

“One lesson learned since September 11 is that the expanded war on terrorism has created a lens that tends to distort our vision of the complex political dynamics of countries like Somalia. Local political realities are not always assessed in their own right, but instead are interpreted through, and reduced to, the logic of the war on terrorism.”

## Somalia: In the Crosshairs of the War on Terrorism

KEN MENKHAUS

Spotlights can produce more glare than illumination; such has been the case with Somalia since September 11. After many months of investigation, discussion, and speculation about the extent to which radical Islamic groups may be using Somalia as a safe harbor, media reports and statements by officials in the United States government and elsewhere continue to be often disquietingly inaccurate, contradictory, or inconsistent. Some of this confusion is the product of intentional misinformation by political actors pursuing their own parochial agendas; some of it is due to poorly informed officials and media figures rushing to judgment; and some of it is the result of honest differences of opinion and interpretation about a complex and inaccessible country.

For Somalia itself, the war on terrorism has added one more layer of crisis to create a triad of troubles: deteriorating political and security conditions in much of the country, alarming economic distress, and now the threat of American antiterrorist economic sanctions and military actions. All have combined to make Somalia more unstable than at any time since the UN peacekeeping intervention ended in 1995.

### A GOVERNMENT ON PAPER ONLY?

The worsening political and security conditions inside most of Somalia is a reversal of a previous trend toward political stability and regional consolidation that had characterized the country until 2000. Not coincidentally, the recent political deterioration is occurring even as an interim national

administration attempts to reestablish a central government for the first time in over a decade.

The declaration of the Transitional National Government (TNG) in August 2000 was unquestionably the most important recent political development in Somalia prior to September 11. The establishment of the TNG marked the culmination of a two-month Somali National Peace Conference hosted by the government of Djibouti in the town of Arta. Previous national reconciliation conferences in Somalia had resulted in such a long string of failed meetings and unimplemented accords that they gave peace conferences a bad name. By contrast, the Arta process inspired cautious optimism and hope both in and out of Somalia. One reason was that the conference gathered Somali representatives on the basis of clan, not faction, leading some to hope that the Arta process would be more inclusive and legitimate.

The transitional government that resulted from this conference was a carefully negotiated power-sharing arrangement in which each clan was accorded a certain number of seats in the 245-member parliament and key posts in the government doled out to a combination of the most strategic clans. Abdiqassim Salad Hassan, a member of the Ayr subclan of the Haber Gidir clan (Hawiye clan-family), was named president, while Ali Khalif Galeyr (from the Dolbahante clan of the Darood clan-family) was named prime minister. Over the course of the 1990s, the Ayr had emerged as the core of the increasingly powerful Mogadishu business class, so it was not surprising that that subclan would be accorded the top position in the government.

The TNG was initially greeted with considerable enthusiasm and support in much of Somalia. Mogadishu residents were by far the most support-

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ive, since they stood to gain the most from a return of national administration and the expected ample flows of foreign aid and government employment. The TNG enjoyed a lengthy grace period from Mogadishu residents as it approached the daunting task of reestablishing a central government.

Not surprisingly, top TNG officials opted to devote a good portion of their time and energy to traveling abroad to seek diplomatic recognition and foreign aid. The TNG's biggest diplomatic successes came at the multilateral level, where Somalia was awarded a seat at the United Nations, the Arab League, and the Organization of African Unity. This dramatically bolstered its claim to be the sole and sovereign authority in Somalia. But only a handful of states, all in the Arab world, extended full bilateral recognition (that is, an exchange of ambassadors) to the TNG. Most countries, including the United States, adopted a "wait and see" attitude to an administration that existed solely on paper.

