many Somalis (and some foreign academics) are quick to assert that the mayhem in Somalia resulted from ill-advised foreign interventions and for contrast point to Somaliland and Puntland, which have achieved peace through homegrown, grassroots processes practically without external involvement. Although there may be an element of truth to this perspective—any foreign in-

3. Ahlu Sunna Wal Jama'a is a Sufi-based religious movement turned militant, mainly because of al-Shabaab's desecration of more than a hundred graves that served as local pilgrimage sites and al-Shabaab's violent opposition to other traditional religious practices.

intervention in a country inevitably affects internal dynamics and risks triggering unintended developments—it is futile to dwell on this point as a case against intervention, because neighboring countries, notably Ethiopia and Kenya, which are host to substantive ethnic Somali communities, will always interact with and at times intervene in Somalia out of their own national interest.

Somalia has also become embroiled in the affairs of its neighbors, such as the conflict between Eritrea and Ethiopia, with Eritrea hosting some of the former leaders of the Islamic Courts Union who had fled Somalia in 2007 to evade the Ethiopian troops that had invaded the previous year. Islamic and commercial organizations from the Middle East have used Somalia as a place to promote their ideologies and to pursue their economic interests.

No country exists and evolves in a political, social, or economic vacuum, and a country lacking an effective national government is particularly vulnerable to foreign influence, even more so in a region that has seen a series of recent conflicts and persistent tensions. The international community has a special responsibility to protect at-risk populations from the potentially pernicious effects of such influence. Wishing it away is hardly a viable political strategy, and ultimately, it is irresponsible.

The United Nations should seek to exploit the opportunity created by the recent developments in southern Somalia and the broader Horn by supporting and reinforcing positive trends and mobilizing international assistance to buttress the political and military achievements there with substantial and tangible programs to rapidly rebuild governance capacities and promote social and economic recovery. The current and fairly fragmented structure of the various UN entities involved in Somalia should be revamped to face this challenge effectively.

Recognizing Somalia's complex and evolving socio-political landscape

For the last two decades, Somalia has been a theater of civil strife, recurrent foreign military intervention, humanitarian disasters, and more recently, religious extremism. It stubbornly represented the failed state par excellence in spite of repeated and costly efforts by the international community to rescue it from its vicious

circle of poverty, clan rivalries, and sectarian violence. But the character of its conflicts changed considerably over time. Whereas the first decade after the fall of Siad Barre's regime was characterized by the ill-fated intervention of UNOSOM and the rise of warlordism, the last ten to twelve years brought about stabilization in the north and northeast and the negotiation of a quasi-constitutional framework through the Mbagathi charter; it also, however, included the spectacular advance of al-Shabaab in the wake of the Ethiopian intervention to oust the Islamic Courts Union. This led to a bipolarization of the conflict between al-Shabaab and its opponents.

The prospect of an al-Shabaab takeover of Mogadishu and establishment of a Taliban-style jihadist state in southern Somalia galvanized local and international efforts and brought an uncharacteristic degree of unity between erstwhile enemies and diverging regional interests. The challenge is now to transform this unity of purpose, forged against a powerful adversary, into a unity of vision for the future of Somalia, including rebuilding the Somali state. This state-building process must take into account the interests of regional authorities and provide balanced, provisional representation of the different clans at various institutional levels while preparing the ground for a genuinely democratic, constituency-based electoral and political system.

In addition to these principles, it is also necessary that the emerging system offers adequate political space to the two main components of Somali society—on the one hand, the rural, largely nomadic and religiously more traditional pastoralists, and on the other hand, the urban, mercantile communities whose religious views are strongly influenced by developments on the Arabian Peninsula, including Wahhabism. Until recently, little political space existed outside the conflict's two main protagonists—the government and al-Shabaab—and the social, political, and religious groups supporting them. This bipolarization neglected the diversity of Somali society and confined political competition to wrangling within the government and among its allies; the arrangement left no room for accommodating Islamist movements or personalities at the time under the umbrella of al-Shabaab but willing to renounce violence and join the peace process. Opening political space is particularly important as the power of al-Shabaab recedes. It will be essential in preparing the ground for genuine

political competition in forthcoming elections, and most important, in attempting to prevent Islamist movements from going underground because they feel politically and socially marginalized.

Even if defeated militarily, al-Shabaab could remain a significant player, as it will most likely intensify its ongoing campaign of terrorist attacks against the government. The assassination attempt against the new president in Mogadishu just days after he was elected was a stark reminder of this threat. Failing to create political and public space for Islamic movements would play into the hands of the extremists by offering them an opportunity to absorb those frustrated by the new political system.

