



The Somali Crisis: Failed State and International Interventions

Rossella Marangio

Abstract

The long-lasting Somali conflict is profoundly linked to the country's historical development and its socio-cultural specificities. The political milieu and the struggle for power in Somalia reflect the cleavage between tradition and modernity. This rift has led to a legitimacy vacuum, which has made it difficult for the warring parties to find enough common ground for a compromise. Furthermore, external influences, at both regional and international levels, have contributed to the fragmentation of the political arena, due notably to the emphasis on the use of force as the principal tool for acquiring or maintaining power. In this unfolding crisis, regional pressures and rivalries, international interventions, economic and strategic interests as well as piracy, corruption and Islamic extremism all play an interlocking role. In view of this, a new approach to the crisis is badly needed. The EU, in particular, should promote a new strategy based on three components: enhancement of social cohesion through local cooperation programmes, state-building and development.

Keywords: *Somalia / Civil conflict / Society / European Union / Military intervention / European Union Training Mission (EUTM) Somalia / Piracy / European Naval Force Somalia-Operation Atalanta (EUNAVFOR Atalanta) / Regional Maritime Capacity Building (RMCB) / African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM)*

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by Rossella Marangio*

Introduction

The civil war in Somalia has been ravaging the country for two decades. The difficulties in achieving peace have highlighted the powerlessness of the international community. The roots of the Somali conflict are deep and obscure, to the point that the prospects for a solution appear to be moving further away rather than closer. Several attempts have been made by regional and international actors to build peace, but results are dispiriting. Evidence suggests that the methods used to reconcile the actors involved in the struggle have been ineffective. Major aspects of the crisis have been neglected, namely the anthropological and communitarian dimensions of Somali society.

The aim of this paper is to highlight the close correlation between the lack of social cohesion in Somalia and the self-sustaining nature of the Somali conflict, taking into account the variety of actors and overlapping interests involved. In this respect, the role of international organizations and especially of the European Union (EU) has acquired great importance, but the efforts undertaken have not met expectations. This analysis of the Somali conflict evaluates the adequacy of current conflict resolution efforts in the peculiar Somali situation and, consequently, the prospects for a more effective EU engagement in the region.

1. The multidimensional nature of the Somali crisis

The Horn of Africa has been one of the regions of greatest international concern in the last decades. Several conflicts have unfolded in this territory as a result of territorial disputes, competing strategic interests and ancient rivalries among the countries of the area. Moreover, the emergence of new phenomena - notably piracy and Islamic fundamentalism - alongside the traditional challenges of poverty and corruption, have added to the growing complexity of East Africa's predicament. As the Somali conflict plays out, any analysis must account for its domestic, regional as well as international dimensions.

Internationally, the Horn of Africa is a strategic zone for maritime routes passing through the Suez Canal, especially for oil transportation from the Arab peninsula. These routes are threatened by the presence and actions of non-state actors such as pirates who are rooted in Somali territory. The growth of illegal activities, including funding for terrorist groups, as well as the risk of exporting instability affect broad security and economic interests. Against this background, the Somali crisis cannot be

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considered as a pure domestic or regional problem, but should be treated as an international one. In fact, as piracy and the risk of Islamic terrorism stem from instability, global and European interests are at stake.

The regional dimension of the Somali conflict is also critical. The crisis entails the risk of exporting instability to the region. On the one hand, there is an outside-in dynamic, in that Somalia's neighbours are induced to step in to defend their interests. On the other hand, elements of an inside-out dynamic can also be identified, mostly resulting from the myth of "the Great Somalia", which calls for the creation of one state regrouping all regions inhabited by Somalis including the territories in the neighbouring countries. This myth has strongly shaped Somalia's foreign policy since the time of the late Muhammad Siad Barre's dictatorial rule (1969-1991) and influenced the formation of Somali identity around ethnic homogeneity. A strong Somali state, driven by the myth of the "Great Somalia", is viewed by neighbouring countries as a possible threat, as it would advance territorial claims on those Somali-inhabited regions in Ethiopia, Djibouti and Kenya, as was the case in the Ogaden war in the 1970s.¹

Regional influences allow the conflicting parties in Somalia to access funds, arms and strategic support. Instability also favours indirect confrontation among rivals in the region. This has been the case of Ethiopia and Eritrea, whose territorial dispute found expression in the uncontrolled Somali situation, whereby the two countries supported rival factions in order to engage in a war by proxy. The Somali conflict has also allowed non-state actors to roam freely across borders. In particular, the rise of Islamic fundamentalism worries all countries in the region, particularly those that host large Somali communities like Ethiopia and Kenya.²

Finally, the domestic dimension of the conflict is the most striking. Despite the ethnic homogeneity of its population, Somalia is characterized by a lack of social cohesion and widespread poverty, which translates into instability. In order to intervene in the crisis, these local features have to be firstly understood and then addressed through appropriate actions.

2. Tradition and modernity underpinning the self-sustaining nature of the Somali conflict

The outbreak of civil war in Somalia was the last stage in its tormented history of social and political transformations. The political predicament is characterized by several non-state actors fighting for power. The Transitional Federal Government (TFG) is unable to control Somali territory. The TFG is actually party to the conflict and its legitimacy derives from the international community alone.

¹ For further information, see Matteo Guglielmo, *Somalia. Le ragioni storiche del conflitto*, Torrazza Coste, Altravista, 2008, p. 72-73.

