GIVING ISLAMISM A VOICE IN SOMALIA'S FUTURE

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JCSP 42	PCEMI 42
Exercise *Solo Flight*	**Exercice *Solo Flight***

CANADIAN FORCES COLLEGE – COLLÈGE DES FORCES CANADIENNES
JCSP 42 – PCEMI 42
2015 – 2016

EXERCISE *SOLO FLIGHT* – EXERCICE *SOLO FLIGHT*

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Word Count: 4945

Compte de mots: 4945

Somalia has not known peace for a quarter of a century. A generation of power struggles between warlords, violent Islamists, rival clans, regional and international states and criminal networks, has dissolved Somalia into a dysfunctional entity incapable of delivering almost any obligation expected of a legitimate governing authority. Currently second of 178 countries on the Fragile State Index,[1] Somalia "has been what many would describe as the quintessential "failed state" since the inception of the Failed States Index."[2] The West[3] and its regional allies have had a significant interest in Somalia since the collapse of General Siad Barre's 22-year dictatorship in 1991. Geo-strategically, Somalia's location is pivotal: sitting on the shores of both the Arabian Sea and the Gulf of Aden it is estimated that 12% of the world's trade moves through these waters.[4] Instability in the region caught the world's attention in recent years as Somali piracy was estimated to have reduced this trade by 4.1% annually between 2000-2010.[5] Amid ubiquitous transnational terrorist networks, Somalia's radical Islamic jihadists are of increasing concern to the international community. The nexus with disaffected members of the global Somali diaspora has been seen to heighten the terror threat against Western targets.[6] Finally, the instability of Somalia as a failed state and its implications on the broader East African region is of significant concern, specifically to key Western allies such as Ethiopia and Kenya.

Successive attempts to bring peace, stability and governance to Somalia have at best failed, at worse exacerbated the crisis. Such failures are born out of an inability or unwillingness to

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[1] Fund For Peace, *Fragile State Index 2015*, accessed 27 March 2016, http://fsi.fundforpeace.org.

[2] Felipe Umaña, "The Recovery of Somalia: Check Back With Us Again Next Year," *Fund For Peace*, 24 June 2013, accessed 27 March 2016, http://library.fundforpeace.org/fsi13-somalia.

[3] Although acknowledged to be a broad term, the 'West,' for the purpose of this paper, refers to the United States and its like-minded liberal-democratic allies.

[4] Alfredo Burlando, Anca Cristea, and Logan M. Lee, "The Trade Consequences of Maritime Insecurity: Evidence from Somali Piracy," *University of Oregon*, 9 April 2015: 2, accessed 5 April 2016, http://pages.uoregon.edu/cristea/Research_files/PiracyTrade.pdf.

[5] *Ibid.*, 1.

[6] Terrorist plots organised by Somali nationals have been uncovered in the US, UK and Australia. See Bronwyn Bruton, "In the Quicksands of Somalia," *Foreign Affairs*, vol. 88, no. 6 (November/December 2009): 79.

understand the complexity of the problem. A key component to the Somalia issue is the centrality of Islam to Somali identity and culture. A rarely homogenous society, Somalia is considered to be 100% Sunni Muslim, affiliated to the Shafi'i branch.[7] Despite the region's long historical association with the religion, Islamism, or political Islam, is a comparatively recent phenomenon.

This paper will argue that understanding Islamism is fundamental to understanding Somalia today. It is a significant force in the power struggles that exist to govern the region. The West's ignorance of the complexities of Islamism in Somalia have prevented opportunities to bring order and stability and has, in turn, driven prominent Islamist movements into the arms of violent extremist ideologies committed to global jihad. In the quest to find a political solution to this failed state, Islamism cannot be ignored; it is both part of the problem and part of the solution.

Having identified key concepts, this paper will outline the history of Islam in Somali culture and more recently, the growth of Islamism, exploring the migration of Islamist movements to an increasingly radicalised ideology. The relationship between Somali Islamist movements and both internal actors, specifically the clan-based system that prevails in the region, and external, both regional and international actors, will then be explored. Islamist-clan relationships will be discussed with a view to identifying how these relationships can be exploited or managed. An analysis of external actors will seek to identify the extent to which interventions have exacerbated divides between moderate and extremist Islamist movements. Finally the role of Islamism in the future of Somalia will be discussed. Whilst it is not the intent

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[7] Afyara Abdi Elmi, *Understanding the Somalia Conflagration: Identity, Political Islam and Peacebuilding* (London: Pluto Press, 2010), 48.

of this paper to provide solutions to the reconstruction of a functioning state, it will consider the role of Islamism in the options available to achieve this ambition.

