

06/2015

January 27, 20155

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STATE. THE EXISTENTIAL CRISIS OF
THE SOMALI STATE (II)

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SOMALIA: PICTURING A FRAGILE STATE. THE EXISTENTIAL CRISIS OF THE SOMALI STATE (II)

Abstract:

Somalia is one of the weakest links in the conflict route that goes from Nuakchot to Mogadishu. More than 25 years of civil war along with the lack of government structures have made this former Italian colony into a so-called fragile state, which sets all the conditions for international terrorism to flourish. The enactment of a interim constitution has not stopped political confrontation both at the federal and regional level, thus creating significant rifts that threaten stability of the government and limit its intention to hold general elections and a referendum for a permanent constitution. Without a solid strategy on the part of both local and international actors that prioritises the fight against terrorism and the stabilisation and development of the country from a local dimension, Somalia will not be able to avoid the population's frustration towards the political authorities, the strengthening of tribes and Al Shabab's re-emergence, thus perpetuating Somalia's existential crisis.

Key Words:

Somalia, Al-Shabab, Kenya, Ethiopia, TFG, drones, piracy, AMISOM.

INTRODUCCION

For the past years Somalia—a result of Italian and British colonisation— has been considered a shining example of a fragile state, which according to Max Weber is defined as that type of state in which the government has lost physical control of the territory and monopoly over the legitimate use of force; therefore becoming incapable of delivering basic services to its population or of acting as a full member of the international community¹.

We could argue that three main security challenges are determining the stability of the Somali state, and having an important impact on the regional and international security framework. The first one is piracy in the Aden gulf, which is threatening maritime traffic and oil supply to the West. Even though piracy has been reduced to the point that it is almost no longer a threat, it still obliges the international community to maintain naval forces to control it. The main forces are under the European Union (Atalanta Operation) and NATO (Ocean Shield Operation). The second challenge is human trafficking from Somalia to the north and then to the Mediterranean. The unstable situation in countries like Libya has made it easier for clandestine immigration to Europe to take place, influenced by the deaths of thousands of people in Mediterranean waters. The third challenge is the terrorist threat from the Islamist militias of Al-Shabab, a group that has good relations with Al Qaeda and that has been clashing with the Somali government since 2007.

In this analysis, which is the second part of a paper that was published recently, we will examine the disintegration of the state that took place after the end of the Cold War, the emergence of the first Islamist groups that would seize power for some years, the failed international military interventions during the 90s and the road to the current state of affairs. Nowadays, Somalia is defined by the invasion of neighbouring countries, anti-piracy operations in the Indian Ocean, the mission of the United Nations and the creation of a national government that intends to take Somalia back to stability, in the midst of great difficulties.

¹ Santos Villareal, Gabriel Mario: “Estados Fallidos: definiciones conceptuales”, Centro de Documentación, Información y Análisis, SERVICIOS DE INVESTIGACIÓN, Cámara de Diputados. Mexico DF. April, 2009. Available at <http://www.diputados.gob.mx/sedia/sia/spe/SPE-ISS-07-09.pdf>.

THE INVASION OF ETHIOPIA

2006 might be considered as a turning point regarding the analysis of Islamism and violence in Somalia. In 2006 the nature and strategies of Islamism and violence took a turn for the worse and went from a decade of “low intensity conflict” that only concerned local and regional actors to a new stage of global terrorism that was significantly more violent. Actually, it was the international intervention what allowed Al Shabab to become the dominant local force in the south of Somalia under its leader Abdi Ahmed Godane. Al Shabab (the youth) is a group will emerge as the young branch of the Islamic Court that controlled Somalia in 2006, and it will become notorious in the years thereafter for being one of the of international franchises of international jihadist terrorism.

At the beginning of 2007, the African Union deployed a peacekeeping mission in Somalia that was called AMISON. However, this deployment did not improve the situation in the country and had the opposite effect. Troops came mainly from Uganda and Burundi and were perceived by the locals as foreigners, which fostered the insurgency².