As for foreign aid, the TNG has fared less well. The most promising source of funds was from oil-rich Arabian peninsula states. TNG leaders called for an "Arab Marshall Plan" for Somalia, but the aid eventually released by Saudi Arabia, Libya, and others was modest in scope and quickly disbursed (total aid from the Arab world to the TNG is an estimated \$20 million since August 2000, with the bulk coming from Saudi Arabia). Other donors wanted to see some tangible signs that the TNG was governing before committing aid. Over time, TNG supporters grew increasingly frustrated with this reluctance, claiming that an initial infusion of aid was essential to jump-start the administration. In their view, donors' insistence on first seeing administration of the country amounted to a self-fulfilling prophecy designed to ensure the failure of the TNG. But donors' caution was warranted.

By the time of the September 11 terrorist attacks, the TNG was already in a full-fledged crisis. At the core of the crisis was the TNG's inability to establish even nominal administration in the capital. The new government has failed to extend its control beyond more than half the capital city; it has been unable to gain control of and reopen the main seaport and airport in Mogadishu; its police force and judiciary are barely functional; security in the streets of Mogadishu has not improved and is at times worse

than before the government's establishment; it has virtually no capacity to raise its own revenue; and its legitimacy and authority have been openly rejected by a significant coalition of political actors within Somalia, including the northern regional administrations of Somaliland and Puntland, the loose coalition group known as the Somalia Reconciliation and Restoration Council (SRRC), and a number of powerful militia leaders inside Mogadishu itself.<sup>1</sup>

The TNG has also suffered damage to its credibility. It was complicit in the importation of millions of dollars of counterfeit Somali shillings by leading Mogadishu businessmen in early 2001, a move that produced hyperinflation and street protests; it has been rocked by charges of corruption in the mishandling of Saudi (and later Libyan) aid money; and it has been riven by internal power struggles, including tensions between the president and prime minister over their division of power (which ultimately led to the dismissal of the prime minister in October 2001). These setbacks have seriously eroded public and external support for the TNG.

In addition, the TNG faces a dangerous external crisis with neighboring Ethiopia, which had initially acquiesced to the Arta process but which quickly grew alarmed at what it perceived to be a sharp tilt by the TNG toward the Arab and Islamic world. Ethiopia shares a long border with anarchic Somalia and faces a radical Islamic movement within its borders; as a result it is sensitive to the point of paranoia about any development inside Somalia that could allow Somalia to be used as a base of Islamist operations. Ethiopia is also the regional hegemon in the Horn of Africa, and is engaged in long-standing competition with Egypt and the Arab world over influence in the Horn. Had the TNG made more effort to work with Ethiopia to vet its diplomatic initiatives and reassure Ethiopia that it would do nothing to threaten its security interests, the TNG and Ethiopia might have found room for coexistence. Instead, the TNG rushed to the Arab world in expectation of foreign aid, reinforcing Ethiopia's worst fears.

Within a few months of its establishment, the TNG was facing opposition groups inside Somalia that enjoyed direct backing from Ethiopia. The standoff that emerged has the flavor of a proxy war, pitting Ethiopian-backed clients against an Arab-backed TNG. This proxy war has remained mostly an angry spitting match, with the TNG accusing Ethiopia of placing its troops inside the Somali border and attempting to keep Somalia in chaos, and Ethiopia accusing the TNG of being a front for radical Islamic groups. Several direct armed clashes between the

<sup>1</sup>The SRRC is an umbrella organization uniting a disparate half-dozen clan militias and warlords. These groups have little in common except rejection of the TNG and shared Ethiopian patronage.

SRRC and pro-TNG militias have occurred, but have been brief and contained.

Ethiopia's ability to play spoiler to any national government in Somalia that it does not like may doom the TNG, whose relations with Ethiopia appear irrevocably damaged. The confrontation between the TNG and Ethiopian-backed factions brings southern Somalia much closer to the brink of major warfare than has been the case in almost a decade.