Challenges ahead: security, stabilization and socio-economic recovery

The waning influence of al-Shabaab and its possible defeat as a military force could lead to an unprecedented situation in which for the first time since the collapse of the Somali state in 1991, an internationally backed and domestically accepted central authority has the authority to control most or all of southern Somalia. In order to consolidate such an accomplishment, a multipronged strategy with the following goals should be launched immediately: the effective restoration of minimal administrative and judicial services; an accelerated security sector reform, including bringing allied militias into the fold of the new security forces; an extensive program of reconciliation among various clans to avert the re-emergence of the rivalries, local violence, and warlordism that has characterized southern Somalia for two decades;⁴ and a vast program of socioeconomic recovery focusing on employment generation, rebuilding agriculture and buffering drought resilience, and restoring basic infrastructure.

As in other (post-)conflict countries, security is critical to the success of such a strategy. In all likelihood, Somalia will require sustained international security assistance for years to come. AMISOM will continue for some time, but if the military campaign against al-Shabaab ends with a defeat of the militia, then the African Union may again

request that the Security Council consider putting the mission under a UN peacekeeping umbrella or establishing a hybrid mission as in Darfur. The argument against »blue-hatting« AMISOM— that »there is no peace to keep«—would no longer apply, and the functions of the mission would resemble the multitask operations conducted by the United Nations in Côte d'Ivoire, the Democratic Republic of Congo, or Timor-Leste.

The planning for AMISOM or any successor arrangement should adopt a timeframe extending until the end of the four-year post-transition period, until 2016. During this time, the international community should assist the new government in negotiating the integration of allied military forces and the creation of genuinely national security forces that transcend clan divisions. The National Security and Stabilization Plan, developed with international assistance and adopted by the outgoing transitional federal government, has been widely accepted as a basis for this process.

The exit strategy of AMISOM or any subsequent mission will hinge on successful security sector development. Correspondingly, the withdrawal of the military mission should consist of a gradual and geographically staggered process, handing over responsibility to local security forces when and where possible. AMISOM was never deployed in Puntland or Somaliland because there was no need for it. Its deployment to and subsequent withdrawal from southern Somalia should be planned and implemented in a flexible manner, taking into account local realities and security conditions.

The creation of a professional, properly structured and fully resourced national army and police force will take time. It involves not only recruitment (or integration) and training, but also command and control—a delicate issue requiring the careful balancing of merit and clan interests—garrisoning, equipment, weapons control, military justice, human rights training, and so on. The government and the international community must mobilize the requisite resources for this process, as well as for the demobilization and socioeconomic reintegration of all those who cannot or do not want to become part of the national security forces.

The foundations of the various components of the security forces must be laid during the four years of the post-

4. Southern Somalia is considerably more fragmented than Puntland and Somaliland, which are essentially regional entities initially formed by Majerteen and Isaq clan leaders. Hence, the pacification and stabilization in southern and south central Somalia requires a complex and flexible process based on transparency, proportionality, and inclusiveness.

transition period. During this time, all militias should be integrated into the government security forces or demobilized. Measurable progress in this area could be an essential benchmark for continued international assistance to the government in other areas, including economic aid. Cooperation in the national SSD/R efforts by regional authorities should likewise be a condition for foreign support to these entities. Security sector development should be embedded within an overall rule of law strategy, encompassing a restructuring and rebuilding of the entire justice and corrections system.

Stabilization also involves political, social, and socio-economic issues. A process for establishing local administrations and a transparent mechanism for interclan reconciliation are essential, requiring material backing in various forms: financial support for inter-clan conferences, assistance to and training of local administrative officials, establishment of rudimentary social services, rehabilitation of basic infrastructure, and the implementation of employment and income-generating activities. This will require significant international backing and enhanced cooperation between the government, various UN entities, and other international actors.

At present, several bilateral partners and UN agencies are providing direct assistance to some regional entities, particularly in Puntland and Somaliland. Much of this assistance is managed from Nairobi, where most diplomats and UN agencies dealing with Somalia are headquartered. Furthermore, several donors from the Middle East and elsewhere have provided direct assistance to the transitional federal government or individual politicians and are likely to continue supporting the new government, often outside the existing coordination frameworks of international assistance. In spite of efforts by the Office of the United Nations Resident and Humanitarian Coordinator, there is no reliable database tracking all the development funds provided for Somalia. A multidonor trust fund for emerging local administrations in southern Somalia is under consideration, but beyond this useful proposal, the overall institutional architecture of international support to Somalia would benefit from a review and appropriate adjustments.