² The number of Somali refugees residing in Kenya is 523,856 (updated 6 May 2012). See "Somali Registered Refugee Population" in the UNHCR portal *Refugees in the Horn of Africa: Somali Displacement Crisis*, <http://data.unhcr.org/horn-of-africa/regional.php>.

The absence of a legitimate political paradigm is due to a rupture between traditional social patterns and the elements of a modern centralized state, introduced through the colonial experience and the Siad Barre's regime.

Somali traditional society has never been based on the rules of a modern state. Social interactions are determined by communal belonging to a set of affiliation groups created within a clan structure. Individual identity is defined by rights and duties acquired through membership of the group, the core concepts of which are the solidarity nexus (*reer*), the sharing of resources, and redress offered in case of offense (*mag*).³

Individual affiliations depend on common ancestry and kinship. The most basic and strongest level of affiliation is the *diya paying* group, made up of individuals who share the *mag* or *diya*.⁴ At this level, relations among individuals are characterized by automatic solidarity: collective consciousness prevails over individual consciousness.⁵ The next level of affiliation is given by the exogamic group, where *mag* sharing would be highly inefficient due to the large number of members, but which nonetheless shapes individual identities in relation to other groups from which the individual can find a spouse.⁶ The largest kinship group is represented by the sharing of the *xeer*, the customary Somali law peculiar to every clan. At this level, individual ties are weak, but the role of leadership and the application of the *xeer*, wielded by the elders, are fundamental in solving the internal disputes of the clan.⁷

The fluidity of Somali society is given by the assumption that lifecycles also concern social groups and are connected to specific needs, such as sharing available resources and exchanging material goods and protection against other groups. Alliances and group set-ups are shaped according to these pragmatic considerations and are justified by customary law.⁸ The composition of such group set-ups are therefore not fixed, but can vary according to changing needs, such as the management of resources and the number of members, with the purpose of preserving the efficiency of the group in terms of resource sharing, defence and power vis-à-vis other groups.

During the colonial and Barre periods, this system was challenged by the introduction of elements typical of the modern European state, namely a state with a monopoly on

³ Federico Battera, *Dalla tribù allo Stato nella Somalia nord-orientale: il caso dei Sultanati di Hobiyo e Majeerteen, 1880-1930*, Trieste, EUT, 2005, p. 35.

⁴ *Diya* is the Muslim name used by Lewis in Ioan M. Lewis, *Understanding Somalia and Somaliland. Culture, History, Society*, London, Hurst, 2008, whereas *mag* is the Somali name.

⁵ Federico Battera, *Dalla tribù allo Stato nella Somalia nord-orientale, cit.*, p. 40; and for a more detailed description: Ioan M. Lewis, *Understanding Somalia and Somaliland, cit.*

⁶ Federico Battera, *Dalla tribù allo Stato nella Somalia nord-orientale, cit.*, p. 42.

⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 36.

⁸ For further information: *ibidem*, p. 36; Marcel Djama, "Trajectoire du pouvoir en pays somali", in *Cahiers d'études africaines*, Vol. 37, No. 146 (1997), p. 403-428, http://www.persee.fr/web/revues/home/prescript/article/cea_0008-0055_1997_num_37_146_3520; Ioan M. Lewis, "Visible and Invisible differences: The Somali Paradox", in *Africa: Journal of the International African Institute*, Vol. 74, No. 4 (November 2004), p. 489-515; Gérard Prunier, "Segmentarité et violence dans l'espace somali, 1840-1992", in *Cahiers d'études africaines*, Vol. 37, No. 146 (1997), p. 379-401, http://www.persee.fr/web/revues/home/prescript/article/cea_0008-0055_1997_num_37_146_3519.

the use of force, central administration of the territory, and group formation based on ideology rather than traditional affiliation.

The colonial period, in particular, was characterized by the establishment of a bureaucracy to control the territory and exploit its economic potential mainly through agriculture. The colonial powers - Italy in the first place, but also Britain in what is now Somaliland - exploited the divisions between clans and social groups by granting benefits to those that were willing to cooperate.⁹ Thus, a major division between collaborators and opponents of the foreign rulers as well as elements of rigidity were introduced in the fluid traditional Somali society. Furthermore, in the Italian Somalia, the fascist rule established the so-called New Order, which foresaw a new agricultural policy based on grants to the *Shidde*, farmers considered as a lower class than nomadic shepherds.¹⁰ As a consequence, Italian rule reversed the social order by conferring power on those groups which traditionally exchanged goods for protection, thus undermining the grounds for cooperation with other groups.

Barre's regime strengthened the central state and focused on the fight against the clan structure. In 1971, the *Ololeh* campaign abolished the *mag* system and replaced traditional law, also with regard to family law, with new laws and codes.¹¹ In particular after Somalia's unsuccessful 1977-78 war with Ethiopia over the Ogaden region, President Barre used cleansing measures towards rebel clans to maintain his power and defend his own clan.¹² The subsequent civil war was characterized by the necessity of self-defence more than offense since every social group was perceived as a threat.¹³ The only guarantee of survival for social groups was the conquest of power through armed struggle. Thus, the attempt to substitute traditional social structures forcefully and artificially with more modern ones led to the breakdown of social cohesion, creating a vacuum with regard to common legitimizing paradigms and rules for political competition.

