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Bricks and blankets – not barrels and bombs



Transcending instability in Somalia

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Summary

This policy brief suggests that stabilisation efforts in Somalia should be viewed through an alternative lens beyond the prevailing focus on military operations. While the relevance and role of military operations must be acknowledged, these relative successes should be accompanied by non-military approaches to achieve short-term stability and lay the foundation for long-term peacebuilding. The policy brief identifies five factors that are vital to attaining sustainable peace.

Recommendations

- The African Union (AU) and the Intergovernmental Authority on Development, in coordination with the international community, must support a national dialogue to help facilitate an emerging inclusive political system.
- Development institutions such as the United Nations Development Programme, World Bank and the African Development Bank should work with the African Union Mission to Somalia and the Somalia National Army to rebuild Somalia's basic infrastructure.
- The current policing model should be recalibrated to embrace community leadership on policing.
- The AU, United Nations and bilateral partners must develop, adopt and adhere to a 'partnership pact' to coordinate support provided to the Federal Government of Somalia.
- Young people and women must be active agents of peace and have at least 30% representation in government institutions.

Introduction

Stabilisation efforts in Somalia have historically been dominated by military operations. While the relevance and role of these operations should be acknowledged, a new approach must now emerge. On 28 January 2020, the African Union Commission (AUC) hosted a Military Operations Coordination Committee (MOCC) meeting on Somalia in Kampala, Uganda. This was the 29th MOCC held by the AUC in eight years. Despite sustained military interventions against Al-Shabaab, the extremist group has remained adaptable and continues to threaten civilian populations, personnel of the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM) and Somali national security forces.

Al-Shabaab attacks intensified in 2019. In June, AMISOM reclaimed the agriculturally rich town of Barire from the terrorist group. Two weeks later, Somali national security forces – backed by the United States – relaunched offensive operations as Al-Shabaab fighters had re-organised themselves in an attempt to gain back control over Barire. In mid-July, a suicide bomber who was alleged to be affiliated to Al-Shabaab rammed a car containing explosives into the Asasey Hotel, located in the port city of Kismayo. This terrorist attack claimed the lives of 26 people including Hodan Nalayeh, a Somali-Canadian journalist, and injured several more. Ten days later, a suicide bomber walked into a high-level security meeting in Mogadishu, detonating explosives that would eventually kill the mayor of Mogadishu, Abdirahman Omar Osman, along with at least six other government officials.¹

Al-Shabaab-linked attacks are not isolated incidents. Somalia has experienced threats from various armed opposition and violent extremist groups for almost three decades.

AMISOM was first deployed in 2007 to restore state authority and promote peace, security and stability in Somalia. Since then, the mission has incurred an estimated annual expenditure of US\$1 billion – and a human cost of thousands of security personnel casualties.² Some 6% of Somali's population of 14.7 million have become refugees,³ and approximately two out of every 10 Somalis are internally displaced as a result of the prolonged conflict.⁴

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In addition to AMISOM, other bilateral partners and Somali national security forces have also been engaged in the effort to restore stability in Somalia. Two electoral processes were conducted based on a so-called 4.5 clan power-sharing formula, which could pave the way for the first-ever universal suffrage in Somalia by 2020/21.⁵

Since 2007, AMISOM and Somali national forces recovered more than 70% of areas in south-central Somalia that were previously occupied by Al-Shabaab. AMISOM has also facilitated humanitarian access, while working with international partners to enable a transfer of primary security responsibilities to Somali national security institutions. This shift forms part of an agreed framework that guides AMISOM's transition to decrease its activities and eventually withdraw from Somalia.⁶

Despite ongoing efforts by AMISOM and international partners, Somalia has not achieved stability. Both asymmetrical and conventional attacks continue to occur even in so-called



Figure 1: Map showing Bariire, Mogadishu and Kismayo in Somalia

'liberated' areas. Even though a high number of Somalis who have become refugees or have been internally displaced, these populations have also shown remarkable levels of hope and resilience. Many have become part of a dynamic global diaspora community. Yet the situation in Somalia can sometimes be a source of rebuke, as evidenced by xenophobic remarks made by United States (US) President Donald Trump in 2019 against four distinguished female senators, including one of Somali descent.⁷

The persistence of security threats is not indicative of an AMISOM failure – indeed, the mission has made important contributions toward peace, security and stability in Somalia. Rather, the continuation of insecurity clearly points to the limits of a predominantly military approach in achieving long-term peace in

Somalia. This calls for an alternative way of thinking about stabilisation beyond the prevailing focus on military operations.

