European Union Training Mission Somalia

PRESS SUMMARY

19th September 2018

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Somali Forces Kill 11 Al-Shabaab Militants In Gedo region

18 September 2018

A combined joint task force comprised of the Somali National Army (SNA) and Jubaland security forces killed 11 Al-Shabaab fighters on Monday during an afternoon raid on a suspected Al-Shabaab base in southern Somalia. Jubaland Darawish commander, General Jamal Hassan Farey announced that the SNA/Jubaland troops now occupy the base. The forces conducted the assault on what they believe was a new base for the militant insurgency group in a village 50km from Beled Hawo.

According to Jubaland security forces, the heavy gun battle that lasted several hours and left 11 militants dead, two tactical vehicles with mounted machine guns destroyed, and several light machine guns seized by the army. General Farey added the militants were planning to use the base to conduct ambushes and attacks against the SNA and Jubaland.

Somali Islamist group seized towns vacated by AMISOM arm embargo must be lifted?

18th September 2018 / Somali lawmaker says the Islamist group Al Shabaab re-captured key areas vacated by foreign forces with African Union peacekeeping force in Somalia.

Hon. Ahmed Mo’alim Fiqi accused African Union (AMISOM) forces of lack military plan as Al Shabaab fighters are often return into each town being withdrawn by the coalition forces.

Fiqi says dozens of his country’s soldiers lost their lives to free Al Shabaab from the towns, while “the Aftican Union solidiers easily vacate those towns”, he said.

“We all know hundreds of people living those vacated towns are in need of governance, unfortunatly living under Al Shabaab strict rule. African Union must take the responsibility”, he said.

There was no immediate response from African Union mission in Somalia over the allegations. Somali National Army (SNA) was Once regarded as one of Africa’s best armies, the S (SNA) has had better days before its disintegration with the collapse of the central government in 1991. The fall of the central government in 1991 brought about the collapse of the state institutions, and the military was not spared. The army is currently restructuring in the hope of restoring calm and order to the country following two decades of incessant conflict.

The Somali National Army (SNA) still struggles with lack of basic equipment, they have only light weapons such as AK47 Gun as UN placed in arm embargo and all this in the face of bloody attacks from Al-Shabaab. Building a capable army is the only solution in order to take responsibility of their country.

https://mareeg.com/somali-islamist-group-seized-towns-vacated-by-amisom/
Somali Army Liberates Coastal Locations In Mogadishu

18 September 2018

Somali Deputy Army Commander, Odawaa Yusuf Rage, has said the army has liberated coastal areas that connect Mogadishu to Merca, in Lower Shabelle region. In an operation to flush out members of the Al-Shabaab militia group, the Somali National Army (SNA) liberated various areas, starting from Jazeera, outskirts of Mogadishu. The liberated areas include Gendershe, El aw Maki, Dhanaane and Jilib Marka, along the coastal route that connects the capital city, to the Lower Shabelle region city of Marka.

In other similar operations, the SNA carried out an aggressive campaign against the militant group in Gedo Jubbaland and Hiiraan regions, respectively. The operation is part of the ongoing efforts by the government to clear the group from the region. Al-Shabab and Somali National Army (SNA) recently battled it out in Beled Hawo along the Kenyan border, after an ambush by militant group.

Family Demand Justice After 9yr Girl Shot Dead, 14 Pupils Injured As Govt Soldiers Open Fire On School Bus

Sep 19, 2018 - A 9yr old girl was on Tuesday shot dead when government soldiers escorting a Somali National Army commander opened fire on a school bus in the Somali capital Mogadishu, Radio Dalsan reports. 14 other pupils were injured and hospitalised at Digfeer hospital some in critical condition. The deceased is identified as Deqo Dahir Ali Farah a pupil at Hoyga Hamar boarding school.

The soldiers blamed for the shooting were reportedly escorting a commander of the SNA identified as General Geeshow who is in charge of Lower Shabelle. The father to the deceased Mr Dahir Ali told Radio Dalsan that they will not bury Deeqo until the soldier who shot her is arrested and produced at a court of law for justice to take it’s course.

Somalis expressed their anger and shock at the shooting of school children. “The safety of our school going children is at stake yet we are being forced not to talk about the insecurity in Mogadishu. My own son was in that very bus! Alhamdu lillah not hurt” Abdullahi Mohamed a parent at the school tweeted.

