Upcoming Inflection Point:

Tracing and Optimizing the Amisom Trajectory in Somalia

BY PHILLIP CARTER AND RYAN GUARD[1]

The outbreak of the Somali civil war in 1988, the toppling of Siad Barre's dictatorial regime in 1991, and the subsequent disbanding of the Somali National Army (SNA) created a decade-long power vacuum in Somalia. In the wake of this collapse, many of the disparate anti-Barre opposition groups seized upon the vacuum in central authority to compete for influence. Within this vacuum of effective governance, the condition of lawlessness produced a sundry series of actors (variously termed as warlords, insurgents, and militants) who prospered on war, chaos, and criminality. A grassroots response to the disorder – the formation of the Union of Islamic Courts – brought a religious dimension and provided an opportunity for extremist religious organizers to insert themselves into local governance. Out of the more radical remains of the Islamic Courts, al-Shabaab arose and eventually evolved to formally become part of the al-Qaeda enterprise.

The focus of this paper is to examine the nexus of Somali security sector development, Somali political development, and international efforts to foster effective governance despite the countervailing pressure of a domestic terrorist group with regional ambitions. It will identify the impending critical juncture in the process, and provide recommendations for the establishment of a durable central authority within the specific context of Somali culture which will be resilient enough to counter al-Shabaab and re-establish effective Somali governance outside Mogadishu.

The Vacuum

Since the early nineties, Somalis have carried on with commerce and local or regional governance while resisting or dismissing attempts by the international community to impose or broker the reestablishment of Mogadishu-based constitutional government. Despite the overall chaos and recurring instability, business owners and clan interests were disinterested or non-supportive of U.S. and UN mediated political conferences in the 1990s. The current Somali national

Ambassador Phillip Carter is Deputy to the Commander of USAFRICOM for Civil-Military Engagement (DCME).

LCDR Ryan Guard is the Deputy Executive Officer for USAFRICOM Deputy Commander for Civil-Military Engagements

government can trace its origins back to the post-9/11 political era, to a conference held in 2004, at Eldoret, Kenya. This conference, sponsored by the Inter-governmental Authority on Development (IGAD), succeeded in creating a Transitional Federal Charter and a Transitional Federal Parliament with a five-year mandate.[2] Embracing the concept of Federalism, the Transitional Federal Government (TFG) was inclusive of existing state governments and regional administrations such as Somaliland and Puntland, but was a weak, donor-driven institution with little public support in Somalia. Though formed as a Somali unity government, it soon split into two camps: a pro-Ethiopian, pro-federalist and anti-Islamist wing concentrated in areas outside Mogadishu, and an anti-Ethiopian, centralist one that was inclusive of Islamist groups with a power base in Mogadishu.[3]

In 2006, armed clashes broke out between a U.S.-backed alliance of militia leaders and a coalition of Islamist militias which culminated in a decisive Islamist victory, the elements of which organized themselves as the Union of Islamic Courts (ICU). Consolidating control over Mogadishu in June 2006, the ICU then quickly expanded its control over south-central Somalia. In six months, the ICU made impressive gains in the provision of public order and rule of law in Somalia. Most Somalis – including many who did not subscribe to an Islamist agenda – strongly supported the ICU as a result. Hard-line Islamists in the broad umbrella movement of the ICU took a series of provocative actions against the U.S. and Ethiopia which led to a full-scale Ethiopian (with U.S. support) military offensive against the ICU in late December, 2006, which in turn, routed the ICU in a matter of days. The shattered ICU and its defeated militia – including

a core force of several hundred well-trained and committed fighters known as al-Shabaab – scattered throughout the countryside.[4]

