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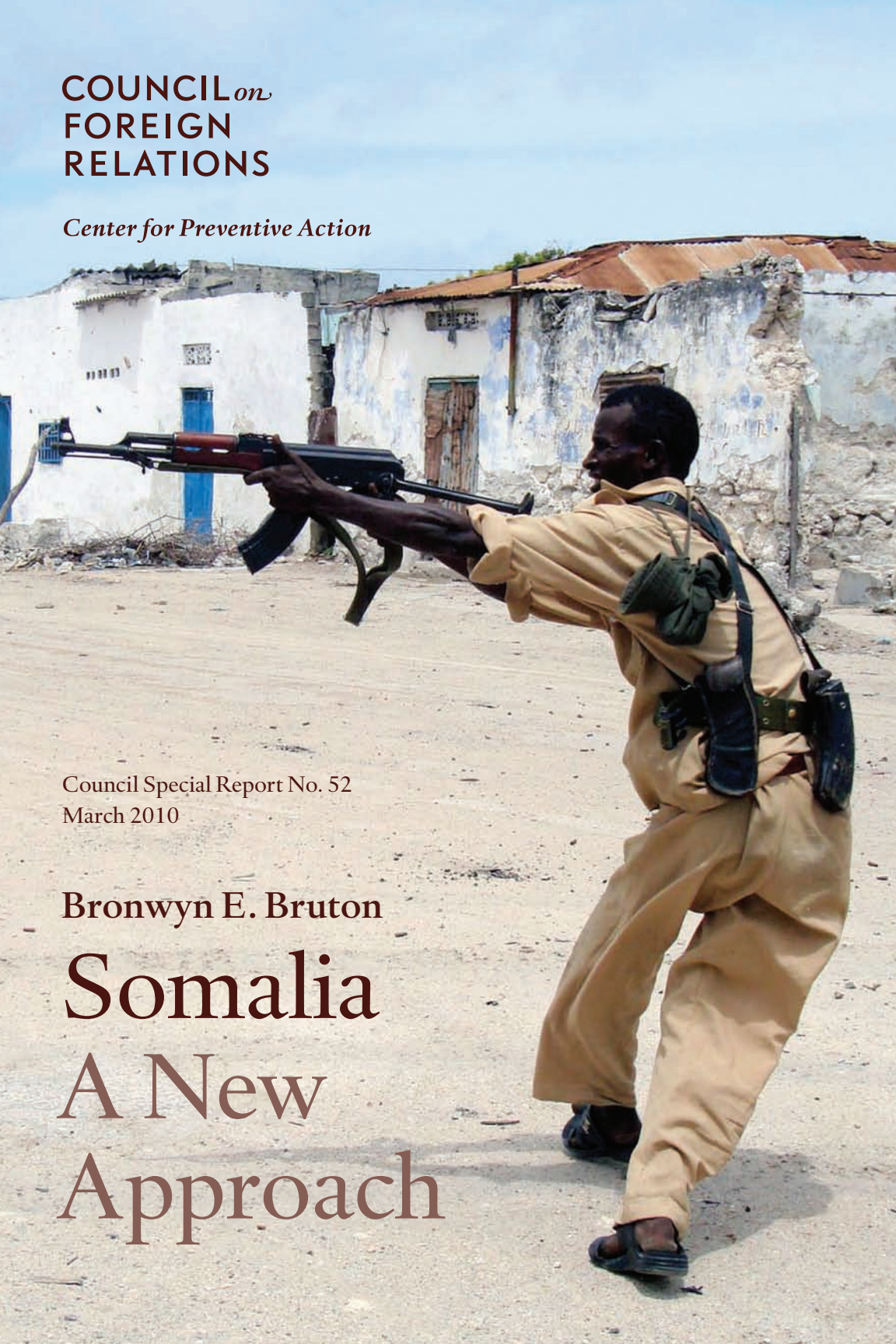

Council Special Report No. 52
March 2010

Bronwyn E. Bruton

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A New Approach

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Foreword

Even among failed states—those countries unable to exercise authority over their territory and provide the most basic services to their people—Somalia stands apart. A country of some nine million, it has lacked a central government since the fall of Mohamed Siad Barre's regime in 1991. Poverty and insecurity are endemic. Less than 40 percent of Somalis are literate, more than one in ten children dies before turning five, and a person born in Somalia today cannot assume with any confidence that he or she will reach the age of fifty.

Failed states provide fertile ground for terrorism, drug trafficking, and a host of other ills that threaten to spill beyond their borders. Somalia is thus a problem not just for Somalis but for the United States and the world. In particular, the specter of Somalia's providing a sanctuary for al-Qaeda has become an important concern, and piracy off Somalia's coast, which affects vital international shipping lanes, remains a menace.

In this Council Special Report, Bronwyn E. Bruton proposes a strategy to combat terrorism and promote development and stability in Somalia. She first outlines the recent political history involving the Transitional Federal Government (TFG) formed in 2004 and its Islamist opponents, chiefly the Shabaab, which has declared allegiance to al-Qaeda. She then analyzes U.S. interests in the country, including counterterrorism, piracy, and humanitarian concerns, as well as the prospect of broader regional instability.

Bruton argues that the current U.S. policy of supporting the TFG is proving ineffective and costly. The TFG is unable to improve security, deliver basic services, or move toward an agreement with Somalia's clans and opposition groups that would provide a stronger basis for governance. She also cites flaws in two alternative policies—a reinforced international military intervention to bolster the TFG or an offshore approach that seeks to contain terrorist threats with missiles and drones.

Instead, Bruton advances a strategy of "constructive disengagement." Notably, this calls for the United States to signal that it will accept an Islamist authority in Somalia—including the Shabaab—as long as it does not impede international humanitarian activities and refrains from both regional aggression and support for international jihad. As regards terrorism, the report recommends continued airstrikes to target al-Qaeda and other foreign terrorists while taking care to minimize civilian casualties. It argues for a decentralized approach to distributing U.S. foreign aid that works with existing local authorities and does not seek to build formal institutions. And the report counsels against an aggressive military response to piracy, making the case instead for initiatives to mobilize Somalis themselves against pirates.

Somalia: A New Approach takes on one of today's most vexing foreign policy challenges, offering concise analysis and thoughtful recommendations grounded in a realistic assessment of U.S. and international interests and capabilities. It is an important contribution to the debate over how to proceed in this most failed of states.

Richard N. Haass
President
Council on Foreign Relations
March 2010

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I am tremendously grateful to Paul B. Stares and Princeton N. Lyman for their extensive dedication to this Special Report. It was made possible by their patient stewardship and guidance. I am also thankful to CFR President Richard N. Haass and to Director of Studies James M. Lindsay, both for supporting the report and for extending my fellowship to allow for its completion. I thank CPA Research Associate Elise Vaughan for her advocacy, frankness, and cheerful moral support, and Patricia Dorff and Lia Norton for their thoughtful advice and editorial contributions to several different drafts. My sincere thanks also to Lisa Shields, Anya Schmemann, and Melinda C. Brouwer for their efforts to promote the report.

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Finally, I wish to thank my husband, Jason Friedman, who read and reread many drafts of this report, and never failed to provide his support.

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Bronwyn E. Bruton

Map

Source: UN Cartographic Section.

Acronyms

AMISOM	African Union Mission in Somalia
ARPCT	Alliance for the Restoration of Peace and Counter-terrorism
ARS-Djibouti	Djibouti Branch of the Alliance for the Reliberation of Somalia
ASWJ	al-Sunna wa'al Jamaa
AU	African Union
LDC	local development council
SCIC	Supreme Council of Islamic Courts
TFG	Transitional Federal Government
UIC	Union of Islamic Courts
UNDP	United Nations Development Program
USAID	United States Agency for International Development

Council Special Report

Introduction

Somalia has been a failed state for the better part of two decades; bereft of central government, cantonized into clan fiefdoms, and wracked by deadly spasms of violence. Repeated efforts to create a viable national government have failed.[1] For the United States, the principal concern, especially since 9/11, has been the fear that Somalia might become a safe haven for al-Qaeda to launch attacks in the region and even conceivably against the U.S. homeland. U.S. efforts to prevent that from happening, however, have been counterproductive, alienating large parts of the Somali population and polarizing Somalia's diverse Muslim community into "moderate" and "extremist" camps. Several indigenous militant Islamist groups have emerged and grown stronger in recent years. One coalition, headed by a radical youth militia known as the Shabaab, now controls most of southern Somalia and threatens the survival of the Transitional Federal Government (TFG)—the latest UN-brokered effort to establish a functioning authority in the capital city of Mogadishu.

The Obama administration has chosen to adopt and expand its predecessor's policy of providing limited, indirect diplomatic and military support to the TFG, in hopes it will provide a bulwark against militant Islamist forces in Somalia. In August 2009, Secretary of State Hillary Clinton met with the TFG president, Sheikh Sharif Sheikh Ahmed, and promised continued shipments of ammunition and diplomatic support, calling the government Somalia's best hope for stability. But the odds of the TFG emerging as an effective body are extremely poor. The government's writ extends to no more than a few blocks of Mogadishu, and its survival depends entirely on the protection provided by a weak African Union (AU) peacekeeping force (AMISOM). Although the TFG has the backing of some Somalis, it has failed to attract a critical mass of support. Indeed, the open blessing of the TFG by the United States and other Western countries has perversely served to isolate the

government and, at the same time, to propel cooperation among previously fractured and quarrelsome extremist groups.

