

Somalia: U.S. Government Policy and Challenges

Testimony by

**J. Stephen Morrison
Director, Africa Program
Center for Strategic and International Studies
Washington, D.C.**

before the

**Subcommittee on African Affairs
Committee on foreign Relations
United States Senate**

**Tuesday, July 11, 2006
Dirksen Senate Office Building
Room 419**

Somalia: U.S. Government Policy and Challenges

INTRODUCTION

Senator Martinez, Africa Subcommittee chairman, and Senator Feingold, ranking minority, I commend you both for holding this timely hearing, and I thank you for the opportunity to contribute to the discussions here today.

I have chosen to concentrate my brief remarks here on the specific acute predicaments that U.S. policymakers face with respect to Somalia and immediate concrete options for moving forward. I hope they are helpful. Ambassador David Shinn has provided ample background on Somalia's history and recent developments which I will not duplicate.

Somalia has surprised and exasperated us with the sudden, recent turn of events. This happened earlier in 1993, has now happened again, and calls for an exceptional response. By contrast with the early 1990s, Somalia cannot today be simply ignored and forgotten. Realities in the Horn of Africa and the world have changed too profoundly since 9/11 to permit us simply to change the subject or follow a business-as-usual approach. The question this then begs: what realistically can be done by the United States and others under present circumstances? The short answer is we have to confront the multiple acute constraints at play and carry U.S. diplomacy to a higher level, grounded in realism and patience; a determination to create new U.S. capacities on a crash basis; and a commitment to strengthen multilateral bodies and systematically test the Somalis.

From 1994 to 2001, the United States was content to allow Somalia to disappear into oblivion, following the tragic deaths of 18 Rangers in Mogadishu in October 1993. After 9/11, Somalia only resurfaced marginally in official U.S. consciousness, confined to the shadows of the Global War on Terror. There was no U.S. policy of any consequence. Occasional suggestions that the United States should enlarge its engagement beyond nominal containment of the terror threat were rejected out of hand. That was certainly the case when we advocated, at Senator Feingold's suggestion, heightened U.S. engagement on Somalia as part of the African Policy Advisory Committee report, commissioned by the U.S. Congress and issued to then Secretary of State Colin Powell in July 2004.

Today, quite remarkably, Somalia suddenly again demands high-level U.S. foreign policy attention. The stakes for the United States have become conspicuously larger, following the embarrassing setback in May when an alliance of Somali warlords backed by the U.S. in its counter-terrorism efforts was vanquished by Islamist militias. That failure is now compounded by mounting concern both for stability within the Horn and the humanitarian toll borne by Somali citizens.

The United States has been caught by surprise, ill-prepared for the multiple quandaries that Somalia now poses.

CONSTRAINTS

Several acute constraints are at play.

First, the three ‘high value targets’ thought to be in Somalia, Fazul Abdullah Mohammed, Saleh Ali Salih Nabhan, and Abu Taha al-Sudani, are serious threats with a proven track record of doing harm to U.S. national interests. They cannot be downplayed or ignored, dealing with them will remain a central U.S. policy concern, and that will require communicating our demands directly to the Council of Islamic Courts (CIC). But that will also likely require dealing with murky outcomes. And at some point it may be necessary but difficult to verify if or when these terrorists are no longer based in Somalia.

Second, there is at present no realistic option for an external force to shape the security situation on the ground inside Somalia. That is because there is no stomach on the part of the United States, any other major power or any international body to introduce armed troops into Somalia. Moreover, there is no feasible proxy option, nor a feasible option to invest in the creation of a new force under the auspices, for instance, of the Transitional Federal Government.

Third, while the United States might be able eventually to engage diplomatically inside Somalia on occasion, it is not realistic or advisable for the United States to establish a presence on the ground in Somalia anytime soon. For now, we are confined to operating diplomatically from the outside, on the margins. That does not rule out, however, that we can have significant impact from within the surrounding region, if we choose to make that kind of commitment.

Fourth, the United States operates from a tremendous deficit, in terms of policy, institutional capacities, and credibility. Disengaged for twelve years, it lacks real-time knowledge and relationships. It has no full-time senior-level leadership in Washington or the region charged with directing policy, and has no serious funding to leverage its aims. At a popular level among Somalis, the United States lacks credibility and support. At home, the U.S. domestic constituency pressing affirmatively for enlarged engagement in Somalia is weak. The constituency arguing the opposite, based on the negative experiences of 1993-94, remains active.

While the outline of a U.S. policy has recently become clearer—the three-pronged focus on counter-terrorism, governance, and humanitarian need outlined by Assistant Secretary Frazer—no credible implementing strategy has yet been put in place, and no functioning interagency process exists to back the formulation and execution of a strategy. Rather, there are persistent internal fissures within the administration that pull policy in divergent directions and impede a coherent response.

Fifth, the Ethiopian military is a wildcard which neither the United States nor any other power controls. If the patterns of the mid-1990s apply today, ten years hence, the

Ethiopians could very well intervene unilaterally on a significant scale and rearrange the Somalia playing field, for better or for worse.