The international community attempted to revive the TFG, strengthen its governing and security sector capacity and enhance its legitimacy. In order to broaden the TFG's appeal among Somalis by creating a more equitable power-sharing agreement, plans were drawn up by IGAD to deploy a peacekeeping force to provide security for the TFG. Though this effort failed, a subsequent push developed into the African Union Mission to Somalia (AMISOM). Initially conceptualized to use African troops from non-neighbouring countries to Somalia to avoid complications from those neighbors' shared history and vested interests in the country, it was difficult to find governments willing to send troops to such a high-risk mission. Eventually 2,000 Ugandan and Burundian forces were deployed to the AMISOM mission, far short of the 8,000 initially sought. Ethiopian troops remained deployed in Somalia as a result, and their presence provoked Somali armed resistance, all of which produced a TFG unable to control much of Mogadishu, coupled with heavy fighting that wracked the city.[5]

Out of the debris of the ICU, the Alliance for the Re-Liberation of Somalia (ARS) became the umbrella resistance group, which eventually split into two camps: one more moderate known as ARS-Djibouti, and a more hard line group, ARS-Asmara. Meanwhile, the al-Shabaab militia broke with both ARS groups and established control as the strongest armed group between the Kenyan border and Mogadishu. The subsequent reconciliation of ARS-Djibouti and the TFG as part of the Djibouti Peace process in 2008 set the conditions for Ethiopian withdrawal and also called

for the replacement of Ethiopian troops with a UN international stabilization force to deploy within 120 days.[6]

The TFG became the Somali Federal Government in 2012, and has subsequently gained international recognition. A key part of this success was AMISOM, which has protected, supported, and continues to provide development space for the reconstitution of the Somali government in Mogadishu and beyond.

The Security Sector

Out of the collapse of the Union of Islamic Courts in 2006, al-Shabaab emerged as the greatest threat to both international and internal Somali governmental forces by virtue of its ties to al-Qaeda and its ability to generate both conventional forces and an asymmetric threat. By 2009, it held administrative and social control over more than 40,000 square kilometers of territory with a population of five million; it possessed the capability to recruit fighters from Somalia and beyond; it was able to provide basic social services to a portion of the population that at least tolerated the regime; and it also quickly terrorized non-supporters into submission.

AMISOM was initially supported by Ugandan troop contributions in early 2007, followed late that year by Burundian forces. Together, these two Troop Contributing Countries (TCCs) saw the AMISOM mission through the difficult period in the wake of the Ethiopian withdrawal from Mogadishu in 2009. Several factors turned the tide in 2010. The first was the Kampala bombings by al-Shabaab. Though designed to negatively impact Ugandan willingness to continue its participation in AMISOM, the attack had the

An improvised fighting vehicle in Mogadishu, 1993

opposite effect by redoubling Ugandan efforts and led to a significant AMISOM force cap increase that paved the way for eventual offensive operations. The second was the failure of the al-Shabaab Ramadan offensive to dislodge AMISOM forces, which showed the growing capability of AMISOM forces to withstand large scale assaults and also revealed al-Shabaab's limited ability to fight conventional engagements. The Burundian soldiers, based out of the former University of Somalia campus, were in dire straits until several months later when Ugandan AMISOM forces, largely supported by the Somalia National Police and the *Alhu Sunna wal Jama'a* militia, were able to link the University and the airport. There were numerous complaints about how the Ugandans conducted operations, largely resulting from Ugandan indiscriminate indirect fire; it took extensive training/mentoring to assist the Ugandans with their targeting. The Burundians suffered extremely high casualties in February, 2011, while taking the Ministry of Defence compound, which precipitated a focused training effort to improve Burundian capabilities.

Nonetheless, AMISOM and its Somali allies continued to make progress to such a degree that al-Shabaab decided to withdraw its fighters from Mogadishu in August, 2011. It is important to note that this was a tactical decision by al-Shabaab to withdraw, and that al-Shabaab was not defeated on the battlefield. Also contributing to greater AMISOM effectiveness during this time were both the stand-up of the UN Support office for AMISOM (UNSOA) which gradually helped to ease AMISOM logistical burdens from the TCCs, and the ramped up U.S. training assistance to TCCs through the U.S. Global Peace Operations Initiative (GPOI). The 2011 famine in Somalia also dealt al-Shabaab a major blow as it was unable to adequately address the drought and its effects. As a result, it failed its first real governance test in south/central Somalia and made it possible for AMISOM and the TFG to find sufficient support within the Rahanweyn clan to liberate Baidoa.