Religion, i.e. Islam, can be considered, to an extent, as the only identity-shaping factor that continued to provide answers to the quest for legitimizing political paradigms. The combination of religious ideology, the absence of clear societal rules, and nationalistic claims against international interventions led over time to the emergence of Islamic extremism, and in particular of Salafi Wahhabism.¹⁴

⁹ Anna M. Gentili, *Il leone e il cacciatore. Storia dell'Africa sub-sahariana*, Roma, Carocci, 2008, p. 274-276.

¹⁰ *Ibidem*.

¹¹ Olol means to burn, Federico Battera, *Fattori di frammentazione e ricomposizione nella Somalia contemporanea*, Milano, Istituto per gli studi di politica internazionale (ISPI), 1997 (Quaderni; 29), p. 47. Cf. also: Matteo Guglielmo, *Somalia*, *cit.*, p. 70; Gérard Prunier, "Segmentarité et violence dans l'espace somali, 1840-1992", *cit.*

¹² Matteo Guglielmo, *Somalia*, *cit.*, p. 83.

¹³ Federico Battera, *Fattori di frammentazione e ricomposizione nella Somalia contemporanea*, *cit.*, p. 47.

¹⁴ Cf. International Crisis Group, *Somalia's Divided Islamists*, 18 May 2010 (Africa Briefing ; 74), <http://www.crisisgroup.org/~media/Files/africa/horn-of-africa/somalia/B74%20Somalias%20Divided%20Islamists.pdf>; International Crisis Group, *Understanding Islamism*, 2 March 2005 (Middle East/North Africa Report ; 37), <http://www.crisisgroup.org/~media/Files/Middle%20East%20North%20Africa/North%20Africa/Understanding%20Islamism.pdf>; International Crisis Group, *Somalia's Islamists*, 12 December 2005 (Africa Report ; 100), <http://www.crisisgroup.org/~media/Files/africa/horn-of-africa/somalia/B74%20Somalias%20Divided%20Islamists.pdf>.

Traditionally Somali society has been characterized by Sufi orders, mostly apolitical and strictly connected to the concept of *asabiyya* - a form of social legitimacy based on blood ties within a group (family, clan, etc.) - incorporated from the pre-Islamic clan structure.¹⁵ From the 1960s onwards, Wahhabi groups started to spread across Somalia, supported by local groups and governments from traditionally conservative Gulf states. Saudi Arabia has been particularly active in supporting Wahhabism in Somalia through the establishment of several *madāris* (Koranic schools), study programmes in Saudi Arabia for young Somalis, and an aid policy aimed at diminishing Soviet influence in Somalia.¹⁶

Despite the repression by the Barre government, Wahhabism continued to gain support especially after the Ogaden war, “when the dream of a socialist pan-Somali state collapsed”.¹⁷ Subsequently, the Islamist movements became parties to the struggle, first against Barre, and then for power.¹⁸ The resurgence of Islamist movements in Somalia contributed to loosening social ties in Somali society by introducing an additional cleavage between fundamentalist Islam and traditional Sufi orders. In fact, Wahhabis consider themselves as the only true believers, classifying all other groups, including the Sufi orders, as apostates to be placed outside the *Umma* (the community of the faithful).

This cleavage strongly increased social rigidity by weakening social ties within groups. At the same time, Islamist ideology has been able to provide a political-social governance project and the means to fight against external and domestic threats, and also to guarantee some stability, as in the case of the Islamic Courts that briefly ruled over southern Somalia until the end of 2006.¹⁹ In this respect, the identity-shaping power held by Islamist groups cannot be underestimated. Nonetheless, the existing divisions among Islamist groups, often reproductions of clan divisions, seem to confirm the hypothesis that there the struggle for power is perceived as a means of survival in a context where traditional social ties and rules have been broken and no valuable alternatives have been provided.

In conclusion, the lack of legitimizing political paradigms following a clash between tradition and modernity has created the conditions for a self-sustaining conflict in Somalia. In fact, the traditional structure regulating a fluid society and based on mutual advantages and tradeoffs has been replaced by an armed struggle for power where compromises and alliances are only entered into to fight other enemies. A well-focused international intervention cannot overlook these realities and should address the aspect of social cohesion first.

¹⁵ Sufi orders have traditionally operated a synthesis between orthodox Islam and prior traditions; for instance, in the Qādiriyya, the oldest Sufi order in Somalia, the local social group based on the *asabiyya* merges with the Sufi order. Cf. Enrico Fasana, “Il culto dei santi e il ruolo delle confraternite nella diffusione dell’Islam periferico”, in Paolo Branca and Vermondo Brugnatelli (eds), *Studi arabi e islamici in memoria di Matilde Gagliardi*, Milano, Istituto italiano per il Medio e l’Estremo Oriente (Is.M.E.O.), 1995, p. 75-113.

¹⁶ International Crisis Group, *Somalia’s Divided Islamists*, cit., p. 2-3.

¹⁷ *Ibidem*.

¹⁸ *Ibidem*.

¹⁹ Cf. also: Matteo Guglielmo, *Somalia*, cit., p. 129-157; International Crisis Group, *Somalia’s Divided Islamists*, cit., p. 5.

3. International intervention in Somalia: in search of stabilization

The international response to the Somali crisis constitutes a unique case of engagement due to the large number of states and international organizations that have attempted to stabilize the country in the last two decades.