“A 9 year old female student shot and killed by government soldiers in Mogadishu. This is both unacceptable and emblematic of the deteriorating security situation in Mogadishu” Abdulle Adan tweeted. “Soldiers who shoot the emerging flowers of this country!! What kind of gov is this? And it is planning to send these troops to S.Sudan!! #pretentious_show” Abdrahman Adle tweeted. The government is yet to issue a statement on the incident.

Somali journalists benefit training on safety in Mogadishu

MOGADISHU - SEPTEMBER 18, 2018, Doha Centre for Media Freedom (DCMF) held a training workshop on “Safety of Journalists in Conflict Zones” in cooperation with National Union of Somali Journalists (NUSOJ) from September 16th to 19th in Mogadishu.

The training targets journalists from mainstream, community and vernacular media outlets. The workshop focused on educating journalists on best ways to safeguard journalism in the country, raising their awareness on the importance of following safety measures during their work in conflict zones, as well as providing them with necessary skills to help them deal with risks they may face during their work in Somalia, which remains one of the most dangerous countries for journalists.

Speaking at the opening of the workshop, Director General of the Ministry of Information, Culture and Tourism Mr Abdirahman Yusuf Adaala urged participating journalists to make use of the opportunity the training presents to enhance their work. Mr Abdirahman Yusuf Adaala thanked DCMF and NUSOJ for their efforts to provide Somali journalists with much needed professional training. The training targets journalists from mainstream, community and vernacular media outlets.

“Attacks and other violations against journalists and media workers have indeed gradually decreased in the past several years, but that is not enough. We want to see an end to all violations against journalists. The Federal Government of Somalia is committed to safeguard and guarantee the freedom of media and expression, that is why we are now working with UNESCO on the formation of an Independent National Safety Mechanism Committee ” Abdirahman Yusuf Adaala said.
For his part, Mohamed Ibrahim Moalimuu, Secretary General of NUSOJ said the training is one of many exceptional training workshops to come. And it serves as a great support and practical solidarity with Somali journalists who are facing many threats. “The workshop has provided practical mechanisms to help protect the lives of journalists, and provide them with required safety training packages that suits their own environment and enable them to protect themselves while doing their job” said Moalimuu during his speech at the opening ceremony of the four-days training workshop.

“Our collaboration with DCMF has enabled journalists from Mogadishu to gain the knowledge and skills to deal with conflict situations, emergencies, and traumatic events. Participants were also taught essential first aid and how to assess potential dangers, including environmental hazards. In addition, participants gained a better understanding of safety equipment, personal security, digital security and how to survive kidnaping. And I would also like to thank Somali Red Crescent Society who sent us experienced paramedic volunteer during training,” Moalimuu added. This workshop is part of DCMF’s annual training program, and its efforts to promote the safety and protection of journalists in conflict zones and to provide media workers with needed capacity building training, especially in areas with volatile security situation like Somalia where journalists are targeted on regular basis and their rights are violated.

The main objective of the training is to build a culture of professional safety for Somali journalists, empower them with protection mechanisms and enhance their knowledge on issues such as accountability, rule of law and combating impunity. Participants expressed their gratitude to have gained such safety training in the early stage of their career as they have witnessed many of their colleagues killed in the line of duty without such safety knowledge.

Some of the training participants attending the training course were actual victims of suicide and small arms attacks in recent years and they were inflicted by various numbers of injuries. Among them was Habiba Jimale Biibto, the editor of Mogadishu Times, a daily newspaper in Mogadishu, who survived and narrowly escaped a suicide blast at Hooyooyinka building in Mogadishu in 2012.
“This training reflects the most acute needs of local journalists in Somalia who are the first respondents to the bombings and their lives endangered.” She said

The journalists explained that they are now better prepared to face the ongoing risks that are associated with daily newsgathering in an extreme conflict environment such as Somalia.

The workshop has embedded a positive train of thoughts to pass on this safety information to their colleagues and start creating a safety culture within their own media organizations.

https://www.caasimada.net/somali-journalists-benefit-training-on-safety-in-mogadishu/
Stop Meddling In Galmudug Affairs, Regional Leaders Tell Farmaajo

18 September 2018

State governments have urged the Federal Government to stop what they have termed "meddling in the affairs" of Galmudug state. This follows political run-ins over the past week leading to passage of no-confidence motions aimed at removing the regional President and assembly Speaker.

In a statement to newsrooms on Tuesday, the regional leaders operating under the umbrella of the Council of Inter-State Cooperation (CIC), accused President Mohamed Farmaajo’s administration of fueling political discord in the embattled Galmudug government, which has seen the state President, Ahmed Haaf, ‘impeached’ twice within a year.

