

Heads Firmly in the Sand – Western Diplomacy & the Rise of Terrorism in the Horn of Africa

Introduction

During the last six months we have witnessed the effective collapse of the Transitional Federal Government of Somalia (TFG) lead by Sheikh Sharif Ahmed, as Al-Shabaab and its allies have seized control of nearly all of Somalia, including Mogadishu, where Sheikh Sharif and his ministers cower in the Presidential Palace (Villa Somalia) under the protection of the AMISOM forces. The Western Powers and the UN Security Council persist in deluding themselves that the TFG remains the “government” of Somalia and that it is capable of mounting an effective fight against the extremists of Al-Shabaab and its allies, notably the Hizb-al-Islam of Hassan Dahir Aweys. This delusion has led the US to send some US\$ 10 million of military aid to the TFG last week, while the TFG, for its part, has clearly enunciated its abject helplessness by declaring a state of emergency and appealing for foreign troops to be urgently sent to Mogadishu to save it from being overrun by the jihadists. Indeed, in what would be a cruel irony, it is likely that most of the arms and munitions sent to the TFG by the US will fall into the hands of the very extremists that they were to be used against.

At the present time, there is no credible military obstacle to prevent the jihadists from expelling the remnants of the TFG and establishing a government of their own in Somalia within the next few months, unless a sizeable and well-equipped international force is despatched speedily to take the offensive against the jihadists and rescue the TFG. The token AMISOM contingent of several thousand Ugandan and Burundian troops can only protect themselves, the port, airport and the immediate environs of the Presidential Palace. It is highly unlikely that the Western Powers are willing to send troops to Somalia, and it is equally unlikely that the African Union (AU) will send more troops to join the 3-4,000 AMISOM contingent already deployed in Mogadishu. Thus we have to face the very real, and increasingly likely, prospect of a jihadist regime in Somalia in the near future. For the first time, since the US overthrew the Taliban regime in Afghanistan in 2002, the jihadists will have their own government in power in an internationally recognised country enabling them to regroup, expand their ranks and influence as well as exult in a resounding victory over the infidel crusaders.

Failure to Reconstruct Humpty Dumpty

How has this disaster come to pass, and what can be done to reverse or prevent it? The answer to the first part of the question is relatively simple. When the Somali National Movement (SNM) defeated the Somali army and expelled the Siyad Barre regime from Somaliland in 1991, this decisive defeat not only sounded the death knell for that dictatorship, but resulted directly in the disintegration of the erstwhile Republic of Somalia. Ever since that time the international community has been engaged in putting the Somali Humpty

Dumpty back together again with as much success as the King's horses and men in the nursery rhyme. The AU, USA, United Nations, EU and Arab League (AL) have all persisted in maintaining the inviolability of Republic of Somalia, while ignoring the history of its genesis, the rationale of Somali irredentist nationalism underlying its creation in the first place, and the objective political realities on the ground, all of which militated for a more thoughtful and creative approach to the collapse of the Somali state.

The central, pivotal factor that all these external actors failed to comprehend, and continue to fail to comprehend, is that the glue holding the Somali state together was the nationalist, irredentist dream of uniting all the five geographic territories into which the Somali people were divided during the colonial carve-up of Africa in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. The union between the ex-British Somaliland Protectorate (present day Somaliland) and the ex-Italian administered UN Trust Territory of Somalia (present day Somalia) to establish the Republic of Somalia in 1960 was only the first step towards the realisation of Greater Somalia, (which was to also include the Northern Frontier District [NFD], of Kenya, Djibouti and the Somali-populated 5th Province of Ethiopia). By the mid-1970s, it was clear that this irredentist dream had withered on the vine as the dictatorship of Siyad Barre elevated tribal autocracy over the idealistic nationalism of a free, democratic Somalia for all Somalis. In 1977 when Djibouti secured its independence from France, it chose statehood over union with the Republic of Somalia in order to escape the tribal dictatorship that ruled in Mogadishu. Equally, the irredentist urge prevalent among the overwhelmingly Somali population in the Northern Frontier District (NFD) of Kenya throughout the 1960s waned dramatically during this period as they witnessed the brutality and naked tribalism through which the Siyad Barre dictatorship maintained itself in power.

