

## SOMALIA: U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY AND CHALLENGES

Hearing before the  
Subcommittee on African Affairs  
of the  
Committee on Foreign Relations  
United States Senate  
July 11, 2006

Testimony by David H. Shinn

Adjunct Professor, Elliott School of International Affairs, George Washington University  
Former U.S. ambassador to Ethiopia and State Department coordinator for Somalia

I thank the subcommittee for inviting me to participate in this hearing. I had the pleasure of appearing before this subcommittee on February 6, 2002, when it held a hearing entitled "Somalia: U.S. Policy Options" chaired by Senator Feingold. I opened my comments more than four years ago with several assumptions that remain essentially valid today. I wish to reiterate and update them for this hearing.

### ASSUMPTIONS

#### Geographical Scope

I include both the southern two-thirds of Somalia known prior to independence as Italian Somalia and the northern third known previously as British Somaliland as constituting the territory covered in my remarks. In order to distinguish between the two areas, I refer to the southern two-thirds as Somalia and the northern third as Somaliland. The Transitional Federal Government (TFG) now based in Baidoa exercises nominal control over parts of Somalia. The Council of Islamic Courts (CIC) controls most of greater Mogadishu and most territory from Jowhar to the north, the Lower Shebelle to the south and Beled Weyne to the west. A democratically elected government in Hargeisa rules Somaliland, although its control is contested in Sool and part of Sanag regions, which Puntland also claims. Somaliland declared its independence from Somalia in 1991 but no government has extended official recognition.

#### US Comprehension of Region

The United States has been absent from Somalia since 1994. US government personnel make occasional visits to Somalia and Somaliland, mainly to Hargeisa and Baidoa. The difficult security situation in Mogadishu has not permitted the assignment of Americans there. Although the US government has improved marginally in recent years its understanding of the situation in Somalia and Somaliland, its knowledge remains highly flawed.

#### Terrorist Links

In the mid-1990s a Somali organization known as al-Ittihad al-Islamiya (AIAI) or Unity of Islam publicly acknowledged that it carried out terrorist attacks against Ethiopia. Its direct terrorist activity seems to have been confined to Ethiopia. AIAI became largely

dormant about the turn of the century. Under Executive Order 13224, the US listed AIAI on 23 September 2001 as an organization linked to terrorism. Hassan Dahir Aweys, now Chairman of the Consultative Committee (roughly analogous to a parliament) of the Council of Islamic Courts was a member of AIAI's executive committee. Under the same Executive Order the US designated on 7 November 2001 Hassan Dahir Aweys and a number of other Somalis as persons linked to terrorism.

It is widely believed in western counterterrorism circles that al-Qaeda personnel transited and perhaps operated out of Somalia in the 1998 attacks on the US embassy in Nairobi and Dar es Salaam and the 2002 attack on Israeli tourists outside Mombasa, Kenya. It is also widely believed that there was some kind of contact between AIAI and al-Qaeda. The US government has alleged that three persons complicit in the attack on the US embassies in Nairobi and Dar es Salaam took refuge in Somalia. I am unable to shed any light on their possible continued presence there. There were several terrorist attacks in recent years against non-Somali targets in Somaliland. Authorities in Somaliland believe the attacks originated in Somalia.

As sections of Somalia, especially greater Mogadishu, have become increasingly subject to the influence of extremist elements, the prospect increases for linkages to terrorism. This does not mean, however, that Somalia is likely to become a major al-Qaeda base or that it is headed towards a Taliban form of government. The vast majority of Somalis follow a moderate form of Islam and they are highly suspicious of foreign influence. Although there are some worrying developments coming from some of the Islamic courts, the situation is much too fluid to jump to conclusions.

#### Need for Central Authority

Until a semblance of the rule of law and some modicum of central authority are reestablished throughout Somalia, it will be virtually impossible to create viable institutions that give Somalis any hope for the future. Likewise, it will not be possible to implement successfully long-term policies aimed at eliminating or even reducing the terrorist threat from Somalia.