“The political crisis in Galmudug confirms our fears that the Federal Government is involved in the interference of Galmudug affairs,” the statement read in part. Referring to Farmaajo’s statements during the opening of the fourth session of the Lower House last week, the leaders claimed the President was out to use the Federal Government Parliament Speaker to destabilize state governments. “The unprecedented political movements are in line with the President’s confession in Parliament that he would ‘work with the speakers of HirShabelle and Galmudug for common interest.”

International Republican Institute Build Program That Supports Political Parties In Somalia Ahead of 2020 Elections

18 September 2018

Somalia is preparing for general elections in 2020, the nation’s first one-person-one-vote elections since the country experienced a military coup in 1969. The United States Agency for International Development’s Bringing Unity, Integrity and Legitimacy to Democracy (BUILD) in Somalia program aims to support electoral and political processes across the country, a key factor of supporting the development of issue-based and viable political parties.

Somalia’s geostrategic importance and instability contribute to the high stakes of the 2020 elections. The Horn of Africa and its elongated conflict have contributed to instability, increased migration, and the rise of violent extremism across eastern Africa. Targeted attacks on Somali civilians by the extremist group Al-Shabab, with suicide bombings continue to have a devastating impact. The violence and instability have forced many to leave their home country.

The BUILD program, implemented by Creative Associates International, the International Republican Institute, and the Electoral Institute for Sustainable Democracy in Africa, supports and fosters citizen participation in political processes, builds the capacity of election management bodies to administer credible elections, and assists in the development of issue-based and citizen-responsive political parties. These strategic activities play an important role in setting Somalia on the trajectory towards stability, inclusivity, and resilience.

Somalia’s clan-based system is the key determinant of how power is obtained, shared, distributed, transferred and purchased within Somalia’s political marketplace. Three previous presidential elections, 2009, 2012, and 2017, were decided in a clan-based
system—legislators that were selected by clan-elders, elected the president. Somalia’s clan-based culture tends to marginalize ethnic and religious minorities, youth, and women, however, recent changes in Somali politics indicate progress towards democratic governance that is inclusive of Somalia’s diverse society.

One example of progress towards representative democracy is the shift away from a clan-based electoral system to a one person, one vote system. When the decision to transition to a one person, one vote election was made, the development of issue-based, citizen-centered political parties was highlighted as a critical step towards democratic consolidation in Somalia. The planned vote in 2020 will be a test of the viability of democracy in a country where power is dictated by “clan-based political factional rivalry....compounded by fragmented Islamic-based factionalism.” Political parties have a large role to play in both the election and in processes leading up to the election.

The National Independent Electoral Commission (NIEC) and the Office of the Political Party Registrar (OPPR) began the process of registering political parties, for the first time in approximately fifty years, on December 3, 2017. Currently, 22 political parties have been registered. More political associations are in the process of registering and estimates from BUILD’s Lead Political Party Programmer based in Mogadishu suggest that there may be up to 30 political parties competing in the 2020 elections. BUILD programming has assisted political associations as they undergo the process in applying to become political parties, however, this work is only the beginning of BUILD’s support to Somalia’s nascent political parties.

EU’s finance for African security missions has ‘poor effect’, say auditors

19-09-2018

The EU’s financial support for African peace and security policies “has had a poor effect and needs refocusing,” the European Court of Auditors said in a report published on Tuesday (18 September).

The CoA, which monitors EU spending, argues that the European Commission, led by its diplomatic arm, the European External Action Service, should work to encourage the African Union’s ownership of the African Peace and Security Architecture (APSA) with a view to “refocus EU support away from supporting operational costs towards capacity-building measures”.

At the centre of APSA is the Peace and Security Council, established by the 55 member countries of the AU as a “standing decision-making organ for the prevention, management and resolution of conflicts”.

The Luxembourg-based Court audited contracts worth €102.5 million, which were concluded by the Commission in the period from 2014 to 2016.

“EU support for APSA had long been focused on contributing to its basic operational costs,” the ECA concluded, adding that its “financing instruments were not always used coherently.”

Around 80% of the EU’s funding is used to finance peace support operations, such as the African Union Mission to Somalia. The EU contends that supporting the APSA reduces the need for its member states to finance expensive peace-support operations, which it estimates would cost an additional €720 million per year.
In particular, the CoA findings underscore some of the struggles that the African Union (AU) has faced since its creation in 2002, as it seeks to establish itself as a political actor on the African continent.

The AU wants to model itself on the European Commission, as a powerful political executive co-ordinating policies on intra-African trade, peace and security and foreign policy.

