



In brief: The Horn of Africa – review of events during 2010 and prospects for 2011

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2010 saw continued internal conflict and humanitarian crisis in central and southern Somalia. However, there were successful – if much delayed – [elections](#) in Somaliland. Flawed elections took place in Ethiopia that saw the dominance of the ruling party reinforced. Low-intensity conflict in the Ogaden persisted. There was no relaxation of domestic repression in Eritrea but significant progress was made in resolving its border dispute with neighbouring Djibouti. However, there was continued stalemate over the Ethiopia-Eritrea border dispute -- and over the less well-known border dispute between Somaliland and Puntland. Sudan moved haltingly towards its moment of truth – the referendum on 9 January 2011 to decide whether the South opts for independence. Events in the Horn continued to have implications for neighbouring countries such as Kenya and Uganda. There were splits between the member states of the Nile Basin Initiative over sharing its waters, with Egypt and Sudan at loggerheads with those states further ‘upriver’. Offshore, piracy remained a threat to international shipping despite the range of actions and measures in place to combat it.

There have been [significant developments](#) in **Somalia** in recent months. In November 2010, yet another attempt was made to create a more effective and cohesive Transitional Federal Government (TFG), leading to the appointment by President Sheikh Sharif Ahmed of a new Prime Minister. Mohamed Abdullahi Mohamed, also known as [Farmajo](#), and a large number of new ministers from the vast Somali diaspora. The TFG’s mandate expires in August 2011, by which time a new Constitution is supposed to have been agreed. In December 2010, UN Security Council Resolution 1964 mandated an increase in the size of the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM) from 8,000, having finally got close to that complement during 2010, to 12,000. The largest contributor, Uganda, which was the target of two bomb attacks in Kampala in July 2010 by the largest Somali insurgent group, al-Shabaab, has pledged 1,800 additional troops. There have been claims that AMISOM has been responsible for civilian deaths in the capital, Mogadishu. Also in December 2010, a ‘merger’ (some view it as a take-over) was announced between the two main insurgent groups, al-Shabaab and Hizb-ul-Islam. Hizb-ul-Islam had suffered set-backs in clashes between the two groups.

What are the prospects for Somalia in 2011? The odds favour the reconfiguration of the TFG in some shape or form once its mandate expires, largely because its members and international stakeholders will struggle to find an acceptable alternative -- not because anybody really expects it suddenly to become a more credible basis for peace and security. There are few signs yet of a radical shift in strategy by international stakeholders of the kind advocated by some experienced ‘[Somalia watchers](#)’, towards a decentralised, bottom-up, approach to building peace and security. Nor is an endorsement of formal negotiations with

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al-Shabaab likely during 2011. However, the US and its allies will increase their already growing support for [Somaliland](#) (but without going so far as to recognise it as an independent state), and [Puntland](#) – those ‘Somali lands’ where viable governments do currently exist, although relations between the two polities remain fraught.

The strengthening of AMISOM could make it tougher for al-Shabaab – its recent ‘Ramadan offensive’ in Mogadishu was successfully repelled. However, the troop increase will probably take time to materialise and does not appear to be the kind of ‘surge’ that might really tip the military balance against al-Shabaab. The AU had been calling for an increase to 20,000 troops. Western and Ethiopian support will continue but unless the performance of the TFG security forces and supporting militias improves markedly, it is difficult to see anything other than a continuation of the current military ebb and flow, although more of Mogadishu may progressively come under the TFG’s control. It currently controls 50% of the city. An attempt may be made to take back the al-Shabaab held port of Kismayo if conditions on the ground allow and external backers of the TFG give the green light for it. The ‘merger’ with Hizb-ul-Islam could strengthen al-Shabaab. Much will depend on how [unresolved tensions](#) in its ranks between ‘purist’ *jihadi* factions and more pragmatic ‘nationalist’ factions, play out. It will seek to increase its attacks in Somaliland and Puntland – and against its opponents abroad.

Overall, there are few grounds for expecting that 2011 will be a ‘breakthrough’ year for Somalia – which means a continuing massive humanitarian toll. In December 2010, the UN Resident and Humanitarian Coordinator for Somalia described the situation as one of “chronic catastrophe”. The [2011 UN humanitarian appeal](#) for Somalia is for US \$530m.

In **Ethiopia**, the ruling Ethiopian People’s Revolutionary Democratic Front, led by Prime Minister Meles Zenawi, won 99.6% of parliamentary seats in the May 2011 elections, apparently signifying the final ‘nail in the coffin’ of the political pluralism that followed the 2005 elections, but which plunged the country into a deep crisis. Its supremacy guaranteed, the government released Ethiopia’s best-known opposition leader, Birtukan Mideksa, in October 2010. Ethiopia’s economy has been growing fast in recent years, with significant extensions in services such as health and education. The country has also been a major beneficiary of [humanitarian and development aid](#), including from the UK. 2011 is unlikely to see dramatic change in Ethiopia, unless succession struggles within the ruling party – Meles has suggested that he will not serve beyond his latest term – spiral out of control.

Eritrea, described in one report as “[the siege state](#)”, remains an important sponsor of anti-TFG insurgents in Somalia. For this reason, UN sanctions imposed against Eritrea in December 2009 are unlikely to be lifted in the near future, despite the Qatar-brokered agreement between Eritrea and Djibouti in June 2010, under which the former has withdrawn all troops (deployed in 2008) from disputed border areas and agreed to pursue a peaceful settlement. Eritrea continues to accuse the UN of ignoring Ethiopia’s failure to honour its obligations with regard to their border dispute. Eritrea’s ‘spoiler’ role in Somalia and Ethiopia, where it supports some armed opposition groups, is unlikely to be abandoned during 2011.

As for **Sudan**, the conflict in Darfur remains unresolved, with peace talks once again in crisis. The [9 January 2011 referendum](#) will produce a vote for Southern independence. A failure effectively to manage the inevitable ‘shocks’ from this outcome, or reach a mutually acceptable deal on the oil-rich border area of Abyei (whose referendum has for now been postponed), could trigger unpredictable and destabilising knock-on effects across the Horn.

Further background: See previous Library Standard Notes on [Ethiopia](#), [Eritrea](#), the [Horn of Africa](#) and [Piracy](#). See also recent Research Papers on [Sudan](#) and the [Horn](#).