Given the promises that the United States has made to support the TFG, one last attempt should be made to help it survive by drawing in the leaders of the principal Islamist groups, including even the Shabaab. Realistically, however, the TFG's prospects are dismal and thus the United States should concurrently review its policy options toward Somalia in the expectation that the TFG will either collapse or—equally disastrous for the United States—remain a marginal presence that is fundamentally incapable of countering the influence of extremist groups in Somalia.

Launching a new and, by definition, costly and prolonged nation-building/counterinsurgency campaign to destroy militant Islamist groups in Somalia and prevent al-Qaeda from establishing a safe haven is not the answer for the United States even if it were politically feasible. Given U.S. priorities in Afghanistan, Pakistan, and Iraq, to say nothing of various pressing domestic initiatives, there is no appetite for another hugely expensive military mission abroad. More to the point, such an effort would likely make matters worse given the harsh anti-Western sentiment permeating Somalia, and runs the real risk that greater U.S. involvement would only strengthen the position of the extremists and produce the outcome that we fear most.

An alternative option is to adopt a minimalist counterterrorist posture to deny al-Qaeda's potential use of Somalia as a training base and staging area to launch attacks in the region and beyond. That would be principally carried out by standoff military attacks using armed drones, cruise missiles, and, if required, occasional ground operations involving special forces. Other measures to isolate Somalia from outside support for terrorist operations and contain the growth of the Shabaab would also be employed. Putting aside whether such an option is operationally sustainable without accurate targeting intelligence that usually comes from nurturing local sources of information, such attacks would risk inciting further anti-American sentiment and increasing the support for al-Qaeda in Somalia and elsewhere in the Muslim world. Such an approach would also do nothing to improve the dire humanitarian situation in Somalia and could conceivably compromise ongoing Western-backed relief operations.

The United States needs to chart a different course—one that deliberately lessens American involvement in Somalia without giving up

on the objective of undermining the Shabaab and denying al-Qaeda a sanctuary. What can be termed "constructive disengagement" may appear to be a counterintuitive approach, but doing less is better than doing harm, and there are good reasons to believe that the results will be more successful. The Shabaab is an alliance of convenience and its hold over territory is weaker than it appears. Under the right conditions, it will fragment. Somali fundamentalists—whose ambitions are mostly local—are likely to break ranks with al-Qaeda and other foreign operatives as the utility of cooperation diminishes. The United States and its allies must encourage these fissures to expand. They can do that most quickly and easily by disengaging from any effort to pick a winner in Somalia, and by signaling a willingness to coexist with any Islamist group or government that emerges, as long as it refrains from acts of regional aggression, rejects global jihadi ambitions, and agrees to tolerate the efforts of Western humanitarian relief agencies in Somalia.

Over the long term, Somalia is likely to slowly return to its pre-2006 configuration of clan territories. As anti-Western sentiment subsides, the United States and its allies can then reengage to help resolve the deeper causes of state failure in Somalia. Rather than pursue centralized state-building and governance efforts, localized economic development initiatives should be encouraged. Simultaneously, regional and international partners should be enlisted to reduce simmering regional animosities, undermine the support for extremist groups, and address the piracy problem that has worsened on the margins of the larger Somalia conflict.

A strategy of constructive disengagement entails risk, but the alternatives are far more dangerous. Unless there is a decisive change in U.S., UN, and regional policy, ineffective external meddling threatens to prolong and worsen the conflict, further radicalize the population, and increase the odds that al-Qaeda and other extremist groups will eventually find a safe haven in Somalia.

Background

Somalia has been without a central government since the collapse of a decades-old military dictatorship in 1991. The bloody civil war that followed utterly destroyed what national governance structures remained, dividing Somalia into a patchwork of clan fiefdoms. Yet, contrary to the general perception of Somalia existing in a chronic state of violent anarchy, a number of loosely functional democratic administrative structures developed—mostly in the north, but also in pockets of the south. Certain economic ventures also began to flourish within the fiefdoms, particularly telecommunications and livestock export industries.[2] By the early 2000s, many of Somalia's economic development indicators were actually comparable to or better than those of neighboring countries.[3] Repeated attempts by the international community to unite Somalia under a viable national government nevertheless failed miserably, largely because of a persistent lack of political consensus in Somalia about the form that a national government should take, and about how to equitably manage the distribution of political power and resources among the country's fractious clans.

THE EVOLUTION OF U.S. POLICY IN SOMALIA

For almost a decade following the disastrous Black Hawk Down incident of 1993, U.S. policymakers effectively ignored Somalia. But after the 1998 embassy bombings in Kenya and Tanzania, and then 9/11, concerns that Somalia could become a safe haven for al-Qaeda quickly eclipsed any lingering humanitarian imperative. Since 2004, U.S. preoccupation with this terror threat has motivated broader international efforts to reconstruct a central government. Local resistance to these efforts has in turn sparked the reemergence and rise of indigenous jihadist groups in Somalia, potentially providing a new foothold for al-Qaeda.

The Transitional Federal Government was created in 2004 after two years of sputtering, internationally sponsored national reconciliation talks in Nairobi. Consisting of a loose coalition of Somali leaders who intended to lay the foundation for a national government over a five-year period, the TFG has never gained widespread local support and initially received only tepid backing from the international community, including the United States. For the first two years of its existence, the TFG effectively remained a government in exile, first in Nairobi, and then in the Somali city of Baidoa.

Despite its apparent stillbirth, the TFG's creation produced a violent counterreaction in Mogadishu, where a radical youth militia group—the Shabaab—developed and began assassinating TFG members and supporters. The emergence of an indigenous extremist group after years of dormancy alarmed U.S. intelligence operatives, who attempted to counter the increased threat by mobilizing a coalition of Somali militia leaders to capture suspected al-Qaeda operatives believed to be hiding in Somalia. In February 2006, these militia leaders formed a disastrously public partnership called the Alliance for the Restoration of Peace and Counterterrorism (ARPCT). The Central Intelligence Agency's involvement was hard to hide, and ARPCT's creation caused a popular revolt. With broad support from the public, clan leaders, Mogadishu's business community, and a preexisting network of sharia courts (known collectively as the Union of Islamic Courts, or UIC) banded together and, after a four-month battle in Mogadishu, handily defeated the ARPCT on June 5, 2006. The governing coalition that emerged from this victory named itself the Supreme Council of Islamic Courts (SCIC).

The SCIC's rise to power owed more to happenstance than to strategy. It depended on a rare confluence of factors: the growing influence of the sharia courts as a rudimentary source of law and order, the business community's willingness to invest in public security, and the clan-based backlash against international counterterror and state-building efforts. But the SCIC ably capitalized on its military advantage and on the population's eagerness for peace to expel the warlords that had balkanized Mogadishu for more than a decade. The subsequent restoration of order generated nationwide enthusiasm, and the UIC governance model was rapidly duplicated across southern Somalia.

Though bewildered by the rise of an apparently effective grassroots governance movement in Somalia, U.S. policymakers were, to their

credit, quick to recognize the popular legitimacy of the SCIC and initially pushed for a power-sharing arrangement with the TFG. But the SCIC, convinced of its political and military advantage, was reluctant to concede to such an arrangement with the dysfunctional and politically isolated TFG, and the TFG, confident of Western backing, was equally unwilling to negotiate. Over the next few months, the rapid rise of extremist elements within the broad SCIC umbrella movement put additional strains on negotiations.[4] It quickly appeared that the radical Shabaab militia, then acting as the military arm of the SCIC, had seized control of policy. A series of unpopular, harsh pronouncements banned foreign films, music, political gatherings, and use of the popular stimulant *qat*, while markedly increasing taxes on the business community. Worse still, the SCIC's vocal revival of irredentist claims on neighboring Kenya and Ethiopia posed a potential threat to regional stability.

The extent to which the broad SCIC leadership actually condoned these measures is unclear, but the actions certainly exacerbated U.S. fears and sent shock waves through the Somali public. Dissatisfaction grew and the SCIC movement began to appear vulnerable to collapse. At the same time, SCIC aggression toward the TFG accelerated and further alarmed U.S. officials. In December 2006, just as the SCIC advanced on the seat of the federal government itself, Ethiopia invaded Somalia with the tacit support of and, most likely, operational help from the United States. Ethiopian forces quickly overwhelmed the SCIC, killing hundreds of Somali youth in a single battle on the open ground outside the town of Baidoa. Abandoned by the public, the SCIC surrendered Mogadishu to the Ethiopian army and its leaders fled across Somalia. The TFG subsequently relocated to the capital and a new, more brutal phase in the Somali conflict began.