However, the AU has struggled to persuade many of its 55 member countries to finance the organization. Fewer than half of the African states paid their agreed contributions to the AU budget on time and in full. Donors contributed 54% of the AU’s €395 million annual budget in 2017.

Building up the AU’s capacity remains an ongoing challenge for the EU. The EU is keen to curtail its financial support for the AU’s military force (AMISOM) against the Al-Shabaab terrorist network in Somalia, which has totalled well over €1 billion since 2007, but Uganda and Kenya threatened to withdraw their troops from the joint force when the Commission mooted halting its funding in 2016.

In 2016, AU member states agreed on a new mechanism for financing the AU’s operational budget and the Peace Fund. The EU supported the initiative, which consists of imposing a 0.2% levy on all eligible goods imported into Africa. By January 2018, 14 member states had started collecting the levy.

Executive Director remarks at the United Nations Security Council meeting on Somalia

Remarks by Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka, UN Under-Secretary-General and Executive Director of UN Women at the United Nations Security Council meeting on Somalia on 13 September 2018 - Thank you, Madame President, Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Somalia, Michael Keating, Special Representative of the Chairperson of the AU Commission (SRCC) for Somalia and Head of AMISOM, Ambassador Francisco Madeira, Excellencies. Let me start by thanking you, Madame President, for this opportunity to brief the Council on my recent visit to Somalia.

I believe, as the previous speakers already indicated, that Somalia has a once-in-a-generation opportunity for both peace and gender equality. Many of the Somalis I spoke with are risking their lives to seize this opportunity. One of the most important positive developments in Somalia is the representation of women in public office, which is increasing and has been helped by special measures. Women’s representation jumped from 14 to almost 25 per cent in the last parliamentary elections, bringing important voices to Somali politics, and bringing to the centre the fight to end child marriage, to end female genital mutilation, and to change laws that discriminate against women.

The participation of women in Somalia would be boosted even better and faster if it was not left to the elders of the clan, who tend to entrench the inequalities that the laws are fighting against. Many more leaders that embrace gender equality and support women are needed in order for us to fast-track the necessary changes. In Baidoa, the interim capital of South-West State, where the Governor has been a stellar supporter of women, I spoke to 31 female legislators in the state assembly, which is the highest number of women in the legislature in Somalia. I saw the need for the support that the women called for. I was able to hear their pain and their desire to change the future of their children and their communities. These women and the people of Somalia desperately need the continued support of the international community, so that their courageous efforts will not be in vain.
I also saw important developments, as evidenced by the constitutional review and the preparations for the 2020-2021 elections, starting with a legally binding 30 per cent quota for women. The Government of Somaliland agreed this June on reserving 20 per cent of seats for women in upcoming parliamentary and local council elections. It is my strong belief that this Security Council can and must stand with the federal and state governments in their efforts to advance gender equality, often against the objection of powerful clan-based authorities.

The voices of women of Somalia, and other minorities, must be heard. They must be at the tables where decisions are being taken, because Somalia remains one of the countries with some of the worst conditions for women and girls. Earlier this year, Somaliland followed Puntland in adopting a law criminalizing rape, forced marriage, trafficking for sexual slavery, and sexual harassment. Even advocates were taken by surprise when the bill got 35 of 50 votes in the House of Elders. The federal government finally agreed on a sexual offences bill, which only needs parliamentary approval. After a 10-year old girl bled to death, the Government announced the first-ever prosecution of female genital mutilation, and there is a draft bill to criminalize this practice. These are encouraging developments.

In the last few years we have seen other advances, including the first forensic laboratory with capacity to test DNA in rape cases; the Chief of the Somali National Army issuing a Command Order affirming zero tolerance for sexual violence; a traditional dispute resolution policy to encourage families to take sexual violence complaints to courts rather than the clan-based informal mechanisms; and a woman being appointed as a chairperson of the Independent National Electoral Commission. We, together with the African Union and the women of Somalia, will soon launch a chapter of the African Women Leaders Network in Somalia, which will support movement-building amongst the many women in Somalia that are hungry for change.