International actions towards the Somali crisis have all tried to address four main challenges: internal conflict, piracy off the coasts of Somalia, Islamic fundamentalism and development. Efforts in tackling these issues have varied over time in terms of actors and actions, and have privileged security conditions first and then addressed piracy and Islamic fundamentalism as they arose.

Civil conflict

As regards Somalia's internal conflict, direct interventions were initially attempted with the aim of restoring peace and mediating between warring parties. Since the beginning of the crisis, the UN was active in the area through its UNOSOM I and II missions (in coordination with the US UNITAF mission) in 1992-95, as well as through mediation efforts and development programmes. Despite the legitimacy conferred on these actions by successive UN Security Council Resolutions,²⁰ results have been wanting. Civil war has continued, UN troops were involved in armed confrontations against Somali armed groups as well as in scandals concerning their conduct,²¹ while mediation efforts have not improved security conditions.

The main deficiency in the UN's approach in the early 1990s was the belief that the crisis could be solved through a top-down mediation between warlords by means of political mediation.²² This approach mostly neglected the lack of social cohesion and the subsequent effect of legitimate violence as a defensive tool, made possible by the widespread availability of weapons. In this respect, the UN military mission was meant to deal only with the humanitarian situation in Somalia and was not mandated with disarmament tasks. On the contrary, the parallel US mission adopted a "selective disarmament" approach, proceeding with disarmament only in case of danger to humanitarian aid distribution or international personnel.²³ The situation on the ground remained unchanged due to the two missions' lack of a clear and equal disarmament

²⁰ UN Security Council Resolutions on Somalia S/RES/751 (24 April 1992), S/RES/794 (3 December 1992), S/RES/814 (26 March 1993), S/RES/733 (23 January 1992), S/RES/1725 (6 December 2006), S/RES/1744 (21 February 2007), S/RES/1910 (28 January 2010), <http://www.un.org/documents/scres.htm>.

²¹ UN troops were involved in illegal activities against the Somali population during the deployment of UNOSOM including torture and rape. Cf. Jean-Paul Brodeur, "Maintien et imposition de la paix en Somalie (1992-1995) - Partie 1", in *Cultures & Conflits*, No. 29-30 (automne-hiver 1998), <http://conflits.revues.org/index686.html>; Flavio Haver and Massimo Alberizzi, "Scandalo Somalia, parlano le vittime", in *Corriere della Sera*, 12 January 1998, http://archiviostorico.corriere.it/1998/gennaio/12/Scandalo_Somalia_parlano_vittime_co_0_9801124370.shtml; Commissione governativa d'inchiesta per i fatti di Somalia, *Relazione conclusiva*, Roma, 26 May 1998, <http://www.repubblica.it/online/fatti/somtort/rapporto/rapporto.html>.

²² Matteo Guglielmo, *Somalia*, cit., p. 99.

²³ *Ibidem*, p. 96-98. Cf. also UN Security Council Resolutions on Somalia S/RES/751 (24 April 1992), S/RES/775 (28 August 1992) and S/RES/794 (3 December 1992), which establish the mandate for UNOSOM and its cooperation with the Unified Task Force (UNITAF).

mandate, and the belief that mediation among the leaders of armed groups could suffice.²⁴

The assumption that mediation between leaders could settle the Somali civil war ignored the fluidity of group formation in Somali society which, as said above, is based on changing opportunities and alliances. Since the outbreak of the civil war, several ceasefires have been signed and different peace processes launched, the last being the Djibouti Peace Process (started in 2008), but to no avail.²⁵

The evidence of a continued struggle among groups shows how these agreements have been limited in their application. For each agreement concluded or opponent to the central state defeated, new groups and leaders have emerged to carry on the armed struggle. A telling example of this perverse process is the emergence of al-Shabaab, a jihadist group, which is an offshoot of the Islamic Courts that were forced to leave Mogadishu in early 2007 following a US-backed Ethiopian military intervention. This re-configuration of groups and alliances confirms the hypothesis of the self-sustaining nature of the Somali crisis as well as the idea of armed struggle as a means to acquire power and benefits for one's kin group.

In fact, kinship deriving from the traditional social structure is still perceived as an identity-shaping factor. As an example, in the early 1990s, Mohamed Farah Aidid, a Somali warlord, and his militia were financially and strategically supported by the families of local UN employees affiliated to the Habar Gidir social group,²⁶ the same as Aidid: the UN was actually funding the Somali warlord they wanted to fight.²⁷

Currently the security situation in Somalia is addressed mainly by the African Union (AU) through its AMISOM mission, the only one remaining on Somali territory, which constitutes the hub of international stabilization efforts. Although this approach may be praised as an "African solution to an African problem", its effectiveness is questionable.²⁸ The situation on the ground has remained unstable and AMISOM troops, much like UNOSOM and UNITAF forces, have been involved in armed confrontation with local groups, highlighting the inadequacy of these efforts vis-à-vis the complexity of the crisis.²⁹

²⁴ Matteo Guglielmo, *Somalia*, cit., p. 97.

²⁵ For details see: the *BBC Timeline*, available at:

http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/africa/country_profiles/1072611.stm; the website of UN Political Office for Somalia (UNPOS) at: <http://unpos.unmissions.org/Default.aspx?tabid=1925>; Matteo Guglielmo's periodical column "Gees. Corno d'Africa", in *Limes online edition*, <http://temi.repubblica.it/limes/category/rubriche/cornodafrika>. Cf. also Matteo Guglielmo, *Somalia*, cit., p. 99-116.