Since January 2007, the Ethiopian authorities had been claiming their intention to withdraw its forces within “weeks”³ but it was not until two years of fighting the insurgency that they did so. The withdrawal contributed to the weakening of the Federal Transition Government and to an agreement of sharing power between the government and the dissident Islamist faction Alliance for the Re-Liberation of Somalia (ARS). The newly independent Al Shabab, former UCI member, rejected the political agreement and continued to occupy significant territories such as the port of Baidoa. The two-year long war from January 2007 to December 2008 caused more than 10000 casualties and a million people were forced to abandon Mogadishu, in the context of grave violation of human rights⁴.

² Menkhaus, Ken, 2008: “Somalia: A country in peril, a policy nightmare”, ENOUGH Strategy Paper, September, Hoehne, Somalia, 2006-2008, pag. 6-7.

³ Rice, Xan: “Ethiopian troops to leave Somalia ‘within weeks. The Guardian (London), 2007-01-03. Available at: <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2007/jan/03/mainsection.international14>.

⁴ Human Rights Watch, 2007: “Shell-shocked: Civilians under siege in Mogadishu”, <http://www.hrw.org/sites/default/files/reports/somalia0807webwcover.pdf>.

Gettleman, Jeffrey, 2007: “Somali battles bring charges of war crimes”, New York Times, 6 April; Menkhaus, Ken, 2007: “The crisis in Somalia: Tragedy in five acts”, African Affairs, 106(204): pags. 357–90.

Given the internal violence, the Somali parliament was forced to meet in January 2009 in Djibouti and elected Sheik Sharif in a not-so-transparent way as the new president of Somalia. A new Transition Federal Government was thus formed. However, the president found some insurmountable obstacles. Not only were military and financial resources very limited, but a great share of the centre and south of the country were controlled by the Al Shabab insurgency and a new organisation called Hizbul Islam⁵ that refused to recognise Sharif's leadership because he was perceived as a corrupt president under the influence of the international community⁶.

The following years are defined by the continuing struggle between government troops backed by AMISON and guerrillas from Al Shabab and Hizbul Islam—both of which will come together in 2010 under the Al Shabab leadership but will separate again in 2012. During these years Al Shabab mastered its tactics and began increasingly using Somalia as a base from which they could infiltrate into neighbouring countries that were against them or had deployed troops to AMISON. The most spectacular attack was the attack by a terrorist cell to the shopping centre Westgate in Kenya's capital, Nairobi, in September 2013, which caused 59 casualties⁷. Nonetheless, the Federal Transitional Government backed by AMISON was also able during this period to defeat Al Shabab to some extent. One example was when the government regained control of the capital on August 11, 2011.

At the same time, the US started carrying out drone strikes against Islamist positions. The decision not to deploy boots in the ground and use military technology was considered the best option available to defeat terrorist groups— a belief that defines the new American military doctrine. The goal was to eliminate the main leaders of Al Shabab—an organisation that supposedly had links to Al Qaeda— because they feared that Somalia would become a