These landmark achievements need your support and sustained attention. The progress Somalis are making is not irreversible. These laws are often ignored. The female parliamentarians are often marginalized or at the whim of clan elders. Al-Shabaab courts are still killing women by burying them neck-deep and pelting them with stones. In customary courts, rapists often simply compensate the victim’s family, or marry her. Impunity for sexual violence is still rampant.
I hope the Security Council will interrogate the impact on women’s current efforts to counter violent extremism, so that you can identify the stronger ways of supporting the women. There are three centres to rehabilitate men who disengaged from Al-Shabaab, but none for women. Women can play a vital role in motivating the voluntary disengagement of Al-Shabaab members, but this work is often an afterthought and under-resourced. With greater support, there too, women can make significant progress and we stand ready to support them. Somalia is also an important test case for the Secretary-General’s gender parity goals because the lack of gender balance in the UN has been noticed by our Somali partners.

I expect Council Members will follow-up on implementation of the mandates you gave to AMISOM and UNSOM earlier this year, which include many references to gender equality. And to support women’s participation, not just in elections or electoral reforms, but in efforts to advance national and local reconciliation, prevent violent extremism and reform the security sector. Just as I have heard many times in this Council that peace will not be achieved by military means alone, I know Somalia will not have long-lasting peace and deep reconciliation without the far-reaching contribution, involvement and recognition of women. We should support and help the women to change the deep structures that continue to reinforce inequality and insecurity. That can happen only when women are fully involved.

Women’s organizations in Somalia are organized, they are dedicated, they are activists, they are advocates, they are entrepreneurs, they are professionals, they are patriots, and they pay the ultimate price. Let us think about them as we look at the way in which we are supporting change and enhancing security in Somalia. In the many challenges that lie ahead, women will both face the challenges but also be able to make a difference.

In Somalia, the glass is half filled. Let us help to fill up the rest of the glass. I thank you again, Madame President, for giving me this opportunity, and for the support that this Council has given to UN Women.

President To Host Prominent Foreigners And Ardent Somaliland Recognition Campaigners

18 September 2018

A major Somaliland recognition brainstorming meeting is expected to be held in Hargeisa. According to Geeska Afrika sources President Muse Bihi Abdi has extended an invitation to prominent foreigners known to be ardent campaigners for the international recognition of Somaliland.

Though no official statement has been issued on this issue, our source indicate that the objective of the meeting is to initially reassemble the prominent foreigners and other campaigners for the recognition of Somaliland, who have worked diligently with the former administration’s of Presidents Egal and Rayale.

“Once the links with these foreign diplomats, politicians and intellectuals are reestablished, President Bihi is intent on pursuing new avenues for the country’s recognition, 27 years on,” said our source. The meeting, scheduled for Hargeisa next month, shall certainly have on board Dr Greg Mills and his South African countryman Prof Iqbal Jhazbhay, who is former South African Ambassador to Eritrea.

Two Mogadishu Women Killed By Husbands In One Week

On Sep 18, 2018

Police in the Somalia capital Mogadishu on Tuesday arrested a man in Daynile district alleged to have stabbed his wife to death.

The man identified as Alas Ghelle is said to have accosted his wife named Hidaya after an argument at their Daynile home.

This is the second reported case of fatal domestic violence in Mogadishu.

Last week a man stabbed his wife to death after a heated argument over money.

The two had been married for 12 days only.

The man had been in Somalia after he was deported from Streatham London, UK over violent crime.

Increased cases of children and adults sick with TB in Mogadishu

09 18, 2018 / Somali health officials say hospitals and health centres in Mogadishu have seen a dramatic rise in the number of people suffering from Tuberculosis (TB) over the past few months.

According to Dr Mohamed Sheikh Omar, head of the TB ward at Banadir hospital, 73 people have been treated in the hospital since May. This compares with 183 people treated there during the whole of last year.

He said most cases were treated as outpatients, whilst 15 patients, including some children, were hospitalized due to the severity of their conditions. TB treatment is provided free of charge by the hospital.

A 22-day old infant baby boy was among those hospitalised after being brought in by his mother. Dr Mohamed said the baby was the youngest TB patient he had ever seen and must have been infected by others living in the neighbourhood.

The baby is receiving drugs by intravenous drip and by adding medicine to bottled milk.

Another mother, Nasro Abshir Mohamed, brought her two-year-old son to hospital on 8 August. He had been coughing for three months, Nasro told Radio Ergo’s reporter, but initially she thought he just had a cold and would recover quickly. However, due to his loss of appetite and weight loss, she finally decided to bring the child to hospital, where he was admitted for two weeks. He will need to continue the medication at home on discharge.

Another TB centre in Mogadishu’s Hamar-jajab district has treated 200 patients in the past three months. The director, Dr Nur Mohamed Abdi, told Radio Ergo that the centre treated
100 TB patients in the whole of 2017. Among the 25 patients seen in the last two weeks, there were 12 children under the age of five.