²⁶ A social group within the clan Hawiye.

²⁷ Matteo Guglielmo, *Somalia*, cit., p. 102 and 105.

²⁸ Cf. Matteo Guglielmo, "Abisso Somalia", in *AffarInternazionali*, 12 July 2010,

<http://www.affarinternazionali.it/articolo.asp?ID=1499>; Daniela Kroslak and Andrew Stroehlein, "Somalia, le speranze stanno svanendo", in *Affarinternazionali*, 10 July 2009, <http://www.affarinternazionali.it/articolo.asp?ID=1192>.

²⁹ Security Council Report, *Update Report Somalia*, Nos. 1 (15 October 2010) and 3 (8 December 2010), http://www.securitycouncilreport.org/site/c.gIKWLeMTIsG/b.2400725/k.71BF/Publications_on_Somalia.htm

In other words, whereas state- and confidence-building measures as well as actions to enhance social cohesion are needed, international missions have mostly undertaken peace-keeping tasks contributing to maintaining the unstable *status quo*. Moreover, international troops are often perceived as a party to the conflict since their unawareness of social mechanisms is transposed into support for specific groups, which compels others to activate defense mechanisms - i.e. direct fighting or terrorist attacks. It appears that the approach adopted by the international community is more indicative of a reluctance to intervene in Somalia due to the high financial and human costs it may imply (particularly recalling UNOSOM/UNITAF's disastrous experience) than a desire to provide a truly calibrated international response to the conflict.³⁰

Most recently, however, AMISOM has made some progress in accomplishing its mandate, thanks to the direct intervention of neighbouring countries, i.e. Kenya and Ethiopia, concerned by the potential spill over of Islamic fundamentalism.³¹ Kenya has demonstrated some ability to counteract al-Shabaab in Southern Somalia and has spurred the international community to renew its commitment through the adoption of a UN Security Council Resolution calling for an increase in troops and an extension of AMISOM's presence in the country.³²

In spite of this, overall success in stabilizing Somalia is far from assured for three main reasons. First, this renewed impetus is mainly connected to the need to fight a common enemy - al-Shabaab - and solves neither the underlying causes that make Islamist militancy attractive to Somalis³³ nor the divergence of interests of the international actors involved with respect to the future of Somalia. Secondly, it continues to have a top-down approach downplaying the question of social cohesion. Thirdly, despite the inclusion of disarmament tasks in the mandate of AMISOM, the widespread availability of arms in Somalia continues to threaten security.³⁴ On top of all this, the international community's support for the TFG remains highly problematic.

Such support has been based on the assumption that a central state is key to restoring peace. The UN, EU, AU and several states meeting within the International Contact Group on Somalia (ICG)³⁵ have always asserted the need for a central government, bypassing the fluidity of Somali society and ignoring the hypothesis that the TFG itself can be seen as one, among many, conflicting parties. Only a few months from the end of its mandate - scheduled for August 2012 - the TFG has not been able to acquire

³⁰ Cf. Romain Esmenjaud and Benedikt Franke, "Qui s'est approprié la gestion de la paix et de la sécurité en Afrique?", in *Revue internationale et stratégique*, No. 75 (automne 2009), p. 37-45.

³¹ International Crisis Group, *Somalia: An Opportunity that Should Not Be Missed*, 22 February 2012 (Africa Briefing ; 87), p. 4, <http://www.crisisgroup.org/~media/Files/africa/horn-of-africa/somalia/b87-somalia-an-opportunity-that-should-not-be-missed.pdf>.

³² UN Security Council, *Resolution on Somalia* (S/RES/2036), 22 February 2012, http://www.un.org/Docs/sc/unsc_resolutions12.htm.

³³ International Crisis Group, *Somalia: An Opportunity*, *cit.*, p. 1.

³⁴ UN Security Council, *Report of the Secretary-General on Somalia* (S/2011/759), 9 December 2011, http://www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=S/2011/759.

³⁵ It was established in June 2006 by the United States and Norway to support peace and reconciliation in Somalia. Currently it includes 31 states and 10 international organizations and it meets every six months. Cf. *UNPOS Quarterly*, No. 1 (March 2011), <http://unpos.unmissions.org/Default.aspx?tabid=9757>; and the Final Communiqué of the 21st meeting of the International Contact Group (ICG) on Somalia, Djibouti, 6 February 2012, <http://unpos.unmissions.org/Default.aspx?tabid=9748>.

wide support from domestic stakeholders nor to establish a shared agreement on the mechanisms of interaction aimed at mitigating violence.³⁶ The underlying problem within the TFG is its internal division and reluctance to devolve powers according to a “decentralised system of administration based on federalism”,³⁷ thus relapsing into a generalized struggle for power which is at the basis of the Somali crisis.

Piracy

Islamic fundamentalism and piracy, which both emerged in the shadow of the civil war, have catalyzed the attention of international and regional actors in Somalia.

The spread of piracy off the coasts of Somalia has led to action by various international players willing to defend threatened commercial routes. These actions include the EU missions EUNAVFOR Atalanta³⁸ and the new Regional Maritime Capacity Building operation (RMCB),³⁹ as well as the NATO and other national counter-piracy operations in the Gulf of Aden.⁴⁰ Despite the magnitude of the effort, no substantive change has been recorded so far.