While both the relevance and the role of military operations in stabilisation are acknowledged, these relative successes must be complemented by non-military approaches to achieve both short- and long-term stability. This would require greater political reconciliation between clans, the establishment of robust and locally driven policing, and basic infrastructural development to facilitate livelihoods. Additionally, there needs to be a broadening of the civic space to increase women and youth participation in governance. This brief also calls for leadership and the coordination of external actors' efforts in Somalia to ensure these are conducive to prospects for sustainable peace and stability.

A history of instability

To make sense of the persistent nature of terrorism in Somalia requires some context. Following decades of authoritarianism, the fall of Siad Barre's dictatorial regime in 1991 led to the rise of armed groups competing for control of political power. This included the radical Islamic Court Union regime, which was responsible for the spread of extremist ideology. The state collapse that followed the fall of Barre's regime led to two broad phases of international and regional intervention.

The first phase occurred from 1992 to 1995, and saw the deployment of the United Nations Operations in Somalia (UNSOM I and II), followed by a US-led multinational force known as the Unified Task Force. These international interventions had a combined strength of almost 40 000 peacekeepers and military personnel responsible for facilitating humanitarian relief and state-building.⁸ The fatalities recorded by these international interventions, including the loss of 18 US soldiers in the Battle of Mogadishu, led to the withdrawal of UN and US troops in 1995.

The second set of interventions was characterised by repeated Ethiopian incursions into Somalia, first occurring in 1996 and culminating in a full-scale military intervention by Ethiopian troops to oust the Islamic Court Union in 2006. This intervention was followed by the authorisation of IGASOM (The Inter-Governmental Authority on Development [IGAD] Peace Support Mission to Somalia) to support the establishment of a Transitional Federal Government in Mogadishu. This mission was never deployed, however, and AMISOM was subsequently deployed in 2007.

Prolonged military operations are unlikely to achieve stability. Rather, five key factors could complement military operations to foster stability in Somalia, namely inclusive political reconciliation amongst clans; enhancing policing and rule of law; infrastructural development; investment in young people and women; and the coordination of support amongst external actors. These factors are vital to attaining sustainable peace in Somalia.

Inclusive political reconciliation amongst clans; enhancing policing and rule of law; infrastructural development; investment in young people and women; and the coordination of support amongst external actors.