#### Unilateral Effort Doomed to Fail

A unilateral US policy in Somalia is almost guaranteed to fail or achieve little. The only long-term strategy that has any hope for success must be coordinated carefully with key countries in the region, European allies, the African Union, Intergovernmental Authority for Development, United Nations, and the Arab League. The recent reconstitution of the Somalia Contact Group was a good first step.

#### Scarce US Resources

It will be difficult to mobilize significant US resources in support of a comprehensive policy towards Somalia. There are just too many competing demands on limited resources. Some in Congress and the executive branch will argue that the US spent billions, primarily for two peacekeeping operations, in Somalia in the early and mid-1990s, question whether it was worth the cost, and be reluctant to reengage. Since my testimony in 2002, USAID development assistance to Somalia has actually declined. Development aid levels, excluding PL-480 food assistance, were about \$4.5 million in FY 2002, \$3.4 million in FY 2003, and \$2 million in FY 2004. The total bumped up to

\$5.1 million in FY 2005 due primarily to the intervention of a member of this subcommittee. Development aid dropped back to about \$2 million in FY 2006 and according to USAID's Operational Plan dated 2 June 2006 is slated to rise to just over \$2.5 million in FY 2007. The levels have dropped so low, however, that they can not be explained solely by competing priorities. There has simply not been a policy decision to make a serious effort. Somalia is admittedly an exceedingly difficult place to implement an aid program; this argument does not hold true for Somaliland. Although more US development aid alone may not do a great deal to improve the situation in Somalia, it must be an important part of a comprehensive US policy towards Somalia.

### ANALYSIS OF RECENT DEVELOPMENTS

Although there have been brief periods of relative calm, sustained peace and security never returned to the greater Mogadishu area following the collapse of the Siad Barre government in 1991. Except for occasional conflict in Sool region, Somaliland has been peaceful for more than ten years. Northeastern Somalia, also known as Puntland, declared its autonomy a number of years ago and generally has been quiet. Its former leader, Abdullahi Yusuf, is now the President of the TFG. Even the southern most part of Somalia has experienced long periods during the past ten years without significant conflict. Most of the difficulties that you have read about in the media since the departure of the UN peacekeeping mission in 1995 have occurred in the greater Mogadishu region. This is where the population is concentrated, the warlords competed for power, the Islamic courts began their rise, and Somali businessmen backed whichever group they thought would be most useful to them. The business community is an important part of the equation as it funds the militias.

The Islamic or sharia courts have been around since the early 1990s. They have long been given credit for creating a semblance of law and order in the areas where they exercise control. In some cases, drawing on funding from Saudi Arabia, the Gulf States, and the Somali diaspora, they have established clinics and Islamic schools. This has helped to ingratiate them with ordinary people. Many Somalis also welcomed the forced departure from Mogadishu several weeks ago of most of the bickering warlords by the Islamic court supported militias.

The court structure is highly decentralized. Some of the courts are led by extremists, others by moderates. They all agree on their goal to create an Islamic state. It is not clear, however, that they have the same vision for that state. Puritanical Salafi and Wahhabi beliefs imported from the Gulf have become popular in many of the courts. An important part of that theology is intolerance towards all non-believers. But others in the court leadership draw inspiration from Egypt's Islamic scholar, Sayyid Qutub, who was more moderate and advocated engagement and compromise. It is also clear that some leaders in the CIC, certainly including Hassan Dahir Aweys, wish to reenergize the Greater Somalia concept by incorporating into Somalia those Somali-inhabited parts of Ethiopia, Kenya, and Djibouti.

Perhaps most important, the courts have developed so far largely on a clan and sub-clan basis. Their power resides in the Hawiye clan, one of Somalia's five major clans. It remains to be seen if their authority will extend significantly to other clans. Their support among the Hawiye seems to be broad, but not especially deep. At least one Hawiye warlord in Mogadishu continues to hold out against the court militias. In the final analysis, clan loyalty will probably prevail over a particular brand of Islamic theology. There could well be a significant push back by Hawiye leaders against the extremist theological views of some of the CIC leaders.