The main reason behind the international failure to eradicate the problem of piracy is that piracy constitutes only one aspect of the wider Somali crisis and is strictly connected to the lack of alternative remunerative activities. The only viable solution to the phenomenon of piracy involves addressing its root causes: human security and development.⁴¹

Islamic fundamentalism

As mentioned above, the emergence of Islamic fundamentalism as a powerful force in Southern Somalia has led to a renewed international commitment towards Somalia to unite all actors involved against the common enemy: al-Shabaab. This commitment

³⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 6-7.

³⁷ *Transitional Federal Charter of the Somali Republic*, Nairobi, February 2004, art. 11, <http://www.so.undp.org/docs/Transitional%20Federal%20charter-feb%202004-English.pdf>; cf. International Crisis Group, *Somalia: An Opportunity*, cit., p. 6-7.

³⁸ It aims at escorting World Food Programme (WFP) vessels directed to Somalia and countering piracy and armed robbery off the Somali coasts. It is active since 2008. Cf. <http://www.consilium.europa.eu/eeas/security-defence/eu-operations/eunavfor-somalia>.

³⁹ This new EU operation currently under preparation aims at increasing the maritime capacities of five countries in the Horn of Africa and the Western Indian Ocean, namely: Djibouti, Kenya, Tanzania, the Seychelles and the Somali regions of Somaliland, Puntland Galmudug. Cf. Council of the European Union, *Regional Maritime Capacity Building for the Horn of Africa and the Western Indian Ocean* [Factsheet], http://consilium.europa.eu/media/1388583/fact_sheet_rmcb_update_jan_2012.pdf.

⁴⁰ For further information on the NATO counter-piracy operation *Ocean Shield* see: http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/topics_48815.htm. National counter-piracy missions are deployed by China, India, Japan, Malaysia, Russia, Saudi Arabia, South Korea and Yemen, source: U.S. Department of State, *Counter Piracy and Maritime Security (PM/CPMS)*, <http://www.state.gov/t/pm/ppa/piracy/index.htm>.

⁴¹ Cf. UN Security Council, *Report of the Secretary-General pursuant to Security Council resolution 1846 (2008) (S/2009/146)*, 16 March 2009, http://www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=S/2009/146; European Union External Action Service, *The EU fight against piracy in the Horn of Africa* [Factsheet], March 2012, http://eeas.europa.eu/agenda/2012/200212_factsheet_piracy.pdf.

has taken the shape of armed confrontation with al-Shabaab, in particular by AMISOM, Kenya, Ethiopia and Ahlu Sunnah Wal Jama'a (ASWJ), a Somali Sufi militant group.⁴²

In spite of some recent successes, several questions remain unsolved. First, Islamic fundamentalism remains attractive as an identity provider able to merge religious identity with nationalistic claims. Secondly, the reluctance of the TFG to fully involve the ASWJ as a partner in stabilization⁴³ continues to follow the rules of a struggle for power and a continuous search for varying alliances according to contingencies. In other words, it is perfectly in line with the fragmentation of Somali society and the absence of common legitimizing paradigms and rules of the game. Thirdly, it remains unclear how diverging regional and international interests on the future of the country would converge were the common enemy to disappear.

Development

International actions have also included development and humanitarian activities carried out or financed mainly by the UN and the EU⁴⁴ with the aim of addressing the underlying problems of widespread poverty and scarce access to resources (worsened by a recent famine). This is a key issue in approaching the Somali crisis since it also addresses local realities, not just central authorities.

Strategic guidelines for development cooperation have been issued in the Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP), a document issuing from the Somali Joint Needs Assessment Process, an assessment of Somalia's post-conflict needs led by the UN and the World Bank in the 2005-2007 period.⁴⁵ The document identifies different priority clusters and cross-cutting issues, but its premise is that peace hinges on governance, economic development, infrastructure and human rights reforms.

The same applies to the operational framework documents for development cooperation issued by the UN and the EU, the major actors involved in this field in Somalia. Both the United Nations *Somali Assistance Strategy 2011-2015*⁴⁶, defining UN actions coordinated by the UN Country Team in Somalia, and the *Somalia Joint Strategy Paper for the period 2008-2013*,⁴⁷ setting the priorities for EU action, state that security is a prerequisite for development and call for the implementation of several related actions in various fields: food security, governance, justice, etc.

However, even if security conditions undeniably affect the outcome of every other action, the reverse mechanism should also be considered: development programmes can also have a positive impact on security conditions by effectively impacting the root

⁴² Cf. International Crisis Group, *Somalia: An Opportunity*, cit., p. 3.

⁴³ *Ibidem*, p. 8.

⁴⁴ In particular within the framework of the Strategy for Somalia for the period 2008-2013. Cf. European Commission, *Somalia: Joint Strategy Paper for the period 2008-2013*, 2007, http://ec.europa.eu/development/icenter/repository/scanned_so_csp10_en.pdf.

⁴⁵ UN and World Bank Somali Reconstruction and Development Programme, <http://www.somali-jna.org>.

⁴⁶ UN, *United Nations Somali Assistance Strategy 2011-2015*,

<http://www.unctsom.org/documents/United%20Nations%20Somali%20Assistance%20Strategy.pdf>.