ETHIOPIAN OCCUPATION

The presence of the TFG and especially of Ethiopian troops sparked a complex insurgency in Mogadishu. The Shabaab militia started to gain popular backing as a resistance movement. Foreign jihadists, including al-Qaeda, sensed an unprecedented opportunity to globalize Somalia's conflict and quickly funneled support to the Shabaab. Several dozen foreign jihadists also entered Somalia, importing al-Qaeda tactics.[5] Remote-controlled detonations and suicide bombings became

relatively common, and over the course of two years, the Shabaab captured most of southern Somalia.

From the beginning, the United States was viewed as a not-so-hidden partner of Ethiopia. Besides its public support for the Ethiopian invasion, the United States launched a series of missile attacks on fleeing SCIC leaders in January 2007. The missiles failed to hit their targets, but caused scores of civilian casualties, and inextricably linked the United States to Ethiopia's occupation and subsequent human rights abuses by the TFG, Ethiopian, and African Union forces. These abuses included rape, kidnapping, mortar fire on civilian hospitals and media houses, and indiscriminate shelling of civilian crowds in response to insurgent attacks.[6] During the two years of Ethiopia's occupation, Mogadishu was reduced to a level of human suffering, violence, and disorder unknown since the civil war, and anti-American sentiment rose to an all-time high. Outrage over the Ethiopian occupation prompted members of the far-flung Somali diaspora, including twenty youths from Minnesota, to return to their homeland to fight for the Shabaab. One of these individuals, Shirwa Ahmed, became the first known American suicide bomber in October 2008. These incidents are isolated, but for the first time have raised the specter of a homegrown radicalization problem in the United States.

RENEWED INTERNATIONAL ENGAGEMENT

In January 2009, Ethiopia withdrew its troops from Mogadishu. The futility of supporting the TFG had become evident, and the costs of confronting the growing Islamist insurgency in Mogadishu had become unsustainable. Fearing a security vacuum, both the UN Political Office in Somalia and the U.S. Department of State actively pushed for the creation of AMISOM, and then, when an adequate number of troops failed to materialize, for the deployment of a UN peacekeeping force to replace the departing Ethiopian troops. A global shortage of willing troop contributors eventually led to a renewed focus on diplomacy.

Fortunately, the removal of Ethiopian troops provided enhanced opportunities for negotiation with one faction of the Islamist reform movement, the Djibouti branch of the Alliance for the Reliberation of Somalia (ARS-Djibouti).[7] The merger of the ARS-Djibouti with the all-but-defunct TFG on January 26, 2009, was hailed by the UN as the

creation of a national unity government and crowds of Somalis demonstrated joyfully in the streets of Mogadishu. The international community had little choice but to swallow its misgivings about the nomination of a former SCIC leader, Sheikh Sharif Sheikh Ahmed, to the presidency and to throw its support behind the revamped TFG.

In the months immediately following Sheikh Sharif's election, there was widespread optimism that the TFG would draw radical factions into the peace process—but those hopes rapidly proved illusory. Although Sheikh Sharif has attempted to create an Islamist identity for the TFG by promising to adopt sharia, he has been rejected as a Western proxy by the principal Islamist factions in Somalia. The TFG has also failed to generate a visible constituency of clan or business supporters in Mogadishu. Its survival now depends wholly on the presence of AMISOM forces, which further reinforces the perception that the TFG is a foreign implant.

THE ARMED ISLAMIST OPPOSITION

The Bush administration's characterization of the Somali conflict as a new front in the war on terror recast a local, decades-long conflict as an ideological battle between secular democracy and Islam, between moderates and extremists. These blunt categories blurred important differences in tactics and ideology, and severely undermined the capacity of U.S. and other international representatives to relate to the Somali public. Worse, it has allowed the Shabaab to unify an otherwise diverse array of actors into an armed opposition.

The desire to expel the peacekeepers and unseat the TFG has provided a powerful motive for cooperation between the Shabaab and its would-be rival, a fundamentalist nationalist group called Hizbul Islam (the Islamic Party). But the Shabaab's alliance with Hizbul Islam is riddled with disagreements over ideology and tactics. Itself an alliance of convenience between four clan-based Islamist factions, Hizbul Islam is fronted by Sheikh Hassan Dahir Aweys.[8] He is high on the U.S. list of wanted terrorist suspects, but is perceived by many Somalis to hold a nationalist rather than a Wahabist ideology.[9] Since his return to Mogadishu in April 2009 after a two-year exile in Eritrea, Sheikh Aweys has publicly criticized Osama bin Laden's interference in Somalia, and though he has called for violent resistance to AMISOM, he has

frequently condemned intra-Somali violence, including attempts to assassinate members of the TFG. Aweys and his deputy, Sheikh Hassan Turki, have sought to maintain Hizbul Islam's tactical alliance with the Shabaab, but the two groups have battled for control of the port town of Kismayo (and its bountiful revenues) and for ascendancy within Somalia's Islamist movement. An eventual confrontation to establish dominance over Mogadishu seems inevitable—and is postponed only by a more urgent desire to expel AMISOM and to unseat the TFG.

Although the Shabaab has a greater military capacity than Hizbul Islam or the TFG, its control of most southern Somali territory is tenuous. Before capturing a territory, the Shabaab typically engages in an extensive public relations effort, featuring public rallies and radio announcements, and ending in a voluntary reception of Shabaab leaders by clan elders, who retain significant power. The Shabaab is also adept at exploiting long-standing clan conflicts, usually by providing guns and ammunition to minority clan factions, rendering the majority clan more vulnerable and less able to protest the Shabaab's occupation. Although that shows an impressive strategic capacity to capitalize on local conflicts, the Shabaab has often overplayed its hand and been met with violent resistance on all sides.

In the central Galguduud region, for example, shared resistance to the Shabaab has resulted in an alliance of convenience between previously rival clan and business factions. The alliance is frequently characterized as a moderate Islamist movement because it has adopted the banner of al-Sunna wa'al Jamaa (ASWJ), an umbrella organization representing the practice of Sufi Islam in Somalia. Formerly apolitical and with no inherent military capability, ASWJ has nevertheless managed to break the Shabaab's hold on the Galgaduud and Hiran regions, in large part by accepting financial and logistical support from the Ethiopian army. ASWJ has formed a forty-one-member parliament and is attempting to position itself as a successor to the TFG, but its ties to Ethiopia will likely undermine the group's capacity to generate a national political constituency. In the meantime, however, ASWJ has capitalized on the widespread public disgust generated by the Shabaab's use of intimidation tactics, including public beheading and stoning. And resistance to the Shabaab has not been restricted to the central region. Another moderate Islamist effort to form a semiautonomous state in southern Somalia is under way in the Gedo, Bay and Bakol, Lower and Middle Juba, and Middle Shabelle regions.

The Shabaab, therefore, faces significant and growing resistance from clan and moderate Islamist groups. The movement is also internally fractured along both ideological and clan lines. The Shabaab's radical leadership is believed to be concentrated along the southern coast, primarily in the port city of Kismayo. These leaders—Abdi Godane ("Sheikh Mokhar Abu-Zubeyr"), Ibrahim Haji Jama ("al-Afghani"), and Fuad Mohamed Khalaf ("Fu'ad Shangole")—have known connections to international jihadist groups and are committed to the Salafi-Wahabist strand of Islam. Access to extensive resources and support from the Middle East (and allegedly Eritrea, though these claims have been poorly substantiated) has allowed these Shabaab leaders to develop an unusual degree of centralized control over several mixed-clan militia groups. The size of these militias is probably only in the hundreds, but their capacity has been enhanced by the presence of foreign experts who provide training in insurgent tactics, including the use of explosive devices and the Wahabi ideology.[10]

The mixed-clan militias, with their disciplined, indoctrinated fighters—some of them foreigners from the United States, Australia, Denmark, Yemen, and Afghanistan, among other countries—represent only a fraction of the Shabaab forces. Most Shabaab fighters are illiterate neighborhood youths, some of them recruited at gunpoint, prone to defection, and possessed of little military training. Many more of the recruits have been opportunistically drawn to the Shabaab from Somalia's many clan and bandit militia factions. A Shabaab-held neighborhood in Mogadishu, for example, may host as many as seven separate militia factions, all of whom identify themselves as Shabaab, but nevertheless compete violently against one another for taxes and territory. The ability of the central Shabaab leadership to exercise command and control of these factions is limited. Indeed, rather than rejecting all Western influence in Somalia, the majority of Shabaab factions have actively cooperated with Western humanitarian relief efforts (if only for a fee). Likewise, a number of Shabaab factions have publicly denied any involvement in terrorist activities or banditry. A major Shabaab leader and U.S.-designated terror suspect, Muktar Robow (also known as Abu Mansoor), has publicly dissented from the Shabaab's strategy of imposing a harsh sharia law on Somalia. He has called instead for the adoption of pragmatic, nationalist strategies that are more in keeping with Somali social custom. Other fighters and militia leaders have been alienated by the Shabaab's deference to

foreign tactics and leaders, particularly in the wake of the December 3, 2009, suicide attack, which killed twenty-four people and destroyed the first medical graduation to be held in Somalia in two decades. The attack provoked unprecedented outrage among Somalis, and it was blamed on "foreigners" within the Shabaab.