### THE "SHADOW STATE"

The TNG has also been confronted by a growing chorus of criticism about the Arta process itself and the legitimacy of the approach used to create the TNG. One grievance is that the bulk of the participants at Arta and in the new government are remnants of the old Siad Barre regime (the corrupt dictatorship that ruled Somalia from 1969 to 1990), civil servants who bring to the table all the old bad habits of that era. Another complaint is that many if not most of the parliamentarians in the TNG are members of the diaspora: returnees from Canada, Europe, and elsewhere who as a result are not stakeholders in the outcome of the TNG. But the biggest concern is that far too many important political actors were absent from Arta for the TNG to presume it is a national administration. The two largest regional polities, Somaliland (a self-declared secessionist state) and Puntland (a nonsecessionist regional state), were not involved in the peace conference, nor were a number of the most powerful militias, factions, and strongmen in southern Somalia.<sup>2</sup> Following Arta, the TNG succeeded in negotiating a separate deal with one or two such strongmen, leading to hopes that they could gradually co-opt and erode the rejectionist front. Instead, they have found that their fragile coalition is not holding together. In one case, a major militia leader, Mohamed Qanyare, negotiated his way into the TNG only to pull out again in early 2002, accusing the TNG leadership of failing to share Libyan aid money fairly. Many clans appear to be hedging their bets, keeping one foot in the TNG while maintaining a presence in the SRRC as well.

<sup>2</sup>Puntland was established in 1998 with the aim of creating a regional administration in northeastern Somalia. Residents of the northeast anticipated that Puntland would eventually be integrated into a revived central state once other Somali regions were able to create regional administrations.

<sup>3</sup>IGAD is comprised of the seven states of the Horn of Africa: Uganda, Sudan, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Djibouti, Somalia, and Kenya. It was originally conceived as a mechanism for cooperation on transnational drought and development issues, but has taken on political challenges as well.

As a result, external actors have come to embrace the view that the Arta reconciliation process was "incomplete." To remedy this, a major reconciliation is currently under way by the regional Inter-Governmental Agency for Development (IGAD) to convene the TNG and the rejectionist groups sometime in late spring.<sup>3</sup> The IGAD initiative has raised hopes among external actors but is being met with skepticism inside Somalia. A number of "non-negotiables"—Somaliland's claim of sovereignty, the TNG's insistence that it be treated as the recognized government, the SRRC's insistence of treating the TNG as the "Arta faction"—conspire against the planned talks.

But even if IGAD succeeds in convening the conference, deep flaws remain in the manner in which reconciliation has been pursued in Somalia, which continue to sabotage implementation of peace accords. For a decade, national reconciliation in Somalia has been reduced to a crass exercise in pie sharing, in which the sole objective of negotiations is to get Somali representatives to agree to proportional allocation (by clan) of various seats in the government. Critical issues of reconciliation—such as the return of stolen property and compensation—are not even discussed, much less resolved. Nor are crucial issues related to representation, administrative decentralization, budgetary sustainability, and taxation in a new government. Instead, all energies are devoted to protracted wrangling over "seat banking" by clan, followed by internal squabbles within each clan over which political figures may claim its allotted seats. This inevitably causes rapid inflation in the number of seats in parliament and proposed ministries—designed solely to buy off and satisfy as many clans as possible—leading to a bloated and utterly unsustainable administration (the TNG cabinet currently boasts over 80 ministers, deputy ministers, and ministers of state).

Such an exercise is built on a false premise: that if the Somali political elite can only come to an agreement on power sharing, then foreign aid resources will again flow into the coffers of the state, enabling each clan to claim its share of a pie generously provided by someone else. In reality, this pie no longer exists. Whatever state emerges in Somalia will have to rely principally on the resources it generates itself. The days of windfalls of foreign aid sustaining a bloated Somali state are gone, though many in Somalia see the war on terrorism as a new chance to enhance their country's strategic importance to the West and are actively trying to exploit that opportunity.