⁴⁷ European Commission, *Somalia: Joint Strategy Paper for the period 2008-2013*, cit.

causes of Somali instability. Development programmes have enormous potential as regards inclusion, social cohesion and reconciliation, especially at the local level. Confidence-building measures such as common management of resources, shared procedures and grassroots participative processes can lead to greater social cohesion and trust in new procedures, forms of cooperation and legal activities contributing to the transformation of the conflict, thanks also to an equal distribution of peace dividends.

Even though the approach used in the field of development is both top-down and community-based, the former is mainly adopted in the security and governance domains while the latter is used in addressing other issues, e.g. food security, resources management and economic development, thus determining a cleavage between these two spheres. Multilevel actions that combine central and local needs are foreseen under the above-mentioned strategic documents. However, the community-based bottom-up strategies should be privileged over mere central institution-building. As the fragmentation of Somali society suggests, cooperative mechanisms enabling social cohesion are more likely to engender positive spill over if they move bottom-up rather than top-down.

4. A challenge for the European Union

The role of the EU in the management of the Somali crisis has increased in the last years. The EU's enhanced commitment should be evaluated according to both the adequacy of the EU's policies per se and the extent to which EU actions provide value-added to those of other international actors.

The current situation in Somalia affects European interests directly when it comes to piracy threatening maritime routes to Europe and jihadist movements. EU actions are brought together in a so-called comprehensive approach, a formula used to indicate the need to act through different policies simultaneously in response to a crisis.

EU interventions in Somalia have developed along three levels: military missions, development cooperation and political dialogue also within international fora, i.e. UN and ICG, and with international organizations, i.e. AU and the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD), an eight-member East African development organization.

The EU missions respond to different challenges: Atalanta escorts World Food Programme vessels crossing the Indian Ocean and, to a certain extent, is also aimed at repressing piracy through the prosecution of pirates; the European Union Training Mission (EUTM) Somalia⁴⁸ provides training to Somali security forces with the goal of reintegrating them into the service of the Somali government; the recently approved Regional Maritime Capacity Building (RMCB) mission, a civilian mission even though it

⁴⁸ It consists in a training programme for Somali security forces and it has been deployed since 2010. Cf. European Union External Action Service, *EUTM Somalia*, <http://www.consilium.europa.eu/eeas/security-defence/eu-operations/eu-somalia-training-mission>.

includes military expertise, is meant to provide technical assistance to the countries in the region in developing their maritime capabilities to fight piracy.⁴⁹

Development cooperation is inserted within the broader framework established for African, Caribbean and Pacific (ACP) countries, and includes access for Somalia to the European Development Fund (EDF).⁵⁰

Political dialogue is ensured through the presence of EU actors, in particular the EU Somalia Unit within the Delegation in Nairobi and the recently appointed EU Special Representative for the Horn of Africa.⁵¹

The performance of the EU suffers from the same deficiencies as other international actors engaged with the Somali crisis. The focus is more on top-down approaches than on bottom-up strategies developing reconciliation and social cohesion.

In the security domain, but also in response to the Islamist threat, EU actions have mainly been supportive of the Transitional Federal Institutions (TFI), through EUTM Somalia and political dialogue, and of AMISOM, by granting funding through the Africa Peace Facility (APF) and the Instrument for Stability (IfS).⁵² Even if this contributes to the effort of restoring security, its effectiveness in the long term may be jeopardized by the inability of the TFG to gain support, by the divisions among the TFI and by competition among Somalia's neighbouring countries.

As regards piracy, EU actions have included the operation Atalanta, but also the signing of various agreements with neighbouring countries (i.e. Kenya and Seychelles) for the prosecution of suspected pirates. However, such measures have only been repressive in nature and do not address the root-causes of the problem. Moreover, especially as regards prosecution, the effectiveness of handing over suspected pirates to neighbouring countries can be questioned given their tenuous juridical and jurisdictional capacities.⁵³ In this respect, the recent RMCB mission is intended to provide technical assistance to the neighbouring countries in developing such capacities, but the fact remains that the solution to piracy has to be developed on Somali land.

⁴⁹ Cf. European Union External Action Service, *Regional Maritime Capacities Building (RMCB)*, <http://www.consilium.europa.eu/eeas/security-defence/eu-operations/rmcb>.

⁵⁰ The main financial instrument to provide development aid to the ACP countries, currently the 10th EDF is under implementation; European Commission-Europeaid, *European Development Fund (EDF)*, http://ec.europa.eu/europeaid/how/finance/edf_en.htm.

⁵¹ Alexander Rondos has been appointed by the Council on 8th December 2011 with a mandate running from the 1st January to the 30th June 2012. Council of the European Union, *Decision 2011/819/CFSP appointing the European Union Special Representative for the Horn of Africa*, 8 December 2011, in *Official Journal of the European Union*, L 327/62, 9 December 2011, <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=OJ:L:2011:327:0062:0065:EN:PDF>.

⁵² The APF has been created within the EDF to support African peace and security missions, http://ec.europa.eu/europeaid/where/acp/regional-cooperation/peace/apf_overview_en.htm. The IfS is an EU thematic financial instrument, http://ec.europa.eu/europeaid/how/finance/ifs_en.htm. For their funding to AMISOM visit EuropeAid website at: http://ec.europa.eu/europeaid/where/acp/regional-cooperation/peace/peace-support-operations/amisom_en.htm.