The capacity of relatively middle-ground Islamist leaders such as Robow and Hassan Turki to influence Shabaab policy is limited. Although they often represent strong local constituencies, they are neither radical nor moderate enough to attract external financial backing, and they are easily held hostage to the demands of the Shabaab's better-funded radical leadership. Robow's recent promise to send troops to support the Islamist insurgency in Yemen has been taken by many experts as a proof of his vulnerability. The ability of the Shabaab's most radical leaders to dictate policy, however, may backfire. The Shabaab's increasing reliance on foreigners, and its declared commitment to the global jihad, has alienated both its rank-and-file fighters and the broader Somali public.

THE MILITARY STALEMATE

The TFG's capacity to attract and retain fighters in its ranks depends on its ability to pay troops as well as or better than the Shabaab. The international community has been largely unable to assist the TFG in providing stipends to troops. The TFG police and armed forces are essentially independent paramilitaries operating under the control of various warlords affiliated with the government, and they have been implicated in rape, robbery, kidnapping, murder, and the indiscriminate killing of civilians during combat operations. These abuses, coupled with the widespread theft of international funds, forced the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) to halt the payment of police stipends in 2008, causing a rash of defections. Until these human rights and accountability problems are resolved, the TFG will remain an inefficient vehicle for international security assistance.

An international donor's conference in Brussels on April 26, 2009, resulted in pledges of $213 million to support the TFG and AMISOM. Less than a third of the funding has been delivered, and efforts to create a unified army from the remnants of the TFG and UIC militias have made little progress. A recruitment effort in May 2009 drew in twenty thousand potential troops, but fifteen thousand failed to report, and

the remaining five thousand have mostly deserted. Credible estimates now place the total number of gunmen reliably on the government side at only a few thousand.[11] U.S. efforts to supply TFG forces with ammunition have been equally fruitless. Despite receiving approximately eighty tons of small arms and ammunition from the United States since May 2009, the TFG has not managed to expand its territory in Mogadishu.[12] The price of AK-47 bullets in Mogadishu's main arms market has also dropped sharply, from sixty-seven cents to thirty cents a bullet. That suggests that at least some of the U.S.-supplied ammunition has, as feared, found its way onto the black market. Reports of TFG and peacekeeping troops selling their weapons to the Shabaab are rampant. And in July 2009, a pair of French security advisers sent to train the TFG forces were kidnapped and handed over to extremists—apparently by renegade members of the TFG police.[13] The lack of loyalty and accountability among TFG forces are likely to fatally undermine efforts to build a national army for Somalia.

U.S. Interests and Options

Since 9/11, U.S. interest in Somalia has been driven primarily by the fear that it could become a safe haven for al-Qaeda and affiliated organizations to plan and stage attacks against targets in the region and ultimately the U.S. homeland. Related but secondary interests derive from the potential for the conflict in Somalia to destabilize adjoining areas in the strategically important Horn of Africa region and to create an even larger humanitarian crisis. More recently, the threat posed by Somali pirates to the vital sea lanes of communication through the Gulf of Aden has added a third dimension to U.S. concerns about Somalia.

SOMALIA AS TERRORIST SAFE HAVEN

As recently as early 2007, U.S. intelligence assessed Somalia's culture and unpredictable operating environment to be fundamentally inhospitable to foreign terrorist groups such as al-Qaeda.[14] But following the Ethiopian invasion and the rise of the Shabaab, there is growing evidence that al-Qaeda operatives have made new inroads in Somalia. A string of five near-simultaneous suicide bombings in the territories of Somaliland and Puntland—two semiautonomous regions of Somalia—in October 2008 were likely the result of al-Qaeda providing tactical advice to the Shabaab. Somalia is now suspected of hosting several hundred foreign jihadists, including Fazul Abdullah, al-Qaeda's top East African operative, and a handful of American Somalis recruited from the Minnesota and Seattle diasporas. The Shabaab's recruitment of diaspora youth has raised concern that these individuals could use their foreign citizenship to form al-Qaeda sleeper cells in the United States, Australia, and Europe. In August 2009, Melbourne authorities arrested a group of terrorists, including two members of the Somali

diaspora, in the midst of preparations for what might have been a devastating suicide attack on Australian military personnel. More recently, similarities between a failed airline bombing attempt on November 11, 2009, at Mogadishu's airport and the Christmas Day attack on Northwest Flight 253 to Detroit have raised new concerns about the potential for collaboration between al-Qaeda affiliates in Yemen, Nigeria, and Somalia. The Shabaab's formal declaration of allegiance to al-Qaeda on February 2, 2010, will further heighten fears that the group may lend its fighters and its territory to further the global jihad.

To date, however, there is no clear evidence of Somalia being used by al-Qaeda or other transnational terrorist groups as an operational platform to carry out attacks beyond its borders. And while the Shabaab has expressed a rhetorical commitment to al-Qaeda, and has been designated a foreign terrorist organization by the United States, there's little to indicate that the group shares al-Qaeda's larger transnational goals. The Shabaab's promises to send fighters to Yemen and to launch retaliatory attacks on Kenya, Uganda, Djibouti, and Ethiopia are, if taken at face value, worrying indications of its willingness to extend its jihad beyond Somalia's borders. But the threats have so far proven empty, and it is equally plausible that the Shabaab's cooperation with al-Qaeda is a short-term tactical arrangement that will be abandoned as its utility decreases. The presence of foreign jihadists will ultimately impede the Shabaab's ambition to govern Somalia. As noted earlier, the Shabaab has already been condemned by many Somalis as an alien movement promoting unwelcome foreign interests. Previous attempts by jihadist groups to govern Somalia have foundered against the Somalis' hostility to restrictive, non-Somali religious edicts and the inability of foreigners to operate within the clan system. During the 1990s, an al-Qaeda-linked group called al-Ittihad controlled a significant portion of southern Somalia, but quickly faced resistance and became defunct—without any intervention by the United States.

PREVENTING REGIONAL INSTABILITY

The potential for the Somali conflict to ignite a wider regional conflict is real but should not be exaggerated. The greatest danger stems from a potential escalation of the long-standing conflict between Ethiopia and

Eritrea. Their border dispute in the late 1990s exploded into a full-scale war that killed tens of thousands. A cease-fire has held since 2000, but both sides have continued their dispute through proxy warfare. Ethiopia has supported Eritrean insurgents in their efforts to undermine the Asmara regime, and Eritrea has supported secessionists in Ethiopia's Ogaden region. Eritrea is also widely suspected of supplying weapons and funding to the Shabaab—though Eritrea has loudly denied these claims. Eritrea has consistently condemned the international community's failure to enforce the ruling of an independent border commission on the demarcation of its border with Ethiopia. Until the border dispute is effectively resolved, efforts to disrupt the flow of arms to radical groups in Somalia will be stalemated.

The northern Somali territories of Somaliland and Puntland are another potential source of instability. Somalilanders crave international recognition of the territory as an independent nation, but it appears that a substantial majority of southern Somalis desire reunification, or at least the perpetuation of a confederal system. The Somalilanders' commitment to independence is a stumbling block to international efforts to establish a central government for Somalia, and in consequence, the Somalilanders have been continually excluded from internationally led reconciliation efforts. The TFG, though theoretically federal, has no authority over Somaliland or the neighboring northern territory of Puntland. The border between Somaliland and Puntland is disputed, and the territories are engaged in a low-level conflict that could escalate unpredictably.

U.S. policy on Somaliland and Puntland has been inconsistent. Both territories have established semi-functional governments, but the United States has emphatically refused to grant them formal diplomatic recognition. Both regimes have nevertheless received some capacity-building support from U.S. development agencies. Western naval forces have handed pirates over to the custody of Puntland authorities, and Somaliland police forces have received counterterror training from American specialists.

Somaliland and Puntland are bulwarks against the spread of radical ideologies, but both territories are under increasing threat from the Shabaab. A coherent policy for protecting Somaliland and Puntland from Shabaab attacks, for engaging the territories as partners in stabilization and counterradicalization efforts, is urgently required.

HUMANITARIAN CONCERNS

The Ethiopian invasion, the insurgency, and a persistent drought have aggravated the humanitarian crisis, pushing Somalia to the edge of famine. Some 3.8 million Somalis require food assistance (one-third to one-half of the total population), approximately 1.6 million are internally displaced, and some five hundred thousand are refugees.[15] The delivery of humanitarian relief is threatened not only by piracy, but also by the escalating violence on land. Southern Somalia presents one of the most dangerous environments in the world to deliver aid, with thirty-five humanitarian relief workers killed in 2008 alone. Humanitarian efforts have been further endangered by a local tendency to conflate the relief effort with unpopular international counterterror operations and support to the TFG.