Sixth, there are no reliable internal partners. The Transitional Federal Government (TFG) is weak and ineffective, the leadership and the intentions of the Council of Islamic Courts (CIC) are uncertain, and for now the latter remains preoccupied with vanquishing the warlords and consolidating its control of the ground in southern Somalia.

Seventh, we do not yet have an effective strategy for engaging Saudi Arabia, Yemen, the Emirates, Egypt, and Eritrea to staunch financial, materiel and political support to the CIC and opposing warlords. UN Security Council sanctions have up to now been ineffectual. The recent revival of the Somalia Contact Group is a welcome step, but that body does not yet have the full regional membership it requires, and is only just beginning to focus on how to bring effective external pressures upon the CIC, TFG and opposing warlords. (Britain, Sweden, Italy, Tanzania and the European Union joined the United States and Norway in the Contact Group. Kenya, which assisted in forming the TFG, was not invited, but the African Union, the Arab League, the East African Intergovernmental Authority on Development, and the United Nations were invited as observers.)

DIVERGENT FUTURES

There are now two divergent narratives of where Somalia may be heading. Each calls for a fundamentally different U.S. approach. Yet we are called upon to prepare simultaneously for both.

Since the bungled U.S. effort to support the warlord coalition backfired in May, there has emerged the possibility that a nascent radical Islamist regime might consolidate its control under the control of Hassan Dahir Aweys. Further, this regime might continue to harbor 'high value' terrorists *and* in addition invite yet another Ethiopian putsch that would threaten to scatter the parties and push the situation back into violent chaos. With this scenario looming, the United States has felt compelled to announce it cannot engage in direct dialogue with the CIC. The U.S. posture has instead concentrated on containment and threat.

Side by side with this scenario, there has emerged the opposing, benign possibility, favored by the EU envoy Mario Raffaelli and regional governments, that the Islamic Courts might break the power of predatory warlords and negotiate a pragmatic transitional governing arrangement with the TFG, under the auspices of the Sudanese government. That presumes the 'high value' terrorists are quietly spirited out of the country and that the CIC leadership concludes it is in its best interest to compromise with a transitional government that has no capacity, administratively or militarily, and low legitimacy.

U.S. POLICY

For the Bush administration, the current scramble to devise an effective policy towards Somalia involves an uncomfortable reunion with the same failed state that dealt the Clinton administration its first major foreign policy defeat. Given the constraints and uncertainties outlined above, it is clear that any effective U.S. policy needs above all to be grounded in *realism, caution and patience*; to test the CIC and TFG directly; to give priority to strengthening and operating *predominantly through multilateral channels*; and, perhaps most important for our discussions here today, to put a premium on *creating elementary U.S. capacities* (now absent) on a crash basis. The latter will be essential, if the United States is to better understand and shape Somalia and its environs, and if it is to see U.S. credibility enhanced.

Critical concrete next steps include:

1. **Test-engage the CIC and TFG:** There is an immediate need to communicate, directly and clearly, to both the CIS and TFG what we need to see from them, in terms of concrete actions, and what we are prepared to do, positively and negatively, in response. The United States has to take special care neither to embrace nor to reject out of hand these two entities. With the CIC, we need to be very clear on our security demands.
2. **Strengthen U.S. capacity:** appoint a senior-level figure to head U.S. efforts; create an adequately staffed U.S. Somali policy group, based in Kenya; create an independent outside expert advisory group; accelerate interagency efforts to formulate a flexible U.S. strategy that mitigates tensions between the Department of State and U.S. intelligence operations; assemble a robust emergency package of bilateral and multilateral assistance to support expanded international humanitarian operations and transitional reconstruction of critical infrastructure in Somalia, including within Somaliland.
3. **Step up engagement by the UN Security Council and the UN Secretary General:** press within the UN Security Council for a tightening of the enforcement of existing arms sanctions on Somalia. As part of that effort, press for an international maritime initiative to combat piracy and enhance maritime security. Encourage the UN Secretary General to become more directly engaged on Somalia at a sustained, senior level.
4. **Intensify U.S. bilateral pressures and expand the Somalia Contact Group:** the United States needs to press Ethiopia to join a broader international dialogue on Somalia; at the same time, the United States needs to engage directly and more aggressively with Saudi Arabia, Yemen, the Emirates, Egypt, and Eritrea to curb materiel and financial support to the CIC and opposing warlords. It also needs to take steps to incorporate these states into the activities of the Somalia Contact Group.

In conclusion, the United States faces a score of formidable barriers to an effective approach to Somalia, in the midst of a rapidly changing situation. But given what is at stake, for U.S. national interests, Somalia, and its neighbors, and given the potential the United States possesses to help avert worst outcomes and move Somalia towards a better future, it is critical that the United States strive to do more, smarter, and at a higher level of effort.

Thank you for the opportunity to present here today.