Abandoned "Green Line" dividing the warring factions in North and South Mogadishu, 1993

Kenya entered southern Somalia in the fall of 2011 following a series of kidnappings of tourists and aid workers by al-Shabaab or those associated with it. With its tourist economy under attack, Kenya concluded that it had no choice but to send a force into Somalia. Kenya then entered into protracted negotiations with the AU about incorporating its forces in Somalia under the AMISOM umbrella. Kenya's entry into Somalia was viewed suspiciously by some in the international community and by other regional partners who saw it as an effort to establish a buffer zone controlled by Somali allies that could be managed from Nairobi. Kenya was also joined in AMISOM by re-hatted Ethiopian forces already deployed in Somalia, as well as forces from Djibouti and Sierra Leone in 2012 and 2013.

Subsequent surges have seen AMISOM take additional towns, but have also illustrated al-Shabaab's pattern of rarely putting up serious efforts to defend those towns. Instead, al-Shabaab has largely used the tactic of resisting to a degree and then abandoning the towns. AMISOM Operation Eagle, completed in March, 2014, liberated key locations and increased the pressure on al-Shabaab. After this offensive, AMISOM assessed that as the liberation of the remaining major communities under al-Shabaab reaches completion, it will need to shift from ground offensives to counter-insurgency, i.e. the disruption of the al-Shabaab network. As al-Shabaab's conventional force wanes, al-Shabaab has increasingly favored asymmetric over conventional warfare, while seeking to exploit clan conflicts to destabilize communities and undermine the Federal Government of Somalia. Thus, to separate al-Shabaab from the population and isolate the group from its sources of support, AMISOM

has endeavored to finish the job of seizing, securing, and stabilizing additional cities from al-Shabaab.[7]

Compared to its beginnings seven years ago, AMISOM has steadily become a more capable multidimensional force of over 22,100 soldiers with more robust (though still developing) capabilities of command and control, logistical sustainment, and countering improvised explosive devices (CIED).

AMISOM's ability to plan and execute multi-contingent offensives has steadily improved. Though the earlier contributors Uganda and Burundi still continue to constitute the bulk of AMISOM forces, today's AMISOM includes military and police forces from the TCCs of Uganda, Burundi, Kenya, Djibouti, Ethiopia, and Sierra Leone. Logistics, materiel, training, financial, and intelligence support to AMISOM's troops are provided by the UN Support Office for AMISOM (UNSOA), with additional support from an international coalition of donors, including the United Nations, European Union, Turkey, and the United States. On an annual basis, total donor support for AMISOM is approximately $900 million. Operationally, AMISOM seeks to coordinate its operations and activities with the Federal Government of Somalia and with the Somali National Army while effectively utilizing international support. The current overarching goal of AMISOM is to build peace and stability so that a Somali political process leading to elections and a permanent national constitutional government can proceed to completion in a secure environment.

During this period of AMISOM offensive operations, it could alternately be argued that al-Shabaab has not necessarily suffered defeats, but has sought to change the character of the conflict. As AMISOM capability increased,

al-Shabaab has changed tactics from fighting pitched battles against increasingly better trained and equipped AMISOM forces in major cities, to insurgency tactics that continually cut stretched AMSIOM supply lines, seriously challenge AMISOM's nominal control of the countryside, and use lulls between AMISOM offensives to re-gather strength. Al-Shabaab has often chosen not to contest an AMISOM offensive, but instead has sought to generate mini-humanitarian crises by destroying pumps, agricultural equipment, and blocking commerce. With the loss of charcoal revenue from coastal ports, al-Shabaab has been forced to modify its revenue model to one