From the late 1970s, until its collapse in 1991, the Siyad Barre regime waged brutal, 'scorched-earth' wars against one or another group of its citizens. The first community to be targeted for this policy of extermination and subjugation were the Majerteyn in 1978/79 in response to a failed, Majerteyn-led coup attempt against Siyad Barre. This resulted in the extermination of many thousands of Majerteyn men, women and children and the burning and looting of many of their villages and livestock. The Majerteyn responded by creating the Somali Salvation & Defence Front (SSDF) guerrilla group to fight the Siyad regime from bases in Ethiopia and Kenya. In the 1980s, the Isaaq become the second community to be targeted for this policy of extermination and expulsion. In their case, the Isaaq had the temerity to oppose the regime in response to their exclusion from economic and political opportunity. In addition, Siyad had decided to appease his kinsmen and maternal uncles (the Ogaden) by settling them on Isaaq territory, in the aftermath of his calamitous defeat by the Ethiopians and their Cuban allies during the 1977/78 war, which resulted in the forced exodus of many of the Ogaden fighters and civilians from Ethiopia in fear

of reprisals. The Isaaq responded by establishing the Somali National Movement (SNM) guerrilla group which eventually evicted the dictatorship from Somaliland.

The third community to be targeted by the Siyad regime for punishment was the Hawiye in the late 1980s until Siyad's ignominious escape from Mogadishu huddled in an armoured personnel carrier in 1991. The Hawiye were not subjected to mass extermination and destruction of their towns and villages as were the Majerteyn and Isaaq since the regime was too weak to mount such a campaign. Instead they were treated to a program of political repression, arbitrary imprisonment, systematic looting of their economic assets and targeted assassinations as the regime sought to subdue an increasingly restive population in Mogadishu that could clearly see the impending demise of the dictatorship. Thus, by the time of the collapse of the Siyad Barre dictatorship, the dream of Greater Somalia lay in tatters and the underlying and unifying principle of Somali nationalism had metamorphosed into a nightmare of a brutal regime at war with its own citizens. Somalis had visited upon each other a brutality and a level of oppression that no colonial power had ever contemplated, much less inflicted. This is the Humpty Dumpty that the international community has been so determined to put back together over the last 18 years, with a singular lack of success, despite dogged and myopic determination. They have completely missed the crucial point that no community in Somalia or Somaliland has any loyalty or fealty to the Somalia that was.

Differing Responses to the Disintegration of the Somali Republic

By the time the Somali state had collapsed, the traditional authority structures in Somalia had been so marginalised and compromised for various reasons over many years, particularly during the Siyad dictatorship, that they were unable to impose their authority over the militia leaders that emerged during the fight against the Siyad regime, e.g. Mohammed Farah Eideed, Ali Mahdi and Osman Atto. Indeed, many of the senior officers of Siyad's army from the various clans in Somalia transformed themselves into militia leaders with control over specific geographic areas dominated by their kinsmen, e.g. Mohammed Deere, Qanyare Afrah et al. Thus, in Somalia the disintegration of the state translated into the atomisation of political power to the sub-clan level wherein multifarious sub-clan based militias each headed by a local warlord sprouted up to compete for power and the ability to extort protection money from the local population, businessmen and foreign aid organisations. In addition to this impetus to political fission in clan politics, and feeding into it symbiotically, was the inability of the majority community to subsume its internal rivalries in order to take the lead in establishing a new social contract (or 'xeer' in Somali) to underpin a reconstitution of the state.

It was into this anarchic maelstrom of competing warlords and militias that the UN and the US blundered into in 1992 with such disastrous consequences. Unfortunately, the international community has not enhanced its understanding

and analysis of the collapse of the state in Somalia during the intervening 18 years, and it remains wedded to the ludicrous idea that the *ex ante* Somali state of the pre-collapse era can be reconstructed in Somalia through establishment of a 'government' by outside powers. The results of this approach have now lead us to the real prospect of jihadist, pro-Al Qaeda regime in Mogadishu with all of the dire consequences that this entails.

By contrast, Somaliland was able to escape this atomisation of political fealty and re-establish its statehood in the face of the death of the irredentist dream for two main reasons: firstly, over the two decades of the Siyad Barre dictatorship and during the decade long civil war, the people of Somaliland had come to realise that their hasty, exuberant and unconditional surrender of their sovereignty after only four days as an independent country on the altar of Greater Somalia was a historic mistake; secondly, because the traditional cultural, political and social structures remained paramount and were able to trump the political and military leadership of the liberation movement, the SNM. Thus, when it became clear after eighteen months that the SNM political leadership installed in Hargeisa after the victory in 1991 over the Siyad regime was not up to the task of establishing effective civilian rule, the elders of the various clans stepped in and convened a Grand Conference in Borama to establish a constitutional structure and effective civilian administration that was accepted by all the communities, and to which they freely and voluntarily granted their fealty. The Borama Conference is an amazing example of indigenous, grass-root, African nation building and democratic constitutionalism that merits further academic study and research.