While there is no compelling reason for a comprehensive coordination structure covering all assistance, the »dual-track« approach—a parallel system providing sup-

port to national institutions in addition to regional entities—makes it virtually impossible for the government to effectively allocate external funds and thus implement efficient planning.⁵ The transitional government regularly complained to donors about the lack of information on aid going to regional (and sometimes local) entities and challenged the international community's demand for transparency concerning government revenue and expenses with a reciprocal demand for transparency regarding donor funds and agency expenditures. This issue needs to be addressed and a reliable system of information sharing established that meets the transparency requested on both sides.

The case for a new UN institutional architecture in Somalia

There has been an extraordinary degree of fragmentation in the international community's interactions with Somalia. Among the reasons for this is the insistence of some international partners to work directly with regional administrations, the need for humanitarian actors to continue supporting people in al-Shabaab-controlled areas and therefore to be perceived as independent from AMISOM and UNPOS, and the reluctance of the Security Council to launch a UN peacekeeping mission as long as there was "no peace to keep". The United Nations has three separate institutional entities involved in Somalia: UNPOS, the Political Office for Somalia, established after the withdrawal of UNOSOM in the mid-1990s; UNSOA, the Support Office for AMISOM; and a UN Country Team headed by a Resident and Humanitarian Coordinator. The African Union, Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD), as well as various other multilateral and bilateral partners remain essential actors with strong interests and considerable influence on the political process.

Various fora for coordination have been established among the UN entities and some of the regional organizations and bilateral partners. Some joint structures or units have been created to address areas of overlapping responsibilities. The African Union and the United Na-

5. Johnnie Carson, U.S. assistant secretary of state for Africa, announced the Obama administration's adoption of a dual-track policy approach for Somalia in late 2009. The term designated a parallel system of support to the transitional national institutions on the one hand, and regional entities on the other; however, this practice had long before 2009 been common among bilateral donors.

tions jointly developed an integrated strategic framework for AMISOM, and in cooperation with IGAD they drafted a joint political strategy in early 2011. Nevertheless, the evolving situation and the scope of required future involvement warrant a review of existing coordination arrangements.

Furthermore, most of the offices and coordination structures of the United Nations and other multilateral organizations are still based in Nairobi, but the center of gravity in political terms has shifted to Mogadishu. The special representative of the UN Secretary-General has officially been based in the Somali capital since the beginning of 2012, and UNPOS, the United Nations Development Programme, and some humanitarian organizations had earlier deployed international staff inside Somalia. The reorganization of the international institutional architecture should go hand in hand with a relocation of all involved head offices to Mogadishu, leaving Nairobi as a hub for liaising with the relevant diplomatic community. This is a considerable challenge in terms of security, but avoiding this transfer could alienate those within the new post-transitional governance structures from those who are supposed to assist them in consolidating peace and security.

As regards the reorganization of the UN institutions dealing with Somalia, various options could be considered, including a merger of UNPOS and UNSOA, the establishment of a hybrid mission as in Darfur, or the deployment of a structurally integrated mission.⁶ The guiding principle of such a reorganization should be

»form follows function,« and the option chosen should reflect the main activities that the United Nations wants to undertake, how it wants to share the burden of assisting Somalia with the African Union and other actors, and the objectives the international community wants to achieve in Somalia. The result could be a »designer mission« determined by the situation and trends on the ground, rather than one based on existing models.⁷ Its components would also have to be adjusted over time, depending on emerging needs and shifting priorities.

The successful conclusion of the Mbagathi transition, the adoption of a new constitution, and the establishment of a new government represent pivotal moments in the modern history of Somalia. The attitude adopted by the international community will be crucial for the success of this new political dispensation. The scope of assistance required is considerable and may be difficult to mobilize in times of budgetary belt-tightening in major donor countries and UN contributors. A loss of momentum, however, whether due to hesitation on the side of Somalia's international partners or a lack of funds for the stabilization process, would condemn the country to a renewed cycle of violence with inevitable repercussions in the Horn and beyond.

6. A structurally integrated mission is one in which the resident and humanitarian coordinator, who heads the country team of UN agencies, is also a deputy special representative of the UN secretary-general. Such an arrangement puts the coordination of UN agencies' activities under the umbrella of a peacekeeping mission.

7. Ian Martin coined the term designer mission in »All Peace Operations Are Political: A Case for Designer Missions and the Next UN Reform,« Center on International Cooperation, New York University, New York, 2011.



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