THE PIRACY THREAT

The emergence of strong pirate networks in the central and northeast regions of Somalia has become a significant threat to the international shipping industry and potentially to local stability. The International Maritime Bureau reports that the number and range of pirate attacks have escalated rapidly, from ten in 2006 to thirty-one in 2007 to 111 in 2008, albeit still a tiny fraction of the twenty-two thousand vessels that traffic the Gulf every year.[16] A well-coordinated international naval response has done little to deter the attacks, which rose to 214 in 2009. The U.S. Naval Forces Central Command's Combined Task Force 151, the European Union's Operation Atalanta, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization's Operation Allied Protector, and independent national navies currently have some thirty ships patrolling the Gulf of Aden. The only good news is that, though the rate of attacks has accelerated, recent measures taken by the shipping industry to beef up on-board security measures have been rewarded with a decrease in the capture rate.

U.S. POLICY OPTIONS

U.S. policy options for Somalia are typically reduced to three alternative courses of action: continuation of current policy, increased military

intervention for stabilization and reconstruction, and an offshore counterterrorist containment strategy. Each of these options, however, suffers from significant shortcomings. A better course of action for the United States is to pursue a policy of constructive disengagement.

CONTINUE CURRENT POLICY

The current policy of providing military and diplomatic support to the TFG is, for the reasons discussed earlier, not bearing fruit. It is also extremely costly. The military stalemate that has held since May 7, 2009, has displaced more than two hundred thousand people from Mogadishu—prolonging a cycle of suffering and radicalization and adding to an already horrendous refugee problem on the Kenyan border. That is a terribly high price to pay for protecting a government that commands little support on the ground, administers no territory, and has, despite the efforts of the international community over the past five years, developed no institutional or military capacity to govern the country. Without supportive political momentum on the ground, the current peacekeeping mission is likely to be as futile as the Ethiopian invasion, and may end in the same way, with an embarrassing withdrawal of troops.

The United States and its allies continue to hope that Sheikh Sharif will be able to cobble together a grassroots clan and religious constituency for the TFG, but the window of opportunity is closing fast if it hasn't already closed. TFG efforts to improve the security situation in Mogadishu, provide services to the population, and engage an inclusive array of clan actors—efforts that are vital to promoting the TFG's legitimacy—have been abandoned in the face of escalating Shabaab assaults. Sheikh Sharif has increasingly devoted his efforts to lobbying the international community for increased military assistance.

In the months following his appointment to the presidency, Sheikh Sharif made sincere efforts to draw the armed Islamist opposition into dialogue. His efforts were roundly rejected by the Shabaab. Sheikh Hassan Dahir Aweys's decision to ally Hizbul Islam to the Shabaab has further undermined the likelihood of a political settlement. Neither Hizbul Islam nor the Shabaab has any evident incentive to cut a deal with the TFG, whose efforts to govern can be indefinitely spoiled by mortar and suicide attacks. The longer the TFG remains ineffective, the more public dissatisfaction with the institution will rise; and the

ongoing conflict and displacement will assist in further radicalizing the public.

In the worst-case scenario, an increasing number of casualties may ultimately compel AMISOM to withdraw its forces. In the wake of the September 14, 2009, U.S. counterterror strike that killed al-Qaeda operative Saleh Ali Saleh Nabhan, the Shabaab managed to launch a retaliatory suicide attack in the heart of the AMISOM compound, killing more than twenty people, including the Burundian force commander. Though AMISOM appears committed to remaining in Somalia, the incident resulted in forceful demands by Burundi's political opposition to immediately repatriate the Burundian troop contingent from AMISOM, which they called a suicide mission. Worse, African commentators have loudly noted the hypocrisy of fielding African soldiers into a theater that is considered too hopeless and formidable for Western forces. Unless a more supportive political framework emerges—which currently looks unlikely—AMISOM will be ineffective and ultimately unsustainable.

INCREASED MILITARY INTERVENTION

The United States could pressure the African Union and the UN to augment the current AMISOM force to prevent the fall of the TFG and provide it with more time to garner wider political support in Somalia. Judging from recent experience, however, the increase in troop strength would need to be significant to have any impact. At the height of its occupation of Mogadishu in 2008, the Ethiopian army controlled six to eight battalions of highly trained troops and as many as ten battalions of Somali troops trained in Ethiopia. It also funded approximately fifteen hundred militiamen belonging to various Somali warlords. Along with the African Union peacekeeping troops, the total number of soldiers and paramilitaries on the government side was in the neighborhood of fifteen thousand men. The Ethiopian battalions were also of significantly higher caliber than the current AMISOM force, and they still failed to stem the Shabaab insurgency. Given that the Shabaab's military capability is stronger, not weaker, than it was in 2008, a March 2009 estimate by the UN's Department of Peacekeeping Operations that 22,500 troops would be required is probably correct.

Even if the AU or the UN were to assemble and deploy such a force, which is highly doubtful given other peacekeeping commitments and

general capacity shortfalls, recent experience also suggests that the presence of a large contingent of foreign troops would be resented by the Somali population and, moreover, fiercely resisted by the various armed clans and factions. Rather than helping the TFG broaden its support base, the effect could be to marginalize it even further.

A much larger stabilization force capable of suppressing resistance, holding territory, and providing security for a more ambitious reconstruction effort is imaginable but even more unrealistic. The rule of thumb for the number of troops required for stability operations in an environment where the population is largely acquiescent is between five to ten soldiers per thousand people; in a nonpermissive environment the requirement jumps to twenty soldiers per thousand. Somalia's population is not reliably known but is believed to be around nine million, which suggests a total occupying force of at least one hundred thousand to account for varying security conditions. For the United States, not to mention other potential partners, the deployment of such a force at this time given ongoing commitments in the Middle East and Afghanistan would be extremely challenging. More to the point, domestic U.S. politics precludes even trying. Public sentiment is already souring on comparable efforts in Afghanistan, and with memories of earlier failed U.S. interventions in Somalia still much alive, there will be little or no support for undertaking such a venture. The situation is no different in other potential troop supplying countries.

OFFSHORE CONTAINMENT

Rather than try to support a political process in Somalia, the United States could narrow its policy objective to simply containing the terrorist threat from outside its borders. That goal could be pursued in several complementary ways. One would be to forcefully suppress any signs of an al-Qaeda operational presence in Somalia through the use of armed drones, cruise missiles, and airpower. Known leaders and operatives would be selectively attacked as occurred in September 2009 with the alleged perpetrators of the 1998 al-Qaeda attacks on U.S. embassies in Kenya and Tanzania. Increased efforts would also be taken to interdict the supply of money and arms in and out of Somalia. Collectively, the goal of this campaign would be to make Somalia as inhospitable as possible to al-Qaeda. In addition, the United States could use similar military tactics to counter the threat posed by the Shabaab and other

militant groups. Arms and other military assistance could be supplied to competing groups inside Somalia to prevent the Shabaab from getting the upper hand.

A similar offshore containment strategy has been proposed for Afghanistan, and it offers the prospect of minimal U.S. military engagement to satisfy core security objectives. That approach, however, is subject to some of the criticisms that have been leveled in the Afghan context. First, discriminating military attacks are difficult to accomplish without good information from local sources, which is difficult to obtain without sympathetic informants that usually come only with some presence on the ground. Second, countering the influence of the Shabaab with its highly decentralized command system is likely to be difficult with selective attacks. The likelihood of collateral damage, moreover, also risks inflaming anti-American sentiment and driving even more recruits into the arms of the Shabaab and al-Qaeda. Third, such a strategy would do little to improve the humanitarian situation inside Somalia and could conceivably worsen it by compromising Western-backed relief operations.

Recommendations

The Obama administration is focused on the threat of Somalia becoming a safe haven for al-Qaeda. Preoccupation with the terror threat will continue to trump all other concerns and will continue to limit the range of policy options under consideration.

Any effective counterterror strategy must be guided by a realistic assessment of what the United States and the larger international community can actually accomplish in the short term. A wide range of Islamist actors are now entrenched in a position of open hostility toward U.S. and UN efforts to influence Somali political outcomes. At the same time, there are no indications that the TFG is capable of developing the administrative capacity, internal coherence, or broad political constituency necessary to govern Somalia. The TFG's political isolation has also rendered it increasingly unable to provide political cover for AMISOM, which is now widely viewed as a combatant in the conflict rather than as a neutral peacekeeping force. And neither the TFG nor AMISOM is capable of containing either the Shabaab's expansion or the formation of al-Qaeda cells in Somalia.

Secretary Clinton's recent and strongly worded promises to the TFG, coupled with the possibility that the TFG's collapse would unravel the UN's regional mediation efforts, make an immediate policy reversal on support for the TFG unlikely. Given the continued support for the TFG among regional and European governments, U.S. abandonment of the TFG may not in any case be decisive. But any future support should be explicitly conditioned on progress.