Re-Inventing Somalia – An Alternative Approach

Since the late 1990s, Somaliland has advised time and again that the 'top-down' approach chosen by the international community of establishing successive so-called governments for Somalia drawn from warlords, self-appointed 'civil society leaders' and their cohorts was an exercise in futility. Indeed, Somaliland went so far as to offer its active engagement and help in hosting a national reconciliation conference comprising clan elders and other genuine representatives of all the different communities in Somalia in order to establish a constitutional structure and government that is truly representative of the people of Somalia. Such a 'bottom-up' approach has a much greater chance of being accepted by the overwhelming majority of the people of Somalia for several reasons: firstly, it would be attended by genuine representatives of the ordinary people, i.e. clan elders and other social leaders, instead of warlords and self-appointed 'leaders' drawn from the Diaspora seeking governmental office and the financial rewards flowing from same; secondly, the conference would not be limited to choosing a government, but would address the disputes between the individual communities and a new basis for re-establishment of the state itself outside of the irredentist dream of Greater Somalia; and thirdly, the success of Somaliland in establishing peace, reconciliation among its various

communities, and democratic governance is widely admired in Somalia and commands great credibility among its people.

Somaliland's repeated advice to the international community to desist from the doomed effort to put Humpty Dumpty back together again, and to let the people of Somalia determine their own fate by deciding how and on what terms they will live together have fallen upon deaf ears. Thus, we are now faced with the prospect of an Al-Shabaab/Hizb Al-Islam regime in Mogadishu that controls nearly all of Somalia, and the existential threat that such a regime poses to the whole region, particularly Somaliland, its closest neighbour. This is not a prospect that Somaliland can accept, since these madmen have already declared war on that country, and neither can Ethiopia and Kenya as they are also immediate targets for these terrorists. It is also true that an Al-Shabaab/Hizb Al-Islam regime in Mogadishu will pose a major threat to the West since it will provide sanctuary, bases of operations, training camps, a deep pool of prospective recruits, not to mention a resounding victory and recruiting tool for Al-Qaeda. The simple fact is that while the ascension of the terrorists to the seat of government in Somalia will pose a major threat to Somaliland, the people of Somaliland have fought and defeated a much stronger enemy in the Siyad Barre regime with much fewer resources, both military and human. Somaliland will survive the advent of such a regime in Mogadishu, and may even emerge from a conflict with it stronger and more cohesive. However, what of the governments of Ethiopia, Kenya, Djibouti, USA, Britain, France and Saudi Arabia which spent many millions of their tax payers' dollars and countless years blindly and stubbornly pursuing the very policies that have resulted in the terrorists' victory?

The Way Forward

In order to answer the second part of the question posed at the beginning of this paper, we have to first determine the key objectives a new Somalia policy is proposed to achieve. Dr. Peter Pham, an acknowledged and prescient expert on Somalia, has argued in a new paper entitled "*Somalia: Strategic Realities and Realistic Stratagems*" that an Al-Shabaab takeover of Somalia "...does not fundamentally alter the strategic landscape." Indeed, he goes on to state that a terrorist victory in Somalia "...may well prove to be the insurgents' undoing..." by turning the population against them in opposition to the fundamentalist strictures and cruel punishments imposed by the jihadists. While I am in broad agreement with Dr. Pham's policy prescription of closer engagement with Somaliland and the more stable parts of Somalia, I have to respectfully disagree with Dr. Pham on the strategic threat posed by a terrorist regime in Mogadishu. Firstly, the strategic landscape will change subsequent to an Al-Shabaab takeover of Somalia for the simple reason that Somalia will become the base from which Al-Qaeda will seek to project its terror attacks on the infidel West and its allies in the region. Secondly, Al-Shabaab, having won control of Somalia, will focus its efforts upon exporting its brand of extremist terror to the

neighbouring countries of Somaliland, Ethiopia and Kenya, while establishing a jihadist alliance with the Taliban in Afghanistan and Pakistan. Thirdly, the terrorists will wrest control of the piracy business based in Puntland from the businessmen and Puntland officials that currently monopolize it. This has been a strategic goal of the terrorists for some time.

With regard to the argument that the harsh rule and oppressive strictures of the terrorists will turn the population against them, while this may be true to some extent, Dr. Pham under estimates the very real fatigue, abject despair and wretchedness of the vast majority of the Somali people after two decades of anarchy, starvation and systematic brutality. It is very likely that they will be willing to trade personal freedom for peace, stability, law and order (harsh though it may be) and theocratic autocracy. In this context, it is worth remembering that the Taliban regime of Afghanistan was initially welcomed by the majority of the Afghan people because it provided stability and ended lawlessness, and later acquiesced to its brutal and autocratic rule because it controlled all the levers of power, having destroyed or removed any potential opposition to it. The same will come to pass under an Al-Shabaab regime in Mogadishu.