Mogadishu and its environs has been the battle space in which these African Union forces have operated and created space for Somali Federal Government institutions to take root.

focused on levying increasingly onerous taxes on Somali agricultural production, livestock trade, and telecommunications. The al-Shabaab business model will likely continue to shift to a greater juncture with criminal activity such as the trafficking and production of illicit drugs and poaching and trafficking of wildlife. We should also expect the relationship between al-Qaeda and al-Shabaab to evolve as well. With Djibouti joining AMISOM, later followed by Kenya and Ethiopia, the original premise of purposely keeping Somalia's neighbors from becoming TCCs because of the inevitable historical baggage and varying national interests in Somalia dissolved. This allowed an opening for al-Shabaab to change tactics and expanded regionally through the conduct of terrorist strikes in neighbouring TCC capitals.

This evolving situation has shown al-Shabaab to not be a static organization, but one able to effect structural changes in strategy and tactics. The net effect in Somalia is that al-Shabaab has lost much of its ability to govern broad swaths of Somalia including Mogadishu, regional capitals, and major ports, but AMISOM and the Somali Federal Government have not been able to assert more than nominal governance over those liberated areas. The international community is increasingly focused on assisting the Federal Government of Somalia to restore governance in newly liberated areas and the provision of "quick-impact" peace dividends through small-scale, but immediately implementable, infrastructure and development projects.

The Security Sector Inflection Point

To date, security efforts in Somalia have largely been externally driven. AMISOM's success has been largely due to a fusion of strong and enduring international support to a group of regional TCCs dedicated to neutralizing a regional threat and stabilizing the security environment in the Horn of Africa. Mogadishu and its environs has been the battle space in which these African Union forces have operated and created space for Somali Federal Government institutions to take root. However, as AMISOM forces push al-Shabaab farther into rural areas, an important inflection point is arriving. This will be the transition from AMISOM-led security operations liberating towns and communities from al-Shabaab to the establishment of Somali forces (civilian and military) capable of securing and holding national territory – in essence: the transition from externally-driven security with internal support to internally-driven security with external enablers.

The development of a Somali National Army (SNA) and Somali National Police Service (SNP) has been a recurrent central feature in the international donor community dialogue. The recent AMISOM offensive has highlighted the need to carefully consider the most appropriate security architecture for Somalia. Somali security forces will have to assume responsibility for holding the towns and countryside that AMISOM operations have secured from al-Shabaab. The Federal Government of Somalia has expressed aspirations for a 26,000 person SNA, along with a small coast guard and comparably-sized SNP. This is an unrealistic vision given the Somali government's economic and financial capacity, parochial clan dynamics, international donor willingness, and the security interests of Somalia's neighbors who also make up AMISOM. The recently completed London conference on SNA development established a 10,900 person force as a goal for Somalia and international donors.

The Somali National Army exists more on paper than in practice. Elements of the SNA have been trained by AMISOM TCCs as well as international partners such as the European Union and the United States. However, trained troops are not necessarily functional troops without the requisite support in leadership, equipment, logistics, transportation, communication, and administration. All of these elements are generally lacking with regard to the Somali National Army. The same is true of the Somali National Police Service, perhaps even more so given the current state of that institution. Questionable accountability for salaries and equipment, and frequent SNA and SNP episodes of human rights violations and criminality present additional grounds for concern.

The affordability and sustainability of the SNA and SNP pose a question for the Somali government to consider: what kind of security force does it need rather than what it wants? The issues of clan dynamics and the security interests of Somalia's neighbors highlight a second question that must also be answered to the satisfaction of the national population: what will be the character of these forces and how will they deployed given local sensitivities? Somalia's complex clan dynamics play a role in the determination of where and how SNA troops may or may not be deployed. Although local communities are generally accepting of national army units that reflect local clan representation and character, the acceptance by these same communities of SNA troops from outside the vicinity and composed of different, even rival, clans is problematic. SNA troops not reflecting local clan dynamics often find communities that are cool, if not hostile, to their presence.