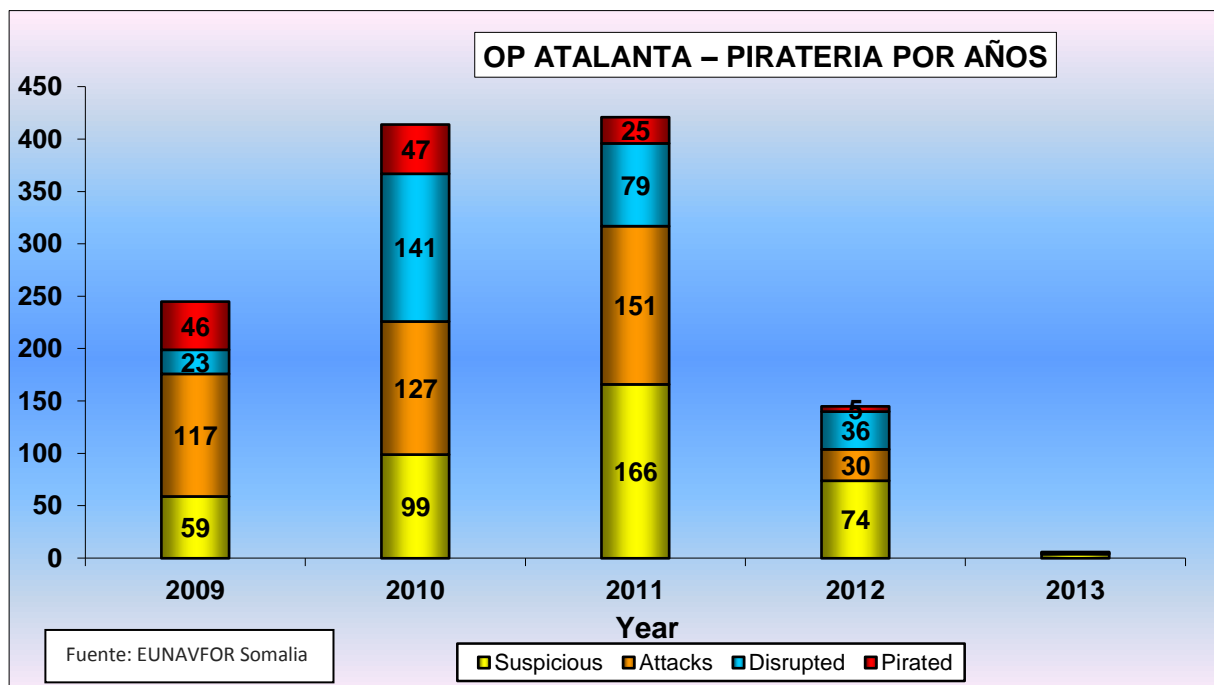
⁵ Hizbul Islam ("Islamic Party") also known as Hizbul Islaami, Hisbi Islam, or Hezb-ul Islam is an Islamist insurgent group made up by four factions: Hassan Aweys' ARS-A, Jabhatul Islamiya ("Islamic Front"), Hassan Abdullah Hersi al-Turki's Mu'askar Ras Kamboni (Brigade Ras Kambon) and Muaskar Anole, the militia of the Harti tribe.

⁶ Africa Confidential, 2009: "The Sheik Sharif show", Africa Confidential 50(4): 10–12; Menkhaus, Ken, Prendergast, John, and Thomas-Jensen, Colin, 2009: "Beyond piracy: Next steps to stabilize Somalia", Enough Project, May 2009. Available at <http://enoughproject.org/publications/beyond-piracy-next-steps-stabilize-somalia>.

⁷ Fernández, Xavi: "Un grupo islamista mata a 59 personas en un centro comercial en Nairobi", El Mundo 22 September 2013. Available at <http://www.elmundo.es/elmundo/2013/09/21/internacional/1379760342.html>.

base from where to plot attacks against western targets.

During this period piracy extended in the Indian Ocean from Somali ports. The attacks that caught the attention of the international community and spurred some reaction were the attacks against the Sirius Star oil tanker—which became the biggest oil tanker ever hijacked— in November 2008⁸ and the Maersk Alabama cargo ship in April 2009⁹. Until 2014, a total of 194 ships were hijacked and 3741 crewmembers detained. 2011 registered 243 attempts to seize different ships, which is the highest number in all these years.



In the end, a combination of factors made piracy plummet, including anti piracy international missions on the part of the European Union) (ATALANTA) and NATO (Ocean

⁸ Piratas con 2 millones de barriles de crudo, BBCMUNDO.com, Available at http://news.bbc.co.uk/hi/spanish/international/newsid_7735000/7735001.stm.

⁹ DAVID ALANDETE. El FBI colaborará en la liberación del capitán retenido por los piratas somalíes. El País. 9 April 2009. Available at http://internacional.elpais.com/internacional/2009/04/09/actualidad/1239228005_850215.html.