In the absence of a decisive event—such as the involuntary withdrawal of AMISOM or the resignation of Sheikh Sharif—the United States should work with the African Union and the UN to promote reform of the TFG's structures to allow it to become a more inclusive governing mechanism. By insisting that the TFG play the role of gatekeeper to any dialogue between the armed Islamist opposition and the

international community, the UN has effectively drawn a line in the sand, but it is the TFG rather than the Shabaab that has been effectively isolated. A stalemate works to the radicals' advantage, and senior Islamist leaders have no incentive to enter into a negotiation framework that requires them to bargain from a position of weakness.[17]

The African Union and the United Nations should attempt to remove that barrier to entry by reconfiguring the TFG. The use of a presidential model in a country fractured along clan lines, and lacking any credible national leaders over the past thirty years, should be abandoned. Instead, the TFG should be quickly reorganized under a technocratic prime minister, and should consist of a council of leaders, including Sheikh Sharif. The council of leaders should replace the TFG parliament, which is not only based on an ethnic quota system (known as the 4.5 formula) that is fundamentally undemocratic but also has become ineffective with a paralyzing 550 members, most of whom reside outside the country. Over the long term—if it survives—the council could work to provide Somali communities with the right to nominate their own parliamentary representatives. In the short term, however, the TFG's incapacity to govern must be explicitly recognized. The TFG must be perceived as a vehicle for dialogue, rather than as a threat to the existing distribution of territorial control. To achieve that end, international military support intended to increase the TFG's territory—including ammunition and weapons supply—must also cease.

If fundamentalist and radical actors are given the capacity to interact with the TFG and the international community directly and on an equal footing, the likelihood of a political settlement will increase, and the TFG may succeed in isolating transnational terrorists currently hiding within the Shabaab. However, success would breed new challenges: there is a strong possibility that fundamentalists would succeed in co-opting an inclusive TFG, as they succeeded in capturing the Supreme Council of Islamic Courts; and it is uncertain that regional actors, particularly Ethiopia, would tolerate a Somali government composed mostly of reformed radicals. But any government that emerges in Somalia will face these challenges.

Given the unlikelihood that even that approach will help build local support for the TFG, the United States should expect that efforts to reform the TFG will likely fail and should simultaneously prepare for its demise and the eventual withdrawal of AMISOM forces. Contrary to what might conceivably be imagined, that outcome is not likely to

make a substantial difference. The TFG is already so weak that collapse would only marginally enhance the Shabaab's operational capacity. The Shabaab's sustained control of multiple port cities—including Kismayo, Marka, Hobyo, and Haraardheere—has already allowed the movement to import funds and fighters, establish training camps, and capture most of southern Somalia's territory. A more serious concern is that a Shabaab capture of Mogadishu could embarrass the international community and the Obama administration in particular.[18] Possession of Mogadishu's port could make it somewhat easier for the Shabaab to import fighters, funds, and weapons into Somalia, and, in a worst-case scenario, the international community might find it necessary to establish a naval blockade of the port to prevent the inflow of foreign materials. The international community would also have to navigate the continued delivery of humanitarian supplies through negotiations with the Shabaab and with the Abgal clan businessmen who currently control the port's operations (and who might mount a local challenge to an attempted Shabaab seizure of the port's revenues). But the contest between the Shabaab and more moderate Islamist and clan voices is increasingly playing out in Somalia's interior and border regions, and the capture of the few remaining blocks of Mogadishu will not dramatically increase the likelihood that al-Qaeda will be able to find a foothold in Somalia.

Before the TFG collapses, the Obama administration must prepare a new approach to Somalia, one that draws on the lessons of past failures but also accepts the limited appetite that the United States and international community have for launching any major new undertaking. Given these realities, the United States should adopt a policy of constructive disengagement—a modified containment strategy that would involve a restrained counterterrorist military component, increased efforts to contain arms or other forms of outside support to the Shabaab and minimize regional instability, and internal actions to help develop alternatives to Shabaab control.

ADOPT A POPULATION-CENTERED APPROACH TO COUNTERTERROR STRATEGY

The United States must be prepared to use military force against al-Qaeda and other foreign operatives in Somalia. It is vital that these

operations be conducted with restraint and sensitivity to the larger political context. In keeping with the shift in U.S. counterterrorism doctrine toward protecting local populations, future operations in Somalia must be conducted with extreme care to avoid the civilian casualties that undermine other political and development objectives.

Under the Bush administration, the use of airstrikes against al-Qaeda targets resulted in heavy collateral damage and outraged the local population. The Obama administration's approach promises to be more fruitful. The U.S. Navy's September 14, 2009, strike against Saleh Ali Saleh Nabhan, a top East Africa al-Qaeda operative, could provide a blueprint for future military counterterror operations in Somalia. In the precision strike, which was preceded by extensive surveillance, several navy helicopters swept in and attacked Nabhan while he was in transit through an isolated rural area, thus reducing the likelihood of civilian casualties and a popular backlash against the attack.[19] Indeed, in the absence of civilian casualties, the Somali public barely seemed to register the assault. If the Obama administration is careful to avoid collateral damage, it might be able to eliminate foreign al-Qaeda targets without undermining important political objectives in Somalia.

ENCOURAGE DISAGGREGATION OF RADICAL MOVEMENTS BY ADOPTING A POSITION OF NEUTRALITY

The Shabaab has capitalized on the United States' too-generic categorization of Somali Islamists as extremists, and on the presence of African Union troops in Somalia, to unify an otherwise diverse array of actors on its side of the divide. At the same time, U.S. attempts to isolate the Shabaab as a terrorist organization conflict with the reality on the ground, where humanitarian actors engage daily with Shabaab leaders in order to deliver vital relief to the suffering Somali population. U.S. agencies have begun to fear prosecution for providing food to Shabaab-controlled territories, and they have suspended funds for humanitarian relief. The humanitarian pipeline has been broken, and the reduction in aid will both worsen the plight of the Somali public and serve to aggravate anti-Western sentiment in Somalia.

The United States and its partners can encourage the pragmatic, nationalist, and opportunistic elements of the Shabaab to break with their radical partners by adopting a position of neutrality toward all local political groupings and by signaling a willingness to coexist with any Islamist authority that emerges, as long as it refrains from acts of

regional aggression, rejects global jihadi ambitions, and tolerates the activities of Western humanitarian relief agencies in Somalia. That approach means abandoning all efforts to pick a winner in Somalia.

The Shabaab is a coalition of fortune. As such, it is susceptible to realignment under the right conditions. There are indications that a number of militia leaders—possibly even including Muktar Robow, who publicly praised al-Qaeda during the period of UIC ascendancy—dissent from the transnational jihadi goals of the Shabaab's radical wing. Such fissures need to be actively exploited. To this end, the United States should indicate strong support for a UN or African Union dialogue with any member of the armed Islamist opposition that is willing to talk. Similar tactics are now being applied in Afghanistan, where the United States is attempting to boost security by integrating low- and mid-level elements of the Taliban back into the mainstream political process. Removing the Shabaab from the U.S. government's list of terrorist organizations is probably not politically feasible, but delisting specific individuals—including Sheikh Hassan Dahir Aweys—provides a powerful incentive for compliance with international demands. As one noted U.S. Somali expert has proposed, it should be possible to develop a series of litmus tests for radicals, such as willingness to cooperate with UN and humanitarian workers and commitment to peace with Ethiopia.[20] The United States and its regional partners must demonstrate a willingness to tolerate the Shabaab if these conditions are met. That approach requires that the United States and its partners not take all pro-Shabaab and, in the short term, all pro-al-Qaeda rhetoric at face value. U.S. officials must assume an inclusive posture toward local fundamentalists yet indicate a zero-tolerance policy toward transnational actors attempting to exploit Somalia's conflict. Perhaps most challenging, the United States must prepare to tolerate a period of uncertainty while the struggle for influence between radical and moderate actors plays out, town by town.

PURSUE DEVELOPMENT WITHOUT REGARD TO GOVERNANCE

Eventually, as anti-Western sentiment subsides, the opportunity will grow for the United States and its partners to reengage and address some of the fundamental causes of state failure in Somalia. Doing so will require accepting that there is a crippling lack of consensus in Somalia over fundamental questions about whether a Somali government

should be unitary, federal, or confederal; Islamist, or a mixture of secular and Islamic law; and whether the northern territory of Somaliland should be granted independence.[21] These large issues only obscure more fundamental conflicts over the distribution of land and resources among various clans. Until there is a meaningful political reconciliation between the clans, attempts to construct governance arrangements will be a recipe for conflict. International efforts to catalyze a political reconciliation via internationally sponsored peace conferences and parliamentary ethnic quota systems will also continue to be futile. Ultimately, reconciliation and governance are in Somali hands.

New development initiatives, therefore, should be pursued in a decentralized fashion that involves collaboration with the informal and traditional authorities that are already in place on the ground—without attempting to formalize or empower them. That approach will also allow for more extensive development support of the Somaliland and Puntland territories, without requiring the United States to explicitly recognize either territory as a sovereign nation. Somaliland has a relatively impressive record of democratic governance, and it has held a series of national democratic elections. But because it is not recognized as a legitimate government, Somaliland is largely ineligible to receive multilateral funding and development assistance. That is a source of increasing frustration to Somalilanders eager for growth and development. An increase in donor assistance could help boost Somaliland's economy, which may in turn help assuage Somalilanders' impatience for international recognition.[22]

As it pursues a decentralized approach, the United States, in cooperation with its international partners, should be mindful of several existing community-based development models. For example, the United States could, via the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) and the UNDP, assist local communities to organize community meetings or even a local development council (LDC) of clan elders and religious leaders responsible for identifying local development and infrastructure projects. Another model is provided by a local women's organization called SAACID (meaning *to help* in Somali), which has successfully implemented a variety of programs ranging from garbage collection to disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration in Somalia's dangerous capital city using a cross-clan community dialogue model. The international community should study and apply these locally developed strategies to a broader effort to promote development and trade across Somalia.