A growing number of observers are speculating that concerns about the TNG's inability or unwillingness to govern are misplaced and miss the point about the TNG's real purpose: to serve as "bait" to attract foreign aid. According to this view, the top businessmen in Mogadishu who have underwritten the TNG were gambling that the TNG would at a minimum receive enough foreign aid to allow them to recoup their original investments (which they have), and in a best-case scenario would attract high levels of aid and recognition, leading to lucrative contracts, opportunities to rent property to foreign embassies and aid agencies, and a host of other profitable ventures. This theory about the TNG goes some way toward explaining why the top businessmen in Mogadishu continue to provide it with minimal support despite lack of progress in extending administration beyond half of the capital. They keep the troubled TNG on life support in the expectation that it will continue to win periodic infusions of foreign aid (mainly from Arab states whose own motive for providing the aid is political and thus less concerned with the TNG's performance as an administration). If true, this would mark the TNG as a new type of "shadow state," one designed with a single, externally focused purpose: to exploit the political and strategic impulse of external actors to provide foreign aid.

Meanwhile, most of southern and central Somalia remains largely ungoverned. Local communities are in some instances able to pull together administrations in what amount to city-states. In other areas, lawlessness remains a chronic problem. Only in the north of the country have local administrations and clan elders succeeded in reestablishing durable stability and order.

#### POTENTIAL TROUBLE IN THE NORTH

Until 2001, the two northern polities, Somaliland and Puntland, constituted the most stable areas of Somalia. Both enjoyed modest but impressive economic recovery, new investments, booming trade out of their seaports, peace and security, and fledgling administrations that offered varying levels of basic government services. Puntland was more peaceful and secure, while Somaliland had a more robust administration and economy.

The past year has seen unfortunate levels of political deterioration in these northern areas. Events in

Puntland have been the most dramatic. Armed conflict broke out in late 2001 between the supporters of Abdullahi Yusuf, who had been serving as president of Puntland, and Jama Ali Jama, who had been named new president. Abdullahi Yusuf has not been popular in most quarters of Puntland, mainly because he appears less interested in administering Puntland than in using it as a launchpad for national political ambitions. But he was able to call on Ethiopian support for his militia, something the Jama supporters could not do. Yusuf exploited Ethiopia's fears of Islamic radicalism by claiming Jama was a frontman for al-Ittihad al-Islamiya (Islamic Unity), a Somali Islamist group. In reality, although al-Ittihad did support Jama, he also was backed by a wide range of social groups with little affinity for one another or al-Ittihad, including clan elders, businessmen, and intellectuals. Since those armed clashes, Puntland has been left divided, with

Jama's group controlling the seaport town of Bosaso and Yusuf controlling the interior towns of Garowe and Galkayo. Unfortunately, the TNG tried to exploit

these divisions in Puntland, which only guaranteed that the crisis would worsen and that Ethiopia would be drawn in.

In Somaliland, President Ibrahim Egal's government held a referendum in May 2001 to approve a new constitution that not only reaffirmed Somaliland's independence but also called for a shift from the current clan-based system of representation to a multiparty democracy. The move is increasingly viewed in Somaliland as an attempt by Egal and his supporters to avoid relinquishing the presidency (which the old system would have required as part

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of a rotating presidency arrangement); subsequent actions hint that Egal is moving the country toward a one-party dominant system, not a democracy. This has provoked a political backlash that has resulted in minimal violence but that has the potential to destabilize Somalia's most impressive recovery zone.

### ECONOMIC WOES

Somalia's economy is precarious even in the best of times. It consistently ranks among the poorest states in the world, and its low human-development indicators are matched only by a handful of other war-torn fourth-world countries, such as Sierra Leone. Somalia's economic productivity has never recovered to its modest prewar levels, and the almost total destruction of its basic infrastructure will make recovery that much more difficult. Food production is especially low and makes much of the country prone to periodic food shortages, malnutrition, and even famine. Many households in Somalia have come to rely mainly on remittances sent home by the 1 million to 2 million Somalis working abroad. Remittances—estimated at about \$500 million per year—constitute the single most important source of hard currency for the country, and are a critical lifeline for households lucky enough to place family members abroad. Somalia has, in a real sense, devolved into a labor reserve for the Gulf states and the West; its chief export is its own people.