The health centre attracts many poor people and IDPs from other areas to come there for free services. The doctors often diagnose TB after a patient’s visit for another purpose.

Dr Nur advised people to report suspected cases of TB immediately to the health centre to contain the spread of the disease. Treatment for TB takes many weeks and involves a sustained course of drugs.

Research by the Ministry of Health of the Federal Government of Somalia and the World Health Organization last year reported more than 62,000 people living with TB. The head of the ministry’s Department of Tuberculosis, Dr Abukar Dini, said the ministry is concerned by the high number of cases and is working on creating more awareness about the disease.

Dr Dini said this communicable disease is more common in southern Somalia, especially in urban areas due to high population density where it spreads widely.

Doctors say there has been little awareness raising over the importance of the TB vaccination for children.

Post your comments

Outbreak update – Cholera in Somalia, September 2018

18 September 2018 – The Ministry of Health of Somalia has announced 76 new cases of cholera including one death for week 34 (20 to 26 August) of 2018. Over the past two weeks, there has been an increase in the number of cholera cases reported. The cumulative total of cases is 6245, including 42 associated deaths (case-fatality rate 0.7%) since the beginning of the current outbreak in December 2017. Of 261 stool samples collected since the beginning of this year, 79 tested positive for Vibrio cholerae, serotype O1 Ogawa.

Cholera cases have been localized in Lower Jubba and Banadir region for the past five weeks. This week, active transmission was reported in 8 districts in Banadir and Kismayo in Lower Jubba region. Banadir accounts for 86% of newly reported cases (66) and also hosts the highest concentration of IDPs, who are living with limited safe water and sanitation. The number of newly reported cases increased from 31 to 66 since the previous week. Among them, 25% are children below 5 years old. In Lower Juba, the current outbreak started in Kismayo district in week 5 of 2018 in communities of internally displaced persons (IDPs) in Farjano. Ten cases were reported, a slight increase from the previous week’s 8 cases. Farjano’s cholera treatment center (CTC) has received 1489 cases since the beginning of the outbreak, and has the highest case fatality rate (CFR) of 1.0.

WHO provides leadership and support for activities with the Ministry of Health (MoH) to respond to this outbreak. Coordination meetings were held in the flood affected districts with MoHs at Federal and State levels including Health Cluster partners for effectively collaboration on the outbreak response.

WHO has continued to support clinical care delivery, including building capacity for health care workers. On-the-job trainings on case management were conducted at CTCs in Kismayo, Farjano, Banadir and Marka. Disease surveillance data was collected through the Early Warning Alert and Response Network (EWARN) with WHO support, which contributes to early detection of new cases and prompt response to outbreaks.
WHO also worked with WASH cluster partners, on chlorination of water sources in cholera affected areas in Hnati-wadaaq, Bulo-sheikh, Allenley and Fanole to ensure safe water in the communities. 1500 hygiene kits were distributed in villages in Kismayo, and hygiene promotion, cholera prevention and control mechanisms are ongoing in Farjano, Allanley, Gulwada and Shaqalaha.

https://reliefweb.int/report/somalia/outbreak-update-cholera-somalia-6-september-2018
Rethinking Somali national identity

In the pre-colonial era, Somalia existed as segmented city states in coastal regions and as various independent principalities in the interior territories without a central authority or state. But, that did not stop them from creating a national identity. A common identity that could unite the segmented city states and which was driven by two elements – religion and clans. Religion was used as a source of unity for all Somalis and adhering to one religion allowed them to unite, not internally but to stand up against any external threats and allowed them to defend their land. Clans are formed as a way to connect close families and lineages to share difficulties and goodness; they have, in other words, been used as a political organ to unite people with the same roots.

After colonial powers invaded the fragmented Somali lands, they immediately began exploiting the clan factor as a tool to expand their power and seek legitimacy. Somalis recognized early on the necessity of ending colonial oppression and straightaway started refusing to comply with colonial domination, which was characterized by exploitation, supremacy and broadening clan division by using indirect rule.

Therefore, while clans became a weakness to Somalis, religion had another effect; it became an important motive to stand up against colonial powers. Colonial powers sent missionaries to Somalia and built churches. Somalis perceived that as a threat to their religion, culture and national identity.