Over the long term, LDCs or other community dialogue mechanisms could be used to create community health insurance programs, hospitals, and schools.[23] At some point, they might even be federalized to promote regional economic cooperation. Economic growth and resource management have been clear motivators for the creation of informal governance structures in Somalia over the past ten years, and it is logical to look to the economy as the primary means of catalyzing a broader political resolution to Somalia's crisis. Currently, economic linkages between the clans and regions are weak, but they could eventually provide a sustainable incentive for the development of infrastructure, a regulatory framework, and, ultimately, the creation of national governance mechanisms.

For now, however, the United States and its partners should avoid the temptation to engage in institution-building at the community level. Traditional governance tends to depend on fluid, community-wide processes of dialogue, and the institutionalization of power can quickly lead to abuse. Development funding is often diverted, for example, to buy vehicles or to build offices for community officials. Such ostentatious and unnecessary purchases create an air of corruption, especially when they precede any visible program outputs to benefit the community. In the case of Somalia, form should follow function.

It may not initially be possible to support development initiatives in the most conflict-ridden areas of Somalia. A positive demonstration effect, however, is likely to create strong community demand for international assistance programs, and it would put pressure on recalcitrant or radical leaders to cooperate with international peace and development efforts. Development initiatives have the potential to rapidly separate pragmatic, locally oriented fundamentalists from their international jihadi counterparts. And by providing youths with alternatives to becoming recruited by militias (something that is actually heavily stigmatized in Somali society and considered a last resort) the goal of disarming, demobilizing, and reintegrating them will be advanced.

INCREASE DIPLOMATIC EFFORTS TO ENGAGE REGIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL PARTNERS

The United States does not want to own the Somali crisis, and it must lead a robust diplomatic effort to harness European and Middle Eastern assistance to support stabilization of the conflict and to address

Somalia's extensive humanitarian and development needs. Such diplomatic efforts are critical to ensure that various international efforts do not work at cross-purposes. Direct U.S. diplomatic involvement in Somalia is unlikely to be constructive, and the UN should continue to take the lead in all local negotiations and programs. Persuading the UN and Europe to abandon state-building efforts may be difficult, but the European consensus on supporting the TFG has already begun to fray, providing a window of opportunity for renewed, more constructive U.S. leadership on international policy on Somalia.

ENGAGE THE MIDDLE EAST

Concentrated engagement with Middle Eastern partners would help combat any perception of American hostility to Islam. But simple bureaucratic hurdles, including the separation of Yemen and Somalia into different regional bureaus, have so far made it difficult to coordinate a regional strategy for the Horn of Africa that includes the Middle East. The UN special representative, Amedou Ould-Abdallah, has already made significant progress in engaging Middle East countries, both through energetic diplomatic effort and by shifting the site of peace negotiations from Nairobi to Djibouti. The Somali Contact Group met most recently in Jedda, an encouraging sign that diplomatic efforts have focused on enhancing Middle East engagement in the Somali crisis. U.S. diplomats should further leverage that progress by reaching out directly to the governments of Qatar and Saudi Arabia to assist in supporting specific development and peace initiatives. Saudi Arabia, in particular, has an economic incentive to participate in antipiracy efforts. Qatar has expressed strong support for the Djibouti peace process (which created the unity government) and currently chairs the Organization of the Islamic Conference's Contact Group on Somalia.[24] Qatar could be mobilized to facilitate a dialogue between the opposing Islamist camps.

However, the United States should be extremely cautious in how it approaches Yemen to support its policy toward Somalia. Though Yemen hosts a large population of Somali refugees and is a likely transit point for weapons and funding into Somalia, any effort by its government to engage in the Somali crisis is likely to do far more harm than good. The United States has good reason to fear Yemen's role as an operational safe haven to al-Qaeda. But there's no convincing evidence of collaboration between al-Qaeda affiliates in Yemen and Somalia, and

if the United States chooses to conflate these separate threats, the likely effect will be to globalize and worsen both conflicts.

The Shabaab has recently declared solidarity with Yemen's northern rebels, and it has vowed to send fighters to support their war against the Yemeni government. But the Shabaab has little capacity to deliver on the promise, and it is probably trying to stoke U.S. fears that al-Qaeda affiliates will succeed in forming a unified, regional offshoot in the Gulf of Aden. Worryingly, the Yemeni government has already responded to the threat by raiding Somali refugee communities in search of the Shabaab. These heavy-handed tactics are likely to aggravate the refugees' feelings of alienation, and they may bolster al-Qaeda's recruitment efforts. An increase in humanitarian and development assistance to Somali—and Yemeni—communities would stand a better chance of reducing the likelihood that al-Qaeda will find fertile ground in Yemen's refugee camps.

RESTRAIN ETHIOPIA

U.S. regional diplomacy faces significant challenges. Ethiopia remains poised—and apparently willing—to attack and destroy any hostile regime that emerges in southern Somalia. Satisfaction of Ethiopia's national security concerns is therefore vital to maintaining regional stability.

Ethiopia is currently pursuing a buffer zone strategy that involves the creation and support of proxy militias (including ASWJ) in the Somali regions of Gedo, Bay, Bakol, and Hiran. The United States will have to monitor the situation closely for changes in the Ethiopian posture. In particular, Washington must be poised to dissuade Ethiopia from reinvading Somalia in response to a Shabaab capture of Mogadishu. Reinvasion would only recreate the insurgency dynamic, unify fractious Shabaab elements, and strengthen the movement's public standing. Ethiopia has a national security imperative to keep troops engaged on its border, but the United States should encourage the UN Security Council to hold Ethiopia accountable for any preemptive incursions into Somali territory.

The United States should also work to ensure the sustainability of its partnership with Ethiopia by publicly urging the Ethiopian government to cease human rights abuses, implement democratic reforms, and resolve its border dispute with Eritrea. Ethiopian cooperation is critical to the pursuit of U.S. strategic interests in the region, but anti-U.S.

sentiment in the Horn is closely linked to the perception of U.S. complicity with Ethiopian human rights abuses in Somalia and Ethiopian abuses against ethnic Somalis in the Ogaden region. The United States' ability to successfully pursue its counterterror objectives depends on resolving that dilemma.

PURSUE DIALOGUE WITHOUT ETHIOPIA

Governments in the region have forcefully advocated for an air and sea blockade of Somalia to prevent the importation of weapons and funds from Eritrea. However, antipiracy efforts have proven the impossibility of effectively patrolling the Somali coast. Further militarizing the international response to the Somali crisis would likely accomplish little, put additional strain on U.S. relations with Eritrea, and only aggravate the Somali perception that the country is under attack.

On December 23, 2009, the UN Security Council imposed sanctions on Eritrea. Though the sanctions were enthusiastically supported by regional actors, the resulting arms embargo, asset freezes, and travel bans are unlikely to encourage President Isaias to halt the flow of arms to the Shabaab and Hizbul Islam. The U.S. Africa Command should continue to expand its efforts to monitor the flow of arms into Somalia and to bolster the capacity of regional governments to police borders and prevent terrorist attacks.

The State Department should also continue to pursue opportunities for dialogue and negotiations with Asmara. These attempts are unlikely to succeed, but Asmara can exert considerable influence over the Shabaab, and the effort is worth making. The United States may also increase its credibility among Islamists in the region by adopting a more neutral posture between Eritrea and Ethiopia. (Hizbul Islam, for example, has vocally protested the hypocritical imposition of sanctions on Eritrea, arguing that Ethiopian military incursions into Somalia have been far more visible and destabilizing.)

SIGNAL U.S. WILLINGNESS TO RESIST SHABAAB OPERATIONS IN SOMALILAND AND PUNTLAND

As part of its broader containment strategy, the United States should prepare to receive Somaliland officials at a steadily higher level than the assistant secretary of state, establish a USAID or USAID contractor

office in Somaliland's capital city of Hargeisa, and consider a U.S. Navy ship visit to Puntland and Somaliland's ports. These steps will signal the United States' willingness to resist any attempt by the Shabaab to attack or gain control of these territories.

RESIST POLITICIZING THE PIRACY PROBLEM

Whatever the pressures or temptations to adopt an aggressive response to piracy, the United States should be sensitive to how such tactics can backfire. Overwhelming use of force, such as the bombing of pirate strongholds in Hobyo, Haraardheere, or Eyl, could politicize the piracy issue, which would likely increase public tolerance of pirate activities. It could also undermine broader U.S. security objectives by further radicalizing the population. Pirates currently have strong disincentives to cooperate with extremist elements, for fear of being branded terrorists themselves. A disproportionate response could nudge pirates into profit-seeking cooperation with extremist elements, facilitating the flow of arms into the country. In the worst-case scenario, piracy could evolve into maritime terrorism.