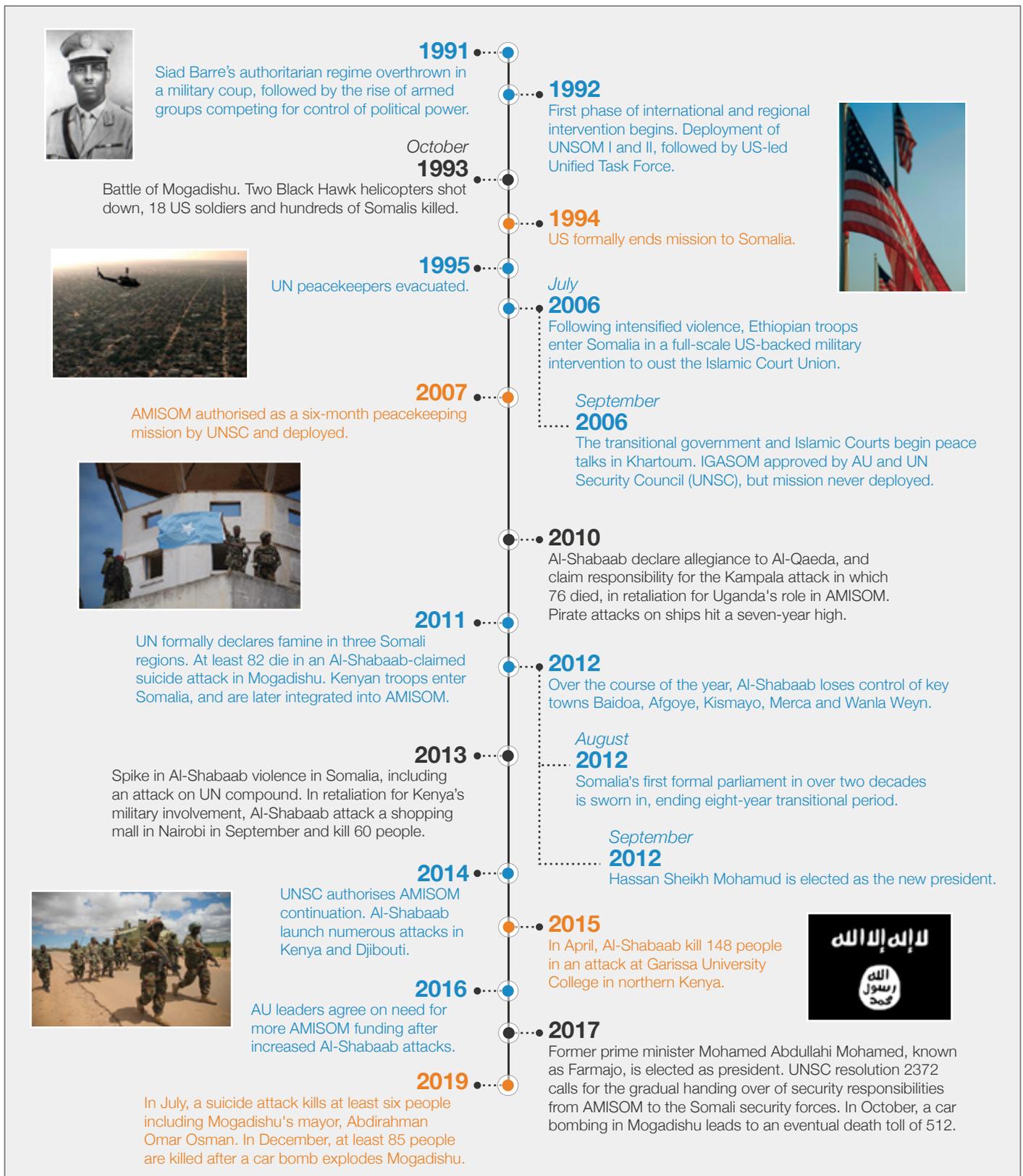


Figure 2: Timeline showing instability in Somalia

Unpacking stabilisation

The concept of stabilisation is elastic and often contested, but remains relevant to both security and development actors.

For security actors, and according to security experts like David Curran and Charles Hunt, stabilisation doctrine is rooted in NATO (North Atlantic Treaty Organization) operations, and interventions are guided by the goal of providing support that allows so-called failed states to re-establish national authority.⁹

This kind of framing has often been adopted in contemporary peace-support operations mandated or authorised by the African Union (AU) and recent UN peacekeeping missions. AU peace-support operations in Mali (2013), the Central African Republic (2013-14) and Somalia (since 2007), have included mandates that support states in the extension of national authority and the restoration of these countries' territorial integrity. Similarly, ongoing UN peacekeeping missions in the Central African Republic, Mali and Democratic Republic of Congo have also included stabilisation in their respective mandates. The security approach to stabilisation, as compared with peacekeeping, has often been characterised by a military emphasis, anchored in a political strategy as a basis for long-term peacebuilding.

Development actors are also gradually embracing the notion of stabilisation in programme delivery within fragile contexts. A proposed definition based on a developmental approach is:

Stabilisation is a time bound, localised, integrated programme of activities in areas cleared and held through military action intended to create confidence in, and provide support to, an ongoing, peace process

internationally recognised through a Security Council mandate while laying the building blocks for longer-term peacebuilding and development by delivering a peace dividend to local communities and seeking to extend legitimate political authority.¹⁰

This type of definition has been inspired by efforts in Iraq and Afghanistan, and more recently in the Lake Chad Basin region by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) to promote and implement stabilisation programmes. The principles that underpin such an approach include that it is immediate, implemented at the sub-national/community level, and anchored in political ownership of the local administration.¹¹

Communities need to have confidence and trust in formal authority if they are to resist the return and re-occupation of violent-extremist and armed opposition groups.