The first anti-colonial movement was formed and led by Sayyid Mohamed Abdulle, known as "Sayid," and was motivated by religious incentives. In 1895, he returned to Berbera from the Arabian Peninsula and started spreading his religious view of "Saalihiya." This did not go well for him due to challenges from the colonial administration and local people and his criticism of their religious beliefs and practices. Consequently, he left Berbera seeking a place
where his political and religious views could be accommodated. On his search for this, he met some Somali boys who were being looked after by a Catholic mission and asked them about their parents, clan and names. They replied that they belong to the clan of Catholic fathers. That response from the children shook him, and he felt that the colonials were on a mission to change his people's identity. As a response, he established the Dervish warriors and began fighting the colonial administration. In many of his poems, his message was that he would no longer allow colonial powers to change his people's culture and identity; meanwhile, he blamed the Somali people for not opposing this identity change.

Nevertheless, the history of the post-colonial Somali state is usually divided in to two consecutive phases. The first phase is known as "civilian rule" and begins in 1960 with independence and ends in 1969 when commanders from the Somali army overthrew the civil government in a bloodless coup. During the civil government period, a growing democratic culture, low economic performance, lack of skilled human resources and the strong influence of Cold War superpowers were the main challenges the civil state encountered.

The discussion of constructing a national identity did not take place extensively, and the civil government failed to develop an inclusive national identity that could guide the people's political future. The idea of a "great Somalia," which meant the unification of the land that Somalis inhabited, became the ultimate goal and dominated political discourse and even made it impossible to define a "Somali citizen."

The second stage, known as "military rule," begun in 1969 when the military took control of the country and continued until the military regime collapsed in 1991. During this period, the military regime behaved like any other dictatorship, diminishing freedoms and banning all social and political organizations. Moreover, the regime, accepted and adapted rigorous socialist and nationalist programs, developed closer relations with the Soviets and initiated the application of clan-loaded socialist programs. However, the military regime tried to develop a national identity derived from what the military government called a scientific socialist method and tried to bury the clan ideology. Instead, the military regime succeeded in strengthening the Somali identity to replace the clans. Unfortunately, principles and values against Somali culture and religion were included in this process and caused a clash between religious figures and the military regime.
Consequently, identity politics based on political clanism strengthened, while Islamic revivalism received new impetus with the emergence of Islamic political movements, strengthened after the execution of the Islamic scholars in 1975. Thus, both traditional pillars of Somali identity, Islam and clans, were employed in combination or separately as the ideology of resistance to the military regime and gradually were pushed to extremism, fragmenting the social fabric of Somalia.

After THE collapse of the state

Indeed, Somalia is rebuilding and reshaping its national identity, which is still in flux, regenerating and recycling social conflicts. The existing national identity from pre-state to military regime were dismantled after the collapse of the state in 1991 and replaced with reconfigured national identities. For instance, the political system of the country had changed from a unitary structure to federalism, and the growing political ideology of "Islamism" replaced secularism. The role of the clans abandoned in favor of a single national identity was employed as means for power sharing. Yet, the re-establishment of the national identity is still critical to avoid all destructible values and principles. It is the responsibility of the federal government to come up with a plan to facilitate the creation of a single identity, not multiple identities.

On the other hand, a state-building process is also taking place in Somalia. Though a process like this requires unprecedented social mobilization of new social actors alongside a strong political elite and leadership to bring about, neither of them are available at the moment. Of course, this is one of the reasons that the process has been unable to achieve results since the beginning. The international community cannot provide either of these aspects but can somehow facilitate the process of getting these significant preconditions. State building has to rest on a foundation of nation building; that is, the establishment of national identity that serves as a focus of loyalty and overcomes attachments to family, tribe or ethnic group.

Generally, nation-building processes bubble up from grassroots, but they can also be the product of powerful political institutions that form and protect. This is another important prerequisite that Somalia's state-building building efforts is lacking – a strong national identity that can replace the current identity affiliations. It is the responsibility of Somali
political elites and leadership, in particular the federal government, to form and systematize it carefully.

The fall of the clan system

The previous attempts to create a national identity have failed to promote concepts that could create harmony and co-existence Somali society. However, it is necessary that the national identity promote a culture of peace, ideas of tolerance, mutual coexistence between social groups, whether they are religious or political, and equality in order to be more effective and productive. The central question of national identity is the position of ethnic minorities within the nation. Somalia has no minorities; the current so-called minorities were created by the clan system, which defined certain clans as a minority, while other clans claimed to be the majority. The dismissal of the clan system in the political and social sphere is also crucial for unity. It is the responsibility of the federal government and our political elites to construct a comprehensive civic national identity free from clans and clan delusion and is able to construct healthy and patriotic Somalis who contribute to the development of a peaceful culture.

Is peace on the horizon for the Horn of Africa?