The Somali pirates have successfully invoked long-standing local grievances over illegal fishing and toxic waste dumping to create what is effectively an enabling environment for attacks on foreign vessels. The Somali public's willingness to tolerate piracy appears, however, to be lessening. Local public awareness campaigns have sought to highlight the social, economic, and political costs of piracy, often by engaging local clerics and clan elders as spokesmen. The work of Radio Daljir, a Bossasso-based radio station, has been particularly effective. The United States, potentially via USAID or UNDP, should support these local awareness campaigns, and it could greatly enhance their effectiveness through the creation of employment opportunities for at-risk youth. Infrastructure projects, such as road construction, could provide immediate opportunities.

Development agencies should also seek to create a partnership with Puntland's legitimate business community—probably the only social segment currently strong enough to challenge the pirate networks. The international community could focus on organizing the professional community in Puntland into a professional association, providing capacity-building support and engaging the group in a discussion about

what can be done to reduce piracy. A program that explicitly ties development incentives in the coastal zones to antipiracy efforts could effectively mobilize a population tiring of pirate promiscuity and excess. Such programs should be considered a relatively urgent priority. Pirate networks have gained strength and operational capability, and without some timely intervention, could develop into powerful criminal spoilers with an interest in sabotaging governance and rule-of-law efforts.

In the absence of an immediate solution to the piracy problem, the United States and its partners in the international community should take advantage of the political opportunities that piracy offers. Washington should look for ways to demonstrate its commitment to addressing local grievances. The United States should propose a UN Security Council resolution to mandate the protection of Somali waters from illegal incursions.

Conclusion

As it seeks to govern Somalia, the Shabaab will face near-insurmountable challenges, ranging from its own internal divisions to the Somali population's profound distaste for restrictive foreign ideologies. History suggests that these challenges will be fatal.

But it will take time. The best-case scenario for Somalia is a gradual diminishment in the intensity of the conflict, with open warfare giving way to stability and piecemeal improvements in the economy and the rule of law. Though indigenous governance movements can emerge in Somalia with surprising speed, national governance is probably still a decade away, and if history is any guide, the Somali processes of reconciliation and political compromise leading up to it will be largely imperceptible to Western eyes. The United States should remain vigilant—and realistic—in assessing the terror threat, and should be poised to support Somalia's reconstruction in the years to come. At some point, the Somalis' desire for peace will certainly reassert itself, and new opportunities for development, governance, and growth will emerge.

Endnotes

1. Most sources indicate that there have been fourteen attempts to create a government in Somalia, but a study by Interpeace claims the number is an international "urban legend." See "The Search for Peace: A History of Mediation in Somalia since 1988," Interpeace/Center for Research and Dialogue, July 1, 2009, www.interpeace.org.
2. Ken Menkhaus, "Warlords and Landlords: Non-State Actors and Humanitarian Norms in Somalia," draft paper presented at the Curbing Human Rights Violations by Armed Groups Conference, Liu Institute for Global Issues, University of British Columbia, Canada, November 14–15, 2003; Alex de Waal, "Class and Power in a Stateless Somalia," Social Science Research Council, February 20, 2007, http://hornofafrica.ssrc.org/dewaal/.
3. Benjamin Powell, Ryan Ford, and Alex Nowrasteh, "Somalia After State Collapse: Chaos or Improvement?" *Journal of Economic Behavior & Organization*, vol. 67 (September 2008), pp. 657–70.
4. Though the moderate Islamist Sheikh Sharif Sheikh Hassan served as the diplomatic face of the UIC, the more obvious ideological force behind the courts was the wanted terrorist suspect Sheikh Hassan Dahir Aweys. Two other prominent leaders of the movement were Aweys's protégés: Yusuf Mohammed Siad ("Inda'adde") and Hassan Abdullah Hersi al-Turki, both warlords with strong militias in southern Somalia. A radical militia movement affiliated with the UIC, the Shabaab, was suspected to contain several al-Qaeda operatives, including the high-value target, Aden Hashi Ayro.
5. Intelligence reports place the number of foreign *takfiri* elements in Somalia at two hundred to three hundred, but estimates by closed local sources are much higher.
6. Amnesty International report, "Routinely Targeted: Attacks on Civilians in Somalia," May 6, 2008, http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/asset/AFR52/006/2008/en/1162a792-186e-11dd-92b4-6b0c2ef9d02f/afr520062008eng.pdf; Human Rights Watch report, "So Much to Fear: War Crimes and the Devastation of Somalia," December 8, 2008, http://www.hrw.org/node/76419.
7. Immediately after the invasion, UIC leaders Sheikh Sharif Sheikh Ahmed and Sheikh Hassan Dahir Aweys fled to Asmara, where they attempted to form a single political opposition party in exile, the Alliance for the Reliberation of Somalia (ARS). The party rapidly split over the question of rapprochement with the TFG. Sheikh Hassan established himself in Eritrea, and committed his wing of the party, the ARS-Asmara, to a violent insurgency against the Ethiopian-backed TFG regime. Sheikh Sharif adopted a more conciliatory posture, and it is his wing of the ARS, based in Djibouti, that eventually merged with the Transitional Federal Government.
8. The four clan-based Islamic factions that comprise Hizbul Islam are the Asmara branch of the Alliance for the Reliberation of Somalia (ARS-Asmara), headed by Sheikh Hassan Dahir Aweys; Jabhatul Islamiya (the Islamic Front), a grouping of armed business interests in the Galgadud region; Muaskar Anole, a recently formed,

clan-based grouping about which relatively little is known; and Mu'askar Ras Kamboni, a militia controlled by Hassan Abdullah Hersi al-Turki.

9. Michael Weinstein, "Somalia: Nation's Contending Islamic Ideologies," *Garowe Online*, March 20, 2009.
10. The possession of trained, paid militias is a significant advantage. Most Somali militia members receive only a mandate to extort, rape, and loot in exchange for their services, and as a result, faction leaders typically have little control over their forces and intra-factional disputes over resources are extremely common.
11. Closed sources inside Mogadishu.
12. U.S. spokesmen initially put the figure at forty tons, but State Department officials have subsequently increased the number to eighty tons.
13. Jeffrey Gettleman, "Two Advisers Abducted in Somalia," *New York Times*, July 14, 2009.
14. U.S. Military Academy, Combating Terrorism Center, "Al-Qaida's (mis)Adventures in the Horn of Africa," West Point, New York, 2007, http://purl.access.gpo.gov/GPO/LPS91834.
15. United States Agency for International Development, Office of Foreign Disaster Assistance, "Situation Report #9, Fiscal Year (FY) 2009," September 23, 2009.
16. International Maritime Bureau, "Briefing 48," March 2009.
17. Sheikh Aweys, for example, is considered by many to be senior to Shiekh Sharif in the clerical hierarchy, and he appears to command stronger support within his own clan. Recognizing Sharif as the president would require him not only to recognize the TFG's legitimacy, but to take a personal loss of face.
18. Ken Menkhaus, "Somalia: Too Big a Problem to Fail?" *Foreignpolicy.com*, August 6, 2009.
19. Andre LeSage, "Fragile Gains in Somalia," *Realclearworld.com*, October 31, 2009.
20. Ken Menkhaus, "Somalia After the Ethiopian Occupation," *Enough! Project*, February 2009.
21. Puntland, although effectively autonomous, has not yet sought independence from southern Somalia, though it is perhaps likely to do so in the future. Its status is therefore not a point of contention at this time.
22. Aid officials should, however, recognize that Somaliland's democracy is more fragile than it appears at first glance. It is still essentially a traditional clan democracy, albeit with some modern institutional trappings, and full recognition too soon would run the risk of disrupting a necessary sharing of power between clan elders, business, civil society, and the government. For that reason, increased international support to Somaliland's governing authorities must be carefully considered with increased support to civil society and the private sector.
23. Randolph Kent, Karin von Hippel, and Mark Bradbury, "Social Facilitation, Development and the Diaspora: Support for Sustainable Health Services in Somalia," International Policy Institute, King's College, 2004.
24. See, for example, a statement by Qatar's ambassador to the UN, Nassir Abdulaziz Al Nasser, to the UN Security Council on December 19, 2007.

About the Author

Bronwyn E. Bruton, a democracy and governance specialist with extensive experience in Africa, was a 2008–2009 international affairs fellow in residence at the Council on Foreign Relations. She was born in Swaziland and spent most of her childhood in Botswana. Prior to her fellowship appointment, Bronwyn spent three years at the National Endowment for Democracy, where she managed a $7 million portfolio of grants to local and international nongovernmental organizations in east and southern Africa (priority countries included Somalia, Ethiopia, Eritrea, Uganda, Kenya, Zimbabwe, and Sudan). Bruton has also served as a program manager on the Africa team of the U.S. Agency for International Development's Office of Transition Initiatives, and as a policy analyst on the international affairs and trade team of the Government Accountability Office. She holds an MPP, with honors, from the University of California at Los Angeles.

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