Shield)¹⁰, ship support by private security companies in the Indian Ocean and some measures adopted by the current government of Sheik Hassan Mohamud, such as the provision of amnesty to reformed pirates and the possibility for them to join the Somali Armed forces. Since 2013 this lucrative activity is no longer a serious concern for international security¹¹.

KENYA'S MILITARY INTERVENTION

Although since independence the relations between Somalia and Kenya had been damaged, the need to secure the northern frontier from Al Shabab and to avoid the spread of violence to Kenya as a result of a refugee crisis—more than 50000 Somalis escaped from the war¹²—convinced Kenyan authorities that only a direct military intervention could prevent Somali instability from reaching Kenya¹³. Thus, in October 2011 the Kenyan Defence Forces (KDF) along with Somali armed forces launched the Linda Nchi operation in the south of Somalia in order to defeat Al Shabab. The pretext was the kidnapping on October 13¹⁴ of two Spanish voluntary workers who worked at the refugee camp of Dabaab, close to the border with Somalia. Some days later, Kenyan troops reached the border.

¹⁰ Currently there are still three active EU missions in Somalia: EUTM Somalia, EU NAVFOR Atalanta y EUCAP Nestor (launched 16 July 2012). *Analysis of EUCAP Nestor by the Global Governance Institute*. Global Governance Institute. 26 July 2012. Available at <http://www.globalgovernance.eu/index.php/p-s-publications/246-new-analysis-the-somali-crisis-and-the-eu-3.html>.

¹¹ In October 2012, piracy attacks decreased to the lowest number in six years. Only one attack was registered during the third quarter, in comparison with the 36 that took place during the same period in 2011. Alaric Nightingale and Michelle Wiese Bockmann (22 October 2012). *Somalia Piracy Falls to Six-Year Low as Guards Defend Ships*. Bloomberg News. Available at : <http://www.businessweek.com/news/2012-10-22/somalia-piracy-attacks-plunge-as-navies-secure-trade-route>.

¹² "2012 UNHCR country operations profile – Kenya", UN High Commissioner for Refugees. Available at: www.unhcr.org.

¹³ "The Kenyan Military Intervention in Somalia". International Crisis Group. Africa Report N°184 – 15 February 2012. Available at <http://kenopalo.files.wordpress.com/2012/02/184-the-kenyan-military-intervention-in-somalia.pdf>.

¹⁴ The two volunteers were sold to pirates in January and transported into a kidnapped ship. "MSF workers moved to MV Albedo", Somalia Report, 12 January 2012. Disponible en http://www.somaliareport.com/index.php/post/2529/Abducted_DDG_Workers_Moved_To_MV_Albedo.

Military leaders thought that it would be a short intervention, but the situation evolved and became more complicated. Not only Somali forces failed to coordinate with Kenya's but also Al Shabab fighters avoided direct confrontation with better-equipped Kenyan forces and opted for waging a guerrilla war. Kenyan forces were not prepared for that. In the end, Kenya was forced to join AMISOM as another actor because of the lack of reliable allies. It compromised to a counterinsurgency campaign against the enemy, who was fierce and had experience¹⁵.

However, the Kenyan invasion also contributed to reopening old wounds among the Somali population living in Kenya, who ended up being radicalised by infiltrated Al Shabab militias. Therefore, the northwestern province of Kenya has become the weakest point in the war against terrorism. This has benefited Al Shabab's strategy of destabilising the province and waging low intensity guerrilla wars in the rearguard of Kenya's areas of operation.

CURRENT SITUATION AND FUTURE PROSPECTS

The death of the Ahmed Godane, the charismatic leader of Al Shabab, on September 1, 2014, as a result of a combination of American special forces and drone attacks in the south of Mogadisu¹⁶; along with internal tensions and military advances of the government and its AMISON allies have severely weakened Al Shabab. This has improved the overall security framework in the region.