Islamism is a contested term.[8] In the context of this paper it refers to the politicization of Islam, one in which a form of governance is sought based on Islamic laws, ideals and values. Whilst this concept may have negative connotations in some Western societies given popular media associations with violent extremists, the concept captures all actors across the ideological spectrum from peaceful moderates to violent radicals. Attention on the latter has manifested from a recent growth in jihadist ideology, referring to aspirations of prominent extremist movements[9] for the creation of a transnational caliphate, at the expense of other secular beliefs or governance. Post-Islamism refers to more "socially conservative political parties that accept the rules of a civil, democratic, pluralist system and no longer advocate for the imposition of sharia law but maintain an Islamic reference as their inspiration."[10]

Islam, Islamism and Somalia

Islam has a long, albeit debated history in what is today known as Somalia. Accounts of its transcendence in the region vary from Muslims escaping persecution in Arabia before the Prophet Muhammed migrated to Medina, to Persians and Arabs arriving during the period of the first Caliph.[11] What is undisputed is that Islam arrived peacefully and spread throughout the region, proving the bedrock to the identity of the Somali people today. "Islam as a religion and a

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[8] For an understanding of the variations in defining 'Islamism' see Afyara Abdi Elmi, *Understanding the Somalia Conflagration…*, 51-53. See also, Said Mentak, "Islam and Modernity: Islamist Movements and the Politics of Position," *Contemporary Islam*, vol. 3, issue 2 (July 2009): 113-119.
[9] Most notably the franchises inspired by Al-Qaeda and the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL).
[10] Rory McCarthy, "Protecting the Sacred: Tunisia's Islamist Movement Ennahdha and the Challenge of Free Speech," *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*, vol. 42, no. 4: 448.
[11] Afyara Abdi Elmi, *Understanding the Somalia Conflagration…*, 49-50.

system of values so thoroughly permeates all aspects of Somali life that it is difficult to conceive of any meaning in the term Somali itself without at the same time implying Islamic identity."[12]

In understanding the emergence of Islamism in the region it is necessary to understand the advent of Islam as a political as well as religious orientation. The forefather, Jamal-al-din al Afghani popularized the use of religion as a source of galvanizing opposition to Western influences in Muslim lands. Successors to his movement, including the birth of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt in the 1920s, have further expanded on the politicization of Islam advocating a mergence of religion and state to produce an Islamic state.[13] This orientation is known as *Ikhwan*. The other dominant orientation that mirrors Ikhwan is *Salafi*, which, whilst it too advocates the establishment of an Islamic state and the use of the Quran as jurisprudence, it differs in that, "while the Ikhwani approach focuses on politics, the Salafi orientation emphasizes the purification of society."[14] Both have found their place in Somali society today and though they differ in emphasis, their history amongst key figures in Somalia's recent history is intertwined.[15] The origins of the Islamist movement in the region are disputed though most accounts see its emergence in the 1960s, gaining prominence in the 1970s.[16] Having set up the movement *Al-Ahli*, Sheikh Mohammed Moallim Hassan is widely regarded as the father of Somalia's Islamic awakening. Arrested by the Barre regime in 1975, the group fragmented and thus began the evolution of a series of Islamist movements along the political spectrum. It is the ignorance or unwillingness of powerful actors to understand this spectrum that, it is argued, has helped to ferment the success of today's radical militants.

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[12] Ali Abdirahman Hersi, *The Arab Factor in Somali History: The Origins and the Development of Arab Enterprise and Cultural Influences in the Somali Peninsula* (Los Angeles: University of California, 1977).

[13] This is not to infer any direct referencing to the ideologies or methodologies of the violent extremist group calling themselves the Islamic State.

[14] Afyara Abdi Elmi, *Understanding the Somalia Conflagration…*, 54.

The pre-eminent group in recent Somali history was Al-Ittihad Al-Islamiya (AIAI) under the leadership of Sheikh Hassan Dahir Aweys, deemed the spiritual head of Somali Islamism.[17] Emerging in the 1980s, AIAI sought an Islamic state in Greater Somalia (including all territory in the Horn of Africa occupied by ethnic Somalis). It rose to prominence in the 1990s as it took up arms in the lawlessness that existed following the fall of the Barre regime. That said, the 1990s was the time of the warlords and thus, whilst Islam was still a galvanising identity, it was clan rivalries that dominated the violent agenda. Key to this paper's thesis, it is necessary to draw a distinction in the evolution of Somali Islamism at this time, in that AIAI, whilst seeking governance according to Islamic law, maintained a nationalist perspective. In the ruins of the post-Barre regime, AIAI's aspirations were to bring stability to the state, albeit not necessarily representing values and ideals conducive to Western forms of governance. Their focus was very much limited to the interests of the Somali people.

On 24 September 2001, America declared AIAI a terrorist organization, citing its attacks on Ethiopian forces and aid workers, as well as its affiliation to Al-Qaeda.[18] It is suggested that the US, in labelling AIAI 'terrorists' securitized this issue. The concept 'securitization' evolves from the theory of constructivism, a school of thought in international relations. Developed out of the Copenhagen School in the 1990s, it proposes that authoritative actors label certain entities as 'threats' or 'existential threats,' thereby suspending political norms.[19] The US, in defining AIAI a terrorist organization in the wake of 9/11, misrepresented the threat of AIAI and its

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[15] *Ibid.*, 56.
[16] *Ibid.*, 55-58.
[17] Mary Harper, *Getting Somalia Wrong: Faith, War and Hope in a Shattered State* (London: Zed Books, 2012), 78.
[18] United States, "Background Information on Other Terrorist Groups," *US State Department*, accessed 6 April 2016, http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