The TFG is unable for security reasons to locate in Somalia's traditional capital—Mogadishu. It initially tried to establish a capital in Jowhar, now under the control of the CIC, and then moved to Baidoa in south central Somalia. But it has minimal control in Baidoa and little prospect of establishing authority in other parts of Somalia outside Puntland. The TFG is, nevertheless, the only governing organization recognized by the African Union, United Nations, and Arab League. It is legally constituted and still has about three and one-half years left in its term.

Sudan's President Bashir is the current Arab League chairman. To the surprise of many, he brokered on behalf of the Arab League on June 22 in Khartoum an agreement between the TFG and the CIC. Both parties accepted mutual recognition and agreed to begin negotiations on a reconciliation process that is scheduled to begin on July 15 in Khartoum. The subsequent ascendance to power within the CIC of extremist Hassan Dahir Aweys puts in jeopardy the future of these talks.

Operating from a position of weakness, President Abdullahi Yusuf and the TFG have called for an African Union peacekeeping mission for Somalia. The TFG sees such a force as protecting it from the CIC and any remaining hostile warlords. The prospects for an African Union peacekeeping mission are bleak. It would be unwise for military forces from any contiguous country to take part in such an operation. Ethiopia volunteered to send troops when the idea first came up. It seems to have concluded subsequently that this would be a mistake because of the historical animosity between Ethiopians and Somalis. The presence of Ethiopian troops in Somalia will only reignite Somali nationalism. The African Union identified Uganda and Sudan as the source of troops for Somalia. Uganda has said it would only send troops after peace has been achieved. That is not very helpful from the standpoint of timing. Sudan has been notably silent concerning a contribution of troops. One must wonder, however, if Sudanese troops are a possibility in view of its problems in Darfur. The CIC has stated categorically that it will not accept a foreign peacekeeping force.

Al-Qaeda stepped into the breach on July 2 when it released an audio tape by Osama bin Laden that denounced the TFG and called on Somalis to support the CIC. Bin Laden condemned any peacekeeping mission to Somalia, stating it would be an agent of American "crusaders." The head of the CIC executive committee, Sheikh Sharif Ahmed, immediately disassociated himself from bin Laden by stating that he was expressing his "personal opinion." Even Aweys said that the CIC has no connection with bin Laden.

## REGIONAL ISSUES

The regional implications of these recent developments in Somalia are huge. Ethiopia feels the most threatened along its 1,000 mile border with Somalia and Somaliland. The southeastern part of Ethiopia known as the Ogaden is inhabited by Somalis and has been subject for many years to dissident activity by the local Ogaden National Liberation Front (ONLF). Extremist members of the CIC have made known their desire to revive Somali irredentism in the Ogaden. It would be no great surprise if the CIC has supported the ONLF. Ethiopia has also charged Eritrea, which is angry at Ethiopia for not implementing binding arbitration in a border dispute, with supporting both the ONLF and the CIC. Ethiopia has long supported Abdullahi Yusuf and the TFG. It also has good relations with Somaliland. The CIC charged recently that Ethiopia sent troops into Somalia to protect Abdullahi Yusuf. Ethiopia denied the charge.

Extremist representatives of the CIC have carefully left out of the dialogue possible irredentist claims to the Somali-inhabited part of northeastern Kenya and to Djibouti, whose population is 60 percent Somali. In any event, Somaliland stands between Somalia and Djibouti. This makes highly unlikely any revival of the irredentist issue in Djibouti, at least for the time being. But if the CIC is able to consolidate power throughout Somalia and if the extremists take complete control of the organization, it will only be a matter of time before Kenya becomes subject to Somali irredentism.