Moreover, defections to the federal government signal a loss of cohesion and control on the part of Al Shabab over its militants¹⁷. Defections have increased at the pace of Al Shabab's loss of control over the territories. This has forced the organisation to strengthen links with

¹⁵ Ombati, Cyrus. "Kenyan troops in Somalia to join Am.som next week", The Standard, 9 March 2012. Available at http://es.wikipedia.org/wiki/Misi%C3%B3n_de_la_Uni%C3%B3n_Africana_en_Somalia#cite_note-Kenyan_AMISOM-67.

¹⁶ Smith, Stefan: "Shebab's new leader a devout, ruthless hardliner", Agence France-Presse. 7 September 2014. Available at <http://news.yahoo.com/shebabs-leader-devout-ruthless-hardliner-sources-05730104.html; ylt=AwrBEiSgiwxUUkoAbqrQtDMD>.

¹⁷ Guled, Abdi: "Mililitants defecting to Somali side after losses", The Washington Examiner, 15 June 2012. Available at <http://www.washingtonexaminer.com/article/733571#!>.

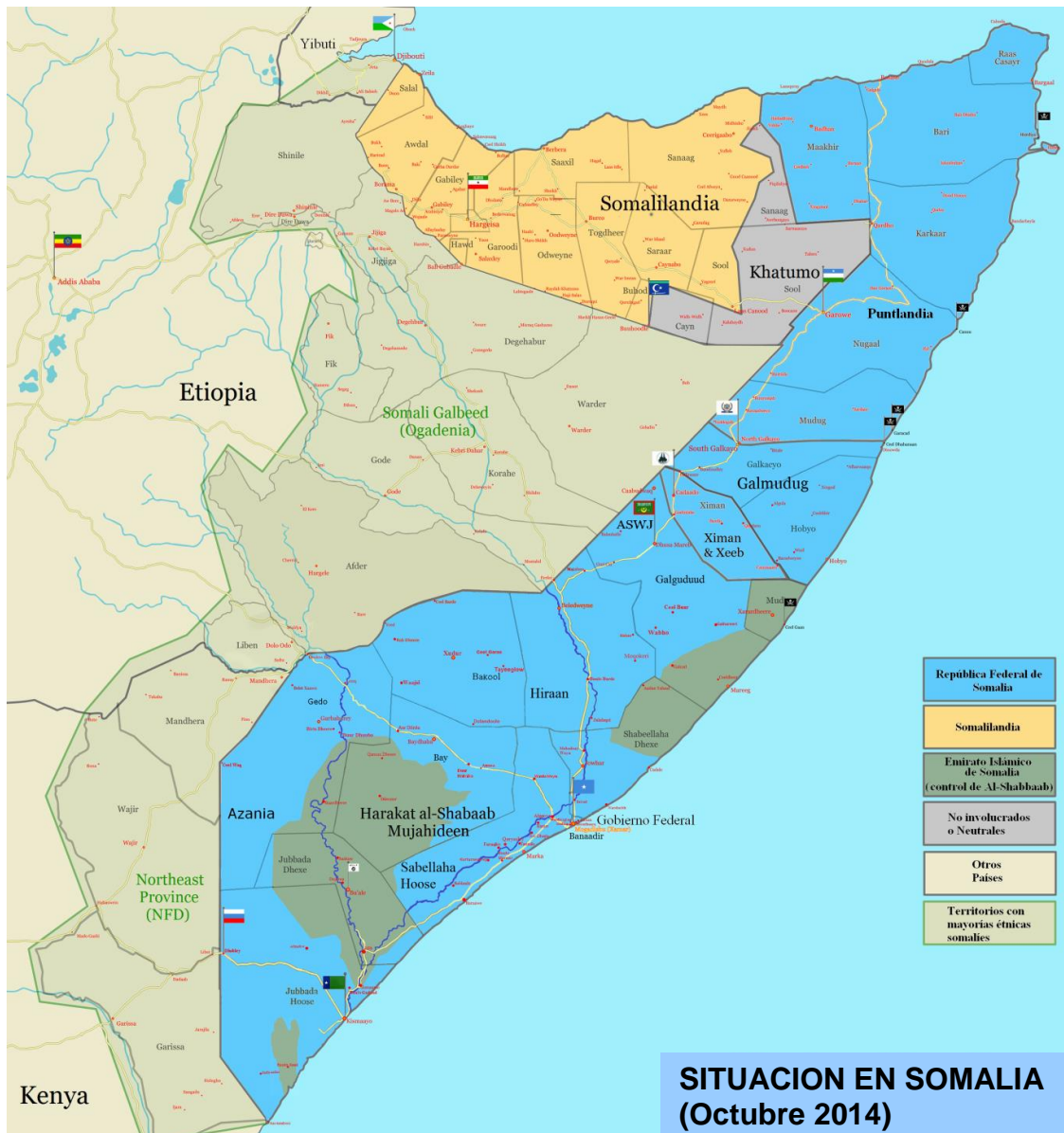
Al Qaeda and its franchise in Yemen AQAP, which serves a strategic purpose. Al Shabab is also said to be bolstering an alliance with former rivals —as with the case of Hizbul Islam in 2010— as a means of covering internal defections and casualties caused by the fight against government forces and AMISON¹⁸.