Over the past seven years, however, a number of economic sectors had shown real strength and were generating profitable opportunities inside Somalia. Transit trade of basic food and consumer goods through southern Somalia's beach ports, which are then smuggled into Kenya, produced an impressive commercial corridor and earned Somalia the reputation as the world's largest duty-free shop. Livestock exports out of the northern ports of Berbera and Bosaso to the Gulf states provided an outlet for pastoral production as far south as the Shabelle Valley. Telecommunications and money-transfer companies blossomed, providing Somalis with the cheapest and most efficient telephone system in Africa and an ability to receive remittances from anywhere in the world.

Unfortunately, the past two years have seen setbacks on all economic fronts. First, livestock exports to the Gulf have been shut down due to an outbreak

of Rift Valley fever in Saudi Arabia, a vector-borne disease that originated in East Africa and can be carried by livestock. The Saudis have a variety of reasons for maintaining the ban on imports of Somali livestock, some legitimate and some driven by parochial business interests in livestock ranches in Australia and New Zealand. It appears unlikely that the ban will be lifted anytime soon. This has been especially devastating for Somaliland and Puntland, which relied heavily on tax revenues on the livestock trade, and for pastoral households, whose purchasing power has been seriously eroded by the declining value of their livestock. Southern Somali pastoralists, whose principal market is Kenya and Mogadishu, have been less affected by the ban.

Second, hyperinflation of the Somali shilling has devastated the purchasing power of poorer households. This hyperinflation was produced by the importation of several million dollars' worth of shillings printed abroad by a group of leading Mogadishu businessmen. Those same businessmen are also supporters

of the TNG, which did nothing to prevent the fiasco but did face angry street protests in Mogadishu in the spring of 2001. The businessmen's holdings are in dollars and hence were untouched by the rapid freefall of the shilling.

Third, a prolonged drought has led to serious crop failure and stress on some rangelands. Areas of southern Somalia are facing near-famine conditions. In the north, rangeland degradation has been compounded by pastoralists holding animals off the market due to low prices; the number of livestock has swelled in some cases well beyond the carrying capacity of the rangelands.

The most recent blow to this vulnerable economy came in October 2001 when the United States, as part of its war on terrorism, led an international freeze on the assets of Somalia's largest remittance and telecommunications company, al-Barakaat, on the grounds that it was part of Al Qaeda's financial empire. The move came as a genuine shock to Somalis. Contrary to some claims, the freezing of al-Barakaat's assets did not prevent tens of thousands of Somali households from receiving remittances. Somalis are very experienced at moving money, and had a range of alternative means of remitting money home. But the American action was disruptive to remittances and business transactions in Somalia, and badly damaged business confidence inside the

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country. The move was viewed in Somalia as capricious and unfounded, and bred fears that other Somali enterprises could also be targeted.

Complaints that the freezing of al-Barakaat's assets was unwarranted have persisted, not only within Somalia but also from journalists and others investigating the charges. The United States government has yet to provide compelling evidence, and has not been consistent in its charges against al-Barakaat. Only time will tell if the economic sanctions imposed on Somalia's largest company were warranted or were an ill-advised rush to judgment by government officials under pressure to attack Al Qaeda's transnational financial empire.

Collectively, these economic woes exacerbate political tensions in the country. They also create even greater need for basic social services—schools, soup kitchens and community centers, primary health care posts—that cannot be met by weak local governments, and that are not being met by Western aid agencies. Instead, the groups most aggressively filling that gap in Somalia are Islamic aid agencies such as al-Islah, which are mainly funded by Gulf states. Those aid agencies—especially the Islamic schools, which dominate primary and secondary education in Somalia—are reshaping the worldviews of a generation of young Somalis. Although they are not comparable to the Pakistani madrassas (religious schools), where young men are recruited into radical Islamic movements, the Islamic schools in Somalia are resocializing Somali society in directions that may make the country a more welcoming place for radical Islamic movements in years to come. The West's protracted indifference to Somalia's crisis of underdevelopment, interrupted only by threatening military moves, stands in unappealing contrast. To the extent that the war on terrorism includes winning “hearts and minds” in the Islamic world, the re-engagement of the West in Somalia's development crisis is an urgent matter.