A deeper examination of these factors coupled with an appreciation of Somalia's

The affordability and sustainability of the SNA and SNP pose a question for the Somali government to consider: what kind of security force does it need rather than what it wants?

neighbors' security concerns raise three additional fundamental questions that the Federal Government of Somalia must address: what will be the respective roles of the Somali National Army and the Somali National Police? The SNA will be created to protect Somalia against which threats, particularly in a "post al-Shabaab" Somalia? What will be the scope of the internal security role of the National Police?

The Governance Challenge

The answers to those three questions above rely on the current political process in Somalia, and that process is directly linked to the establishment of governance throughout the country.

The political progress in Somalia has been notable, particularly when one compares the political landscape of today with that just three years ago. Though while AMISOM has been effective in recapturing territory once held by al-Shabaab, the concomitant political process has been an uneven one. Some could argue that AMISOM's security gains have outpaced the Federal Government of Somalia's political and economic reform program. The fledgling Federal Government of Somalia, recently recognized by the international community, is developing basic institutions while it contends with an insurgency intent on its destruction. Currently, the Somali government lacks the essential capacities to extend governance beyond Mogadishu. Its effort to extend basic services into the interior is nascent and fully dependent upon donor support. Negotiations between regions and the central government on the division of responsibility and authorities under a national consensus of federalism has yet to begin.

Around the world, the linkages between security sector reform and politics are long established. However, in Somalia this challenge is made even more complex and is shaped by the lack of basic infrastructure and governing institutions to effect reform. Somalia, the once infamous failed state, is striving and struggling to establish legitimate governance after twenty years of violence and chaos. Twenty years was a generation ago and there is no viable Somali model from which

Somalia's polity and leadership can draw upon as they set out to rebuild their nation. The average Somali has no memory of what it is to live within the constructs of a national state. Among older Somalis who can recollect a previous era, their memories recall the dictatorial regime of Siad Barre. In short, there is no tradition of national representative governance in Somalia. This is a rather unique circumstance compared to other countries that have recovered from conflict. Without a historical reference of "what is right," state building and security sector reform in Somalia must follow a pragmatic path that advances a federal model of governance while balancing national, provincial, clan, and regional interests. The one advantage of the lack of historical reference is the opportunity to draw from wide and varied best practices available from other nation's experiences.

In this context, it must be acknowledged that the critical question of balance also applies to the process of security sector reform. Broadly writ, security sector reform is more than just police and soldiers. It must incorporate courts, judges, civil society, penal systems, traditional leaders and community relations. The Somali government must look beyond a vision of institutional state security to one of enhancing the basic human security of its citizenry. The federal government's pursuit of security sector reform must also offer a regional balance that recognizes the interests of Somalia's neighbors, IGAD and the AU. This issue of balance, internally and externally, is critical to the legitimacy of the Somali state, to its citizens, and to its regional neighbors.

What Next?

International support to AMISOM's effort to blunt, degrade and destroy al-Shabaab must

continue unabated. However, AMISOM and its international supporters must continue to be attentive and adapt in order to counter al-Shabaab changes in tactics on a battlefield that now extends beyond Somalia. The defeat of al-Shabaab is the essential element and necessary precursor for the Federal Government of Somalia to fully reconstruct governance and shape an enduring peace in the Horn of Africa. The defeat of al-Shabaab will require both a military element and the effective establishment of Somali Federal Government authority outside Mogadishu. An effective Somali Federal Government itself is as much a defeat for al-Shabaab as are al-Shabaab's reverses in the trenches.