One could argue that the status quo has changed, especially because the military conflict has improved in a significant way lately thanks to the international intervention, most notably on the part of the African Union. The 22000 soldiers of AMISON from Sierra Leone, Kenya, Djibouti, Uganda, Burundi and Ethiopia along with Somali defence forces have enabled the government to reoccupy all important ports and countries in the south of the country in the last two years—the last region to be secured was Baraawe at the beginning of October, 2013. The capital Mogadishu is also again under government control, which has cut off Al Shabab's first source of funding: economic extortion.

In the political arena the situation has also significantly improved because of the implementation of a process in 2012 that foresees the adoption of an interim constitution, the formation of a new parliament and the parliamentary designation of Hassan Sheikh Mohamud as the President of the country. Backed by the international community, the President and the Prime Minister Abdiweli Sheikh Ahmed are currently working intensively on an ambitious reform agenda that envisages the adoption in 2016 of a permanent constitution, the creation of a federal administrative organisation, and general elections. However, the enactment of the interim constitution has not prevented political rifts from taking place both federally and regionally, which threatens the stability of the government and limits its intention to hold general elections and a referendum for a permanent constitution.

¹⁸ The Global Intelligence Files: "Shabaab calls on al Qaeda to 'expand the East Africa jihad' ". Available at: https://wikileaks.org/gifiles/docs/20/2020214_re-ct-africa-shabaab-calls-on-al-qaeda-to-expand-the-east.html.

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At the same time, Al Shabab still controls significant inland areas and major communication hubs, which are used as a means to economically asphyxiate liberated cities. Even though offensives carried out by Somali forces and AMISON military forces under the scope of the African Union have achieved noteworthy successes against Al Shabab, the Islamist group still has the capacity to attack inland areas and neighbouring countries. In Kenya the group has emerged as the advocate of the irredentism of the Muslim population that lives there. The attacks against government institutions and foreign presence along with the kidnapping of

Western people is part of a broader strategy aimed at showing that the group is still able to prevent the country from going back to normal.

Ultimately, Somalia keeps being one of the weakest points in the conflict route that goes from Nuakchot to Mogadishu. More than 25 years of civil war along with the lack of government structures have set the basis for international terrorism to flourish, especially Al Shabab. Without a solid and long term strategy on the part of both local and international actors that prioritises the fight against terrorism and the stabilisation and development of the country from a local dimension, Somalia—a country whose economy is dependant on international aid— will not be able to avoid the population’s frustration towards the political authorities, the strengthening of tribes and Al Shabab’s re-emergence, thus perpetuating Somalia’s existential crisis.

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