Other important regional players, in addition to neighbors Kenya and Djibouti, are Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Yemen, United Arab Emirates, and Sudan. Egypt has a long historical interest in Somalia and has in the past used Somalia as a pawn to distract Ethiopia. Egypt, for example, supported Somalia during its war against Ethiopia in 1977. Saudi Arabia was the major importer of livestock from Somalia and Somaliland but has stopped the trade on grounds that the animals can not be properly certified as disease free. Saudi money has also been instrumental in the development of Salafism and Wahhabism in Somalia. Yemen is a frequent destination for Somali refugees seeking a better life. Dubai in the United Arab Emirates has become the major financial center for Somalia and Somaliland. Sudan has long maintained relations with Islamic groups in Somalia. As current chair of the Arab League, it could play a positive (or negative) role in bringing the CIC and TFG to the negotiating table. The Intergovernmental Authority for Development, which represents the five countries in the Horn of Africa and Kenya and Uganda, is also central to the peace process.

## POLICY SUGGESTIONS

### Continue Contact Group and Widen Consultations

The Contact Group should meet on a regular basis and expand its membership to include all of Somalia's neighbors, Egypt, Yemen, Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates, the executive director of the Intergovernmental Authority for Development, and representatives from the African Union, Arab League, and European Union. If it is not feasible to include all of these countries/organizations in the Contact Group, the US

should engage all of these parties in regular bilateral consultation concerning Somalia and Somaliland.

The US has maintained regular contact with representatives of the TFG. This should obviously continue. It is also important to encourage the dialogue that has begun between the TFG and the CIC. In the final analysis, Somalis themselves will decide, for better or worse, their own future. The international community can cheer from the sidelines, reward positive developments with tangible assistance, and express displeasure when there are setbacks, but they can not decide the future for Somalis. Although the immediate focus should be on discussions between the TFG and CIC, the US should not close the door to direct contact with appropriate members of the CIC.

#### Establish a Special Envoy for Somalia

I am normally not enthusiastic about the naming of special envoys to deal with country specific crises. Special envoys sometimes create more problems than they solve by working at cross purposes with ambassadors on the ground. Somalia is an exception. For good reason, there is no US ambassador in Somalia. In fact, there are no US personnel assigned to Somalia. A special envoy for Somali, supported by a small staff, would for the first time since 1994 permit US policy towards Somalia to rise to the level required for adequate interagency coordination in Washington and the field. The assistant secretary of state for African affairs or one of the deputies just do not have the time to devote to an issue as complex as Somalia. Perforce, the issue is relegated to the desk officer for Somalia and occasionally the director of East African affairs. This system works well for most situations. Somalia has risen above this level.

#### Reinforce Ties with Somaliland

This is not a plea to extend diplomatic recognition to Somaliland. I have argued for years that the African Union or, at a minimum, key African governments should be the first to take that step. Although Somaliland authorities are warmly received in a number of African countries and the African Union recently issued a complimentary report on the situation there, no country has recognized Hargeisa.

Somaliland has proved its commitment to democratic governance, avoided conflict with all of its neighbors, and generally maintained peace and security. It has particularly strong support from the Somaliland diaspora, which has become the overwhelming source of most of its income. I suggested at the 2002 hearing that the time had come to increase US assistance and to establish a small American liaison office in Hargeisa. The focus should be on the provision of aid and the sharing of information on terrorism. The American presence might consist of two State Department officers and one or two USAID staff. The security situation is no worse in Somaliland than in many other countries around the world where the US has a large presence.

#### Increase USAID Development Assistance to Somalia and Somaliland

Foreign aid is not a panacea for the problems of Somalia and Somaliland, but it is an important piece of a comprehensive policy. As noted above, USAID development assistance to Somalia and Somaliland has actually been declining in recent years. The time has long passed to reverse this trend. The focus of the small USAID program—mitigating conflict, strengthening civil society, and improving access to basic

education—is sound. It is just too little and USAID should begin to add other project areas. It is particularly important to support the building of social and governance institutions. USAID should expand its support for the growing number of Somali professional organizations. One innovative program that has been tried in Somali region of Ethiopia and has promise throughout the Somali-speaking region is interactive secular primary education by radio. The lessons are broadcast from a central location by Somalis in Somali to schools throughout the region. Somali teachers undergo a brief training period at a central location so that they can make the most efficient use of the material. Somalis constitute an oral society; radio is an ideal teaching medium.