It is the authors' view that the role of AMISOM should be extended to include playing more of a role in securing the territory it liberates. One idea is to expand the authorized number of AMISOM forces with those additional forces being dedicated to training and mentoring Somali security forces. Expanding AMISOM's role is likely the most expedient way to allow space for the Somali Federal Government to effect real political and security sector reform, which will likely also require adjusted expectations by Somalia's leadership. The key aspect of this political progress is the effective utilization of federalism, which must be embraced and implemented without delay. The future of the Somali state depends upon it.

In addition the Somali government and the international community should proceed in a more measured fashion in terms of security sector reform. Essentially, the international community should forego, for the time being, a central focus on formation and training of a Somali National Army. The focus of security

Burundian troops preparing to deploy to Somalia, 2006

sector reform should shift from training troops to institution building, in particular support for building police and judiciary institutions. For the military, the defence institutions to support, sustain and lead the SNA should be in place before the first SNA unit is recruited, trained or deployed. Without civilian governance structures to support them, the training of security forces could, at worst, prove destabilizing to the Federal Government and, at best, be a waste of donor funds. The international community must effectively utilize its disparate resources to better assist the Somali Federal Government in balancing the development of the correct security institutions that mesh with the tandem development of Somali political and government institutions. To press Somalia to develop a military without a functional government, or a military that does not reflect the Somali political context on the ground, is a recipe for folly.

With 22,100 troops, though short of the initial AU estimates of a 30,000 man requirement, there is an opportunity to use this significant force to spur Somali Federal Government security sector development after the needed political (federalism) and security sector (defence institution building) reforms are consolidated. As more and more areas are liberated, AMISOM should continue to advance, not remaining in garrison. This would place the onus on the Somali Government to start effectively moving in behind AMISOM forces.

The donor community must demand greater accountability and transparency from the Somali government and from AMISOM. However, donors cannot ask more from the AU, IGAD, AMISOM, and the Somali government without looking at themselves. The donors must become better organized and accountable in their efforts and activities in Somalia. To date, the donor response to the Somali question has lacked coordination and organization. Moreover, the agendas and programs of some donors have been studiously opaque.

The timetable for this enterprise must be conditions-based and grounded in honest metrics. The time has passed for aspirational deadlines extolled by United Nations Security Council Resolutions or African Union Declarations. Peace enforcement operations, state building and security sector reform are non-linear in character and are defined by local conditions rather than by political debate in foreign capitals. Somalia has endured over twenty years of conflict and deprivation. The gains of the past few years, achieved by the blood, sweat and tears of Somalis, their neighbors, and international partners are not insignificant. Somalia is approaching a tipping point of sustainable governance but this approach is a fragile one. In order to complete its transition from failed state to a functional one, Somalia will need to rely on the continued security and sacrifice of AMISOM TCCs and the support of international donors as it pursues - with a laser focus - its ambitions of governance modeled on inclusive federalism with a matching security sector structure. PRISM

Notes

1 This paper presents the views of the authors and does not reflect the policy of U.S. Africa Command, the Department of Defense, or the United States Government.

2 See http://amisom-au.org/about-somalia/somali-peace-process/

3 Ken Menkhaus, Somalia: A National and Regional Disaster? (UNHCR, April 2009), pp. 1-9, Available at http://www.unhcr.org/refworld/pdfid/49f180d82.pdf.

4 Ken Menkhaus, Somalia: A National and Regional Disaster? (UNHCR, April 2009), pp. 2-5, Available at http://www.unhcr.org/refworld/pdfid/49f180d82.pdf.

5 Ibid, pp. 5-9

6 Apuuli Phillip Kasaija, "The UN-led Djibouti peace process for Somalia, 2008-2009," Journal of Contemporary African Studies, 28:3 (2010), pp. 269-74.

7 Bruton, Bronwyn and Paul Williams, Counterinsurgency in Somalia: Lessons Learned from the African Union Mission in Somalia, 2007-2013 (The Joint Special Operations University Press, MacDill Air Force Base, Florida 2014) pp. 5-72