### SOMALIA AND THE WAR ON TERRORISM

Following September 11, Somalia was quick to earn a spot on the short list of countries that might be targeted in an expanded war on terrorism. Initially this unwelcome recognition was not earned by direct evidence of Islamist radicalism in Somalia, but rather by a process of deduction. Somalia met a number of criteria that made it an obvious “state of concern” (to use the terminology for “rogue state” offered by the Clinton administration): it is a collapsed state where terrorists could operate beyond

the reach of the law; an impoverished land where radicals could easily buy local cooperation; and a country with the presence of an indigenous political Islamist movement, al-Ittihad. That placed it in the company of Yemen and Sudan as possible countries where Al Qaeda might relocate from embattled Afghanistan. Naval interdiction along and patrolling of the Somali coast was initiated; aerial surveillance was conducted over the country; and increased intelligence assets were devoted to monitoring a country that had been given little attention since early 1995, when the United States and the UN pulled out of the country following a failed peace operation.

By November 2001, statements out of some United States government departments—particularly parts of the Department of Defense—suggested that the United States had compelling evidence of an Al Qaeda presence in Somalia and was prepared to take military action against it. Media pundits seized on and drove the story, putting Somalia back on the front pages of newspapers. These unequivocal charges were interspersed with more cautious statements, mainly from the Department of State, that Somalia “could become” a base for terrorists. The inconsistent and contradictory positions on the terrorist threat posed by Somalia soon made it apparent that there were sharp divisions inside the United States government. Although the Defense Department was most often associated with more hawkish views on Somalia, every department of the government, including defense, was divided internally on the subject. A paucity of reliable intelligence on Somalia encouraged widely divergent interpretations of the threat of Islamic radicalism in the country. Mounting political pressure to expand the war on terrorism beyond Afghanistan led some

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to worry that Somalia was being targeted not because of compelling evidence of a terrorist threat, but because it was a collapsed state with few friends; a United States military strike there would produce far fewer diplomatic complications than elsewhere.

Despite often harsh rhetoric, however, no American military actions against Islamist cells have been taken in Somalia, and the United States government positions on Somalia have gradually grown more cautious. Part of this shift has been the result of the government's stepped-up monitoring and intelligence gathering, which has produced no "smoking gun" of evidence of Al Qaeda operations in Somalia. The Defense Department, which initially relied too uncritically on Ethiopian military intelligence, quickly discovered that the Ethiopians and their Somali allies had vested interests in exaggerating the threat of radical Islam in Somalia. What has been discovered instead is that the Somali Islamic movement al-Ittihad is a possible but not a definitive threat, one that requires ongoing monitoring rather than military action.

#### AL-ITTIHAD, SOMALIA, AND AL QAEDA

Al-Ittihad al-Islamiya emerged in the late 1980s as a movement in Mogadishu, comprised mainly of educated young men who had studied or worked in the Middle East. They believed that the only way to rid Somalia of the corruption, repression, and tribalism under the regime of Mohammed Siad Barre was through political Islam. In this sense, al-Ittihad mirrored many other Islamic movements in the Middle East. With the collapse of the Somali state in early 1991, al-Ittihad made several attempts to hold strategic real estate, including seaports (they failed to hold Bosaso in the north, but temporarily ran seaports at Kismayo and Merka) and the commercial crossroad town of Luuq in southern Somalia, near the Ethiopian border. Al-Ittihad managed to govern Luuq from 1991 to 1996, imposing sharia (Islamic law) on the community. In other towns they developed cells that exercised varying levels of political influence locally. Ironically, security was better in Luuq than almost anywhere else in southern Somalia, leading some international aid organizations to express preference for al-Ittihad's administration.