September 19, 2018

Conflicts between Eritrea, Djibouti, and Ethiopia have dramatically shifted in recent months, giving hope for an end of hostilities in the region.

It's just five months since Abiy Ahmed took over as Ethiopian prime minister yet the pace of change in the Horn of Africa has been simply staggering. Insuperable obstacles have been swept away. So many hurdles have been vaulted that it's difficult to keep track.

First, Ethiopia and Eritrea ended years of hostilities. And just two months after Abiy's first path-breaking visit to Eritrea meetings have been held in Djibouti to try and eliminate some of the major international problems besetting the region.

The background to the Djibouti mission was the conflict between Eritrea and Djibouti that erupted in 2008. For many years it was unresolved and there was a serious source of tension in the region. The Djibouti-Eritrea issue was also the reason why United Nations sanctions against Eritrea were not lifted—despite U.N. monitors declaring that Eritrea was no longer

The armed confrontations between Ethiopia and Eritrea, and between Eritrea and Djibouti, have now vanished in a puff of smoke. Or so it would appear.

It would be a mistake to ridicule what has been achieved. Eritrea seems to have genuinely dropped its hostility toward its southern and its eastern neighbor. But it's also prudent to note the obstacles that remain.

Eritrea is still locked in a confrontation with its western neighbor, Sudan. In January Sudan's President Omar al Bashir closed the country's border with Eritrea, sending crack troops to patrol the frontier. The dispute was never officially explained and seems to have been parked for now. But others remain.

Abiy is aware that a lot still needs to be done. As he put it recently:
When the time came both peoples Eritrea and Ethiopia woke up from their sleep and said enough is enough and brought back their peace. The next question will be not about who contributed how much to the peace deal, it should be on how to keep and sustain the peace, because the peace needs to be maintained. So, all people have to work together to sustain it.

In addition, for the peace efforts to stick both Ethiopia and Eritrea must complete internal reforms. Abiy has pushed Ethiopia much further down the road of reform while Eritrea still has a long way to go. Consolidating democracy and internal peace building will be needed if the dramatic pace of change is to hold in the region.

What Still Needs to Be Done - As Abiy rightly says, a great deal still needs to be done to sustain the peace. People and villages all along the Ethiopian border need to be assigned to their respective countries, as the new border comes into force. Tens of thousands of troops will have to be withdrawn from the trenches they have inhabited since the end of the border war of 1998–2000. A host of customs arrangements and immigration issues must be resolved. This is the hard graft that needs to follow the handshakes and smiles of the leaders.

Then there are internal reforms in both Ethiopia and Eritrea that have to be addressed if peace and security are to be consolidated.

Ethiopia has made considerable progress on this front. Journalists have been freed from jail, the Internet restrictions lifted, and media regulations relaxed. Political prisoners have been released and opposition leaders have come home.

Even hardline rebels based in Eritrea have returned. Berhanu Nega, the elected mayor of Addis Ababa, who fled into exile in the United States, has arrived home. Speaking to the BBC he described Ethiopia as, "a fundamentally changed country."

These developments have transformed the atmosphere in the capital. But in the rest of Ethiopia there are still major issues confronting the government. More than two million people have been displaced in recent ethnic clashes. The Tigrayans, who ruled the country after seizing the capital in 1991, are smarting from their loss of influence.
Still Some Way to Go in Eritrea - In Eritrea there have only been the most feeble of moves toward reform. Bloomberg reported that the government is "definitely studying" the possibility of demobilization of its vast army of national service conscripts. In an interview the Minister for Labor and Human Welfare Luul Gebreab said, "Definitely a small army will remain, and the others will concentrate on the developmental work as planned."

When this might take place is not clear.

On other reforms, including the implementation of the country's constitution, the freeing of political prisoners, and the lifting of the ban on independent media and all opposition political parties, there is a stony silence from the Eritrean government.

Herman Cohen, the former U.S. secretary of state for African affairs who brokered an end to the Eritrean-Ethiopian War in 1991 has offered encouragement. He has has argued that Isaias "should not fear a more open Eritrea system. Now would be a good time to start the process."

There are no signs of this taking place and as a result no drop in the number of Eritreans fleeing to neighboring Ethiopia. The U.N. Refugee agency registered 1,738 in July this year—very much on trend with previous years.

Welcome Developments

The developments between states in the Horn of Africa are clearly very welcome. The question now is whether they can be translated into reality on the ground, and whether the international developments will be reflected in internal reforms.

Once both of these steps have been taken it would be possible to conclude that the region has truly been transformed.