The immediate objective of a development-led stabilisation approach is the provision of basic infrastructure and security – including access to justice and ensuring that livelihoods opportunities are restored. These immediate priorities reflect the elements that are usually lacking in communities recovered by security forces from violent extremist or armed opposition groups, like in the Somali context. Ensuring security operations are followed with stabilisation efforts increases the likelihood of ‘winning hearts and minds’, and boosting confidence amongst local communities. Communities need to have confidence and trust in formal authority if they are to resist the return and re-occupation of violent-extremist and armed opposition groups.

The security and non-security approaches to stabilisation outlined above unite around three factors. First is that stabilisation occurs in fragile contexts, amid conflict and in high-risk security environments. Second, stabilisation is underpinned by strong cooperation with political and security actors. Local administrations in affected areas are responsible for leading and supporting external actors in accessing local communities so that governance can be extended through the provision of security, basic services and infrastructure, and access to livelihoods opportunities. As stabilisation work takes place amid the deployment of security forces, these two sets of actors are required to work together, including to ensure that a conducive security environment which facilitates immediate programming can be created. Third, stabilisation activities, even when successful, will not guarantee sustainable peace. Rather, they have the potential to lay a foundation for recovery and long-term peacebuilding.

Despite these commonalities in the security and development approaches, stabilisation operations have been predominantly military led. As the case of Somalia reveals, promoting non-military interventions will be crucial for restoring the ingredients of peace in the country.

Non-military prioritisation

Political reconciliation between clans

Political reconciliation among Somali clans is essential for the restoration of sustainable governance at local, regional and national levels. Inclusive political processes have long been a challenge in Somalia. The fragile central government has struggled to govern beyond the political capital, Mogadishu. Recurring tensions between the central government and

regional governments have made it impossible to establish a viable state. The cumulative effect of such a dearth of political consensus is that local governance is either limited or defined by intense clan rivalries. A central factor that drives this persistent lack of state consolidation is the absence of inclusive political reconciliation between clans, which could address the collective security concerns of the Somali society. This can be achieved through a locally constituted and inclusive peace process that is bottom-up in its approach, and is not perceived as predominantly led by the Federal Government of Somalia with support from various external stakeholders.

Context-appropriate policing

Enhancing policing rather than reinforcing the militarisation of Somalia could promote stabilisation. In 2016, the Federal Government of Somalia – with the support of international partners – launched the New Policing Model.¹² The model aims to establish a police force comprised of 32 000 personnel across the federal and state police, including a coastguard and Darwish (locally trained police who could deploy where civilian police operations are required). Unfortunately, in its current form, Somalia's new policing model is based on a neo-liberal understanding of policing. According to this perspective, policing is based on the establishment of an institutional framework for maintaining law and order and promoting the rule of law. This does not take into account the need to fulfil preferences, expectations and incentives of Somali communities.¹³

Neo-liberal policing doctrine is anchored in helping the communities maintain law and order – rather than empowering communities to leverage local policing infrastructure. As a result, there has been a failure to transition from policing

as ‘giving to the communities’ – to finding creative ways of how local communities can be supported to police themselves. Training civilian groups and regional police that have a stake in maintaining law and order within their own communities will be vital.

In Somalia, less than 30% of the police complement envisaged under the New Policing Model has so far been generated.

In Somalia, less than 30% of the police complement envisaged under the New Policing Model has so far been generated. There are significant gaps in the skills and capabilities of the existing police force. As part of the support provided by AMISOM, just over a thousand police personnel have been authorised to provide mentoring and training to the Somali Police Force. Yet AMISOM police are not able to deploy to certain regions without the protection of military personnel. Rethinking policing at the local level will significantly accelerate a sustained approach to peace in Somalia. This calls for a deliberate initiative to establish locally empowered police personnel to execute key functions regionally, while some exclusive tasks – such as election security and cross-border security – could be performed nationally.