The key objectives of a new Somalia policy may be summarised as follows:

- I. Decisively defeat and rout the Al-Shabaab/Hizb Al-Islam terrorists and their allies. While it may not be possible to completely eradicate these elements to the last fighter, it is certainly feasible to crush them militarily, ideologically and politically as credible force in Somalia's political and socio-cultural landscape, and this must be the clear objective.
- II. Recognise the right of the Somali people to self determination. This requires the immediate recognition of the clear wish of the people of Somaliland for independence. If the international community wish to confirm this wish through a referendum observed by the UN and other NGOs, this can be speedily arranged, however the tangible, self-evident achievements of the people of Somaliland in recovering their sovereignty and establishing a functioning, representative democracy must no longer be ignored and held hostage to the reconstruction of Humpty Dumpty!
- III. A grand conference for all the communities of Somalia must be convened to freely and openly discuss and debate the future of that country. Such a conference should be held in Somaliland with the Guurti (Somaliland's upper legislative assembly comprising traditional elders and clan leaders) as the hosts and "honest broker", since all communities in Somalia respect the role these elders played in brokering peace and reconciliation in Somaliland and will thus accept their mediation. The present TFG will attend the said conference as an observer on the clear understanding that

they will hand over executive authority to whatever government is agreed upon by all parties at the conference. Instead of seeking to reconstruct Humpty Dumpty, the aim should be to enable the people of Somalia to establish a new 'xeer' for their country.

The above objectives can be achieved realistically through a clear and focused policy which can be elucidated as follows:

1. Somalia should be placed under UN trusteeship until a freely and democratically elected government is chosen by its people. The interim government established by the grand conference mentioned above should govern the country under a UN mandate for a defined period (say 5 years) and prepare for free elections, while re-establishing the state and basic services. During this period a significant degree of regional autonomy must be incorporated in the governmental system both to give voice to popular concerns and opinions and to develop and encourage grass-root civil society organisations and democratic, community structures.
2. The newly recognised country of Somaliland should be tasked by the international community with training and re-establishing the Somali National Army. In addition, a new AU military mission for Somalia comprised principally of Somaliland forces with logistical support, special forces training and equipment provision by the US, Russia and the EU should be established and despatched urgently to Somalia with offensive mission approval and the explicit aim to secure the country and defeat the terrorists. This force would expel the terrorists from specific areas which they would then hand over to local militias loyal to the new government and support them in holding same.
3. The Eritrean government should be left in no doubt regarding the consequences of its support for Al-Shabaab/Hizb Al-Islam which must be the severest ostracism from the international community, particularly the AU, UN Security Council, the US and EU. If the Eritrean government does not immediately cease its support of the terrorists, it should be placed on the list of State Sponsors of Terrorism and its engagement with the international community with respect to diplomacy, international trade and financial intermediation curtailed accordingly.
4. A donor conference must be arranged concurrently with the grand conference for the various communities in Somalia outlined above to pledge funds for the disarming of the militias, re-establishment of the state in Somalia (in particular the police, security services), and reconstruction of basic services, e.g. electricity, water, medical and educational facilities. This will enable whatever government is formed at the grand conference to 'hit the ground running' with respect to providing

good and effective governance. This is absolutely crucial to securing and maintaining the confidence of the people, in view of current history wherein an entire generation has grown up to equate government with venality, warlordism and the enrichment of the favoured few in the name of the wretched masses.

In conclusion, the situation in Somalia has gone far beyond the current ludicrous and doomed attempts by the West to shore up the fictional 'government' of the TFG. As stated so succinctly in Dr. Pham's above mentioned paper, the TFG is neither transitional, nor federal or a government in any true sense of the word. The imminent prospect of a takeover of Somalia by the Al-Shabaab/Hizb Al-Islam terrorists presents a clear and present danger to international peace and stability and the international community must take decisive steps to crush and neutralize this threat. To achieve this objective, it is necessary to embrace the only peaceful, functioning, Muslim, representative government in the Horn of Africa, namely Somaliland, and seek its help in defeating these extremists. It is also necessary to re-establish the state in Somalia by helping its people to determine their own future, instead of seeking to impose a failed state from which they had long withdrawn their consent. The West has to choose between acquiescing in the establishment of a new terrorist government in one of the most geographically strategic regions in the world, and taking bold action born of creative, 'out of the box' analysis to forestall the threat and secure the Horn of Africa region.

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