⁵³ For instance see: Osogo Ambani, "Prosecuting Piracy In the Horn of Africa: the case of Kenya", in Chacha Murungu and Japhet Biegon (eds), *Prosecuting International Crimes in Africa*, Pretoria, Pretoria University Law Press, 2011, p. 233-246, http://www.pulp.up.ac.za/pdf/2011_04/2011_04.pdf.

In the development cooperation domain, the Somalia Joint Strategy Paper⁵⁴ provides the basis for the inclusion of certain community-based actions as a response to the security situation. Reconciliation through dialogue and peace-building at both national and local levels is expressly mentioned and, specifically, actions to support and develop “the role of traditional leadership in conflict resolution” are foreseen at the local level.⁵⁵ Moreover, the Strategy underlines the importance of involving non-state actors and including community-based conflict-management and peace-building activities.⁵⁶ However, the community-based bottom-up process is still subsidiary to the general international engagement in support of the TFG central authorities. While this process should be considered as the starting point for promoting reconciliation and launching inter-clan grassroots peace processes, it is lamentably confined to the realization of few development programmes.

The EU could play an important role also thanks to its political leverage *vis-à-vis* Somalia’s neighbouring countries by virtue of EU-ACP relations. As a major donor to Somalia, the EU has an additional value-added in the development cooperation domain and for this reason it should be able to maximize its impact on the ground by focusing on the sectors that are more likely to drive change. In Somalia, the most promising sector in this regard is community-based reconciliation, which could open the way for social cohesion and for the establishment of new procedures for competition based on new legitimizing paradigms excluding violence.

Moreover, the EU could make use of its comparative advantage in addressing the Somali diaspora which is largely present in Europe.⁵⁷ The diaspora plays an important role not only through its remittances and their impact on development, but also by means of its network of contacts in Somalia which affect public life.⁵⁸ The increased involvement and consultation of the diaspora in the EU strategy towards Somalia could contribute to calibrating EU actions better. It could also open a preferential path for understanding and addressing the local dimension of the conflict, as well as exploring the potential for reconciliation and governance, including the creation of a Somali middle class, essential for any administrative apparatus.

Another area of EU intervention is regional integration. Recently, the EU has renewed its support for regional integration viewed, in line with the European experience, as an instrument of conflict resolution, in that it aims to reduce interstate tensions by

⁵⁴ European Commission, *Somalia: Joint Strategy Paper for the period 2008-2013*, cit.

⁵⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 27.

⁵⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 30-31.

⁵⁷ See “Inflows of foreign population by nationality” (sorted by country of origin) in OECD *International Migration Database*, <http://stats.oecd.org/Index.aspx?DataSetCode=MIG>. Cf. also the report for UNDP by Hassan Sheikh and Sally Healy, *Somalia’s Missing Million: the Somali Diaspora and its Role in Development*, March 2009, <http://www.so.undp.org/index.php/Somalia-Stories/Forging-Partnerships-with-the-Somali-Diaspora.html>.

⁵⁸ Petra Mezzetti and Matteo Guglielmo, *Somali Diaspora Associations in Italy: between integration and transnational engagement*, Centro studi di politica internazionale (CeSPI), October 2009 (Working Papers ; 62/2009), <http://www.cespi.it/WP/WP%2062%20Mezzetti%20Diaspeace%20FINAL.pdf>; International Crisis Group, *Somalia: An Opportunity*, cit., p. 8; Hassan Sheikh and Sally Healy, *Somalia’s Missing Million*, cit.

producing predictable patterns of behaviour.⁵⁹ However, it is not yet clear how competition among countries in the region can be reconciled through regional organizations and what role Somalia could play within such organizations, given the destabilizing presence of Somali minorities in Ethiopia and Kenya as well as the mistrust of these two countries vis-à-vis a potentially stronger Somalia.

Conclusions

The long-standing civil war in Somalia is the outcome of a social process which the country has been undergoing for decades, shaped by domestic, regional and international specificities. Years of international involvement have failed to deliver any significant results. This failure has highlighted the inadequacy of top-down approaches that neglect Somalia's social and historical uniqueness.

In a highly fragmented environment, the only chance of intervening effectively is through long-term involvement organized in at least three phases.

The first phase should be centred on disarmament as a precondition for any structural intervention. The second phase needs to include a bottom-up approach aimed at restoring social cohesion through local development programmes, the launch of vertical institutionalized cooperation between the central state and the periphery, and horizontal cooperation in the region, both political and economic with an increased role of the IGAD. The third phase should focus on development, and in particular on the recreation of a middle class in order to reconstruct the political, administrative and economic apparatuses of the state.

The EU should join or, ideally, lead these efforts given its economic and security interests in the stabilization of the region and its capacity to combine soft power and military instruments, as well as the greater credibility it enjoys in Somalia with respect to the UN, the US and the AU itself. Successful engagement in Somalia would also bolster the EU's role as a global player. This, of course, provided the EU and its member states summon up the political will to engage in such endeavours.

Updated: 12 May 2012

⁵⁹ Council of the European Union, Council conclusions on the Horn of Africa, 3124th Foreign Affairs Council meeting, Brussels, 14 November 2011, http://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms_data/docs/pressdata/EN/foraff/126052.pdf.

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