In 1996 the Ethiopian branch of al-Ittihad engaged in several acts of terrorism inside Ethiopia, including two hotel bombings and an assassination attempt as part of an effort to impose sharia in all Somali-inhabited regions of Ethiopia. Those acts are the basis for the State Department's labeling of al-Ittihad as a terrorist organization. They also led

the Ethiopian government to crack down on the group. Ethiopia responded by launching military attacks against Luuq, which had been suspected of hosting non-Somali Islamists from Sudan. Al-Ittihad was driven out of Luuq and scattered.

Since 1996, al-Ittihad has embraced a new strategy. First, it has decided not try to hold towns or territory, since that only makes it an easy fixed target for Ethiopia and other enemies. Instead, it now integrates into local Somali communities. That makes it a problematic target in the war on terrorism. Second, after concluding that clannish Somalia was not yet ready to accept a transclan Islamic movement, it has opted to decentralize the movement within clans. Some clans have a stronger al-Ittihad following than others, but none is beholden to a central al-Ittihad decision-making body. The movement has become as decentralized as Somali society is. This has led to the movement taking on different flavors by region. In some areas it has openly cooperated with Western aid agencies and disavows any links to outside Islamic movements; in other places it keeps to itself; in still other areas it has been linked to acts of violence against and assassination of Somalis and Westerners. Third, al-Ittihad has forsaken short-term political goals and adopted a long-term strategy to bring Islamic rule to Somalia. It is focusing on key sectors of society—education, local judiciaries, the media, nonprofit organizations, and commerce—to build constituencies, place members, socialize Somalis, and build a power base. How strong the organization is at this time is the subject of fierce debate. Some Somalis argue it is discredited and virtually moribund; others claim it remains a force to be reckoned with.

In the aftermath of September 11, al-Ittihad came under much more intense scrutiny as a possible subsidiary or partner of Al Qaeda. Some of the initial fears—that Al Qaeda had training camps and bases in Somalia, and that al-Ittihad and Al Qaeda are synonymous—were eventually dispelled. But other concerns about al-Ittihad remain. For instance, some al-Ittihad members clearly have associated with Al Qaeda. This has led to worries that Al Qaeda may be able to use al-Ittihad for a variety of purposes: to carry out terrorist attacks, to harbor fleeing Al Qaeda members and provide them safe haven in Somalia, to relocate an operational base into Somalia, or to use Somali businesses owned by al-Ittihad members to generate profits for Al Qaeda.

These charges have been difficult to investigate, but some consensus has emerged that the concerns

are not as alarming as initially feared. No Somalis have been directly involved in Al Qaeda terrorist attacks, and no Somalis appear in the high ranks of the Al Qaeda organization. Whatever involvement Somali Islamists may have in the group appears relatively modest. It is also increasingly obvious that Somalia would be a very risky and poor choice for non-Somali Al Qaeda members to seek safe haven or to reconstitute Al Qaeda operations. Non-Somalis have great difficulty doing anything in secret in Somalia and would stand an excellent chance of being turned in by Somalis, who would be quick to seek the financial and political benefits that presumably would accrue to reliable partners in the war on terrorism. Prudence dictates that the United States needs to continue to monitor Somalia in this regard, but the use of Somalia as an alternative base for Al Qaeda is considered unlikely.

As for Somali businesses generating profits for Al Qaeda, it is entirely possible that some Somali businessmen secured loans in Dubai from individuals linked to Al Qaeda, in part because that may have been the only source of credit available. In that case, Somali businesses may involve Al Qaeda as a “shareholder” of the company. But the profits generated in impoverished Somalia hardly compare to opportunities elsewhere, and should not be exaggerated.

There is also concern that al-Ittihad constitutes a silent partner in the TNG. Al-Ittihad has been relatively well organized in Mogadishu and played an important role in the sharia court system that provided a modicum of rule of law in the capital prior to the TNG. Al-Ittihad supported the Arta process, pressed the TNG hard (but unsuccessfully) to gain control over key portfolios such as the judiciary, and has a number of members in the TNG parliament.

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<sup>4</sup>*Black Hawk Down* refers to the intense battle that occurred on October 3, 1993, when about 100 United States troops were dropped by helicopter into a densely populated neighborhood of Mogadishu in a mission to apprehend General Aideed's top lieutenants. Two Black Hawk helicopters were brought down by heavy Somali gunfire, and the American forces were pinned down in a firefight that lasted 12 hours and left 17 American soldiers and an estimated 500 to 1,000 Somalis dead. Televised images of Somali crowds dragging a dead American soldier through the streets led to fierce pressures to pull out of Somalia and created a powerful backlash against United States involvement in “operations other than war” elsewhere.

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This has been the basis for charges that the TNG is a Trojan horse for al-Ittihad, which in turn is charged with being a Trojan horse for Al Qaeda. From this perspective, the TNG is the equivalent of the Taliban regime in Afghanistan. Ethiopia and its Somali clients (who fancy themselves the equivalent of the “Northern Alliance”) have been vigorous in promoting this interpretation of the TNG in an attempt to draw the United States into assisting in attacking or discrediting it. In reality the TNG is not a Trojan horse for radical Islamists. Indeed, the TNG leadership would like to be able to purge itself of al-Ittihad members but cannot; it is too weak to risk a direct confrontation with al-Ittihad. Instead, it has quietly sought to contain and marginalize al-Ittihad. Again, prudence dictates that the relationship between the TNG and al-Ittihad be closely monitored,

but at this time there is no justification for labeling the TNG a front for radical Islamists.

Making an assessment of radical Islamic agendas in Somalia even more difficult is

the active role of Islamic NGOs, some of which may be used as fronts for al-Ittihad or external Islamists. The Islamic NGOs have traditionally kept a distance from other international NGOs and do not subscribe to the same rules of transparency and accountability. This makes them difficult to monitor and potentially easier for radicals to misuse. One of the changes that may need to occur in post-September 11 Somalia is much greater insistence by the United States that Saudi-funded NGOs subject their work to the same level of outside evaluation and monitoring expected of other international aid organizations.

As for United States policy, in the year ahead we are likely to see ongoing monitoring and surveillance of Somalia. If a direct military intervention occurs, it is likely to be a “snatch and grab” operation by special forces to apprehend (or kill) an individual terrorist suspect. This would be a high-risk operation in the crowded and heavily armed dens of Mogadishu. No one in or out of the United States government would want to see a repeat of a *Black Hawk Down* disaster.<sup>4</sup> Presumably such an operation would take place only if the threat posed warranted such a risk.

## REGIONALISM VERSUS GLOBALISM

One lesson learned since September 11 is that the expanded war on terrorism has created a lens

that tends to distort our vision of the complex political dynamics of countries like Somalia. Local political realities are not always assessed in their own right, but instead are interpreted through, and reduced to, the logic of the war on terrorism. The war on terrorism is encouraging the same type of bipolar vision of the world that informed much political analysis during the cold war. This can lead to oversimplification and misinterpretation, which in turn runs the risk of producing ill-advised and counterproductive policies.

The expansion of the war on terrorism into places like Somalia is also reviving an old and utterly unloved debate over national security between “globalists” and “regionalists,” only now with Islamic radicalism replacing communism as the object of the quarrel. Globalists are quicker to conclude that local Islamic movements are part of a

transnational network of Islamic radicalism (and hence are a threat); area specialists are more likely to stress the local nature of such movements and view any links with external Islamic networks as incidental or situational (and hence less of a threat). Regionalists accuse globalists of ignorance of local realities; globalists accuse regionalists of ignorance of the broader political context. The ongoing debate inside the United States government over the threat of radical Islamic movements in Somalia is a reflection of the two very different worldviews. The answer, of course, is that accurate analysis and successful policy requires both close attention to local dynamics and to the broader transnational context in which these movements exist. It remains to be seen if the expanded war on terrorism will possess the analytic dexterity to wed the two approaches successfully. ■