Prioritising basic infrastructure

Following decades of civil war and an absence of governance, Somalia’s infrastructural development is ranked the lowest in Africa and among the least developed in the world.¹⁴ Robust, long-term infrastructural development will be expensive, and will not necessarily lead to peace. However, restoring basic infrastructure that will allow communities immediate access to

their source of livelihoods – such as agricultural farmlands and markets – is expedient. Basic infrastructural needs are relatively easy to support and represent an immediate gain that could potentially win the hearts and minds of local communities, and consequently boost the legitimacy of governments across federal, state and local levels. Meeting Somalia’s immediate, micro-level infrastructural needs could lay the foundation for longer-term, positive peace.

Boosting inclusivity

Women play an important role in driving peace in Somalia, but their role remains under-utilised – especially in rural communities. Women who champion peaceful co-existence are helping their communities to transform. More than 73% of Somali women are involved in the agricultural sector. There are several women organisations across Somalia that are actively working towards preventing and responding to violent extremism in their communities. Parliament is also becoming more representative, with 24.4% female representation in 2018.¹⁵ Yet Somalia has a particularly high maternal mortality rate – estimated at over 700 deaths per 100 000 births.¹⁶ The majority of these deaths occur in rural communities where there is no access to basic services. In these communities, the role of women in public life and decision making is often significantly limited. Extending, supporting and deepening the leadership roles of women in rural communities will enable bottom-up transformation.

Young people represent the largest demography in Africa. As at 2020, 62% of the continent’s population is under the age of 25.¹⁷ In Somalia, the average age of the population is 18 years and the annual population growth rate is ranked at almost 6% – representing one of the highest in the world.¹⁸ Somali youth are defying odds to



Women who champion peaceful co-existence are helping their communities to transform.

influence national, regional and global discourses in areas like climate change, countering violent extremism and championing an alternative narrative about their society. Scaling up the role of youth in shaping Somalia's political and developmental trajectory will be essential for sustainable peace.

Coordinating external actors

The haphazard constellation of uncoordinated external actors is doing more harm than good in Somalia. Indeed, the Somali government has a sovereign right to forge legitimate partnerships with various stakeholders. Currently, however, there are more than 40 external partners in the country, providing financial and technical support across sectors ranging from security to infrastructure and even maritime support – given Somalia's strategic proximity to the Red Sea. The net outcome of these parallel support processes is a lack of accountability by the government. It is perhaps no coincidence that Somalia is perceived as the most corrupt country in the world – according to Transparency International.¹⁹

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External partners operating in Somalia sometimes have opposing interests, and a lack of leadership in coordinating their involvement continues to stifle accountability and reinforce governance deficits. Reversing this pattern would require urgent political cooperation among influential actors. This would include regional actors such as the AU and bilateral partners

in neighbouring countries to urge the Federal Government of Somalia towards more visible, accountable and coherent collaboration with external actors.

Time is running out

Somalia appears to be trapped in an abyss of intractable conflict. The threat posed by Al-Shabaab is only one of several security concerns facing the country. After more than a decade of sustained engagement, it is clear that military operations can only play a limited role.

Prevailing policy discussions of AMISOM's exit or transition from Somalia obfuscate deeper concerns about continued insecurity.

Prevailing policy discussions of AMISOM's exit or transition from Somalia obfuscate deeper concerns about continued insecurity. An alternative and potentially transformative approach is to launch a process of stabilisation that prioritises the short-term provision of basic services, including essential infrastructural development to restore livelihoods – especially amongst rural communities.

An overarching requirement for stabilisation is political reconciliation. The Somali people will have to establish a 'clan cohesion model' that allows for an inclusive political process to underpin the vision for security, development and positive peace in Somalia. A response that prioritises immediate stabilisation, medium-term recovery and long-term peacebuilding offers the best chance of sustainable peace in Somalia.

Notes

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