Because it is easier to work in Somaliland, most of USAID's assistance has actually gone there. Hargeisa is deserving of the aid, but it is also important to find ways to have more active programs in Somalia, probably by making greater use of indigenous and international NGOs and working through international agencies like UNDP and UNICEF. Security conditions do not yet permit the stationing of American personnel in Somalia or even visits to parts of the country. Until there is a policy decision to give a higher priority to Somalia and Somaliland, there just will not be any significant increase in USAID funding.

#### Fund a Voice of America Somali Service

The Voice of America (VOA) had a Somali-language service during the US-led and UN peacekeeping missions to Somalia in the mid-1990s. With the departure of international forces, the service became a victim of US unhappiness with events in Somalia and other budget priorities. Resumption of a Somali service has been under discussion at VOA for at least the past five years. It has never crossed the budget priority threshold. There are about ten million Somalis in Somalia and Somaliland, more than four million in Ethiopia, and smaller numbers in Kenya and Djibouti. If the US is serious about having an impact on Somalis it will fund this language service.

#### Help Prevent Off-shore Piracy

There is an international naval task force with strong American participation that operates throughout the waters of the region. It has already contributed to efforts to reduce piracy off the shores of Somalia. This should continue and, to the extent there are not higher priorities elsewhere, increase. But it is also important to understand that Somali piracy is essentially a commercial undertaking; it has little to do with the problem of terrorism.

#### Make Somali Livestock Acceptable for Importation in Saudi Arabia

The single most important export from Somalia and Somaliland has traditionally been livestock. Saudi Arabia, the biggest buyer in earlier years, periodically stops imports because no organization can certify that the animals are disease free. This has been a problem for at least ten years and should be susceptible to resolution. A solution would have a major positive impact on the economies of Somalia and Somaliland.

#### Make Greater Use of the Somali Diaspora

Somali-Americans have become an increasingly important part of American society. Although many are recent arrivals and still finding their way, others have

become significant contributors to American institutions such as local government, business, and education. Minneapolis-St. Paul boasts the largest Somali community in the US with Columbus, Ohio, in second place. But you can probably find Somali communities in every state and every large city. Remittances to Somalia and Somaliland have become an important part of national income in both countries. Many of those Somalis who have become well established in the US would like to contribute in other ways to improve life in their country of origin. An American foundation or NGO, possibly with US government funding, should be encouraged to assemble representatives from these communities in the US to determine if they have ideas for contributing to the establishment of stability and development in Somalia and Somaliland.

#### Draw on the Expertise of Regional Experts

There is not a great deal of expertise on Somalia and Somaliland in the US government. US understanding of neighboring countries is much better. It would be useful to assemble the handful of American experts, explicitly to include several Somali-Americans, to brainstorm the kinds of policies that might most effectively further American interests in the region. Such a session should include representatives from US government agencies that follow events in Somalia and Somaliland or conduct programs there. They could provide a reality check. Representation from the Combined Joint Task Force-Horn of Africa based in Djibouti would also be helpful. But to serve any purpose, the brainstorming session needs to be a free-flowing discussion with most of the comments coming from those who are not part of the US government.

#### CONCLUSION

The policy suggestions in this paper constitute a point of departure for further discussion. They do not meet the criteria of a comprehensive policy towards Somalia and Somaliland. I have made all of them previously either before this subcommittee or in other written analyses. These steps, and others, will, I believe, contribute to reducing the threat of terrorism posed by continuing instability in Somalia. I ended my remarks before the subcommittee more than four years ago with the following statement: "The urgency is in launching the dialogue and gaining support from allies and countries in the region." The urgency has become even greater because developments in Somalia now have the potential to inflame the entire region.

Again, thank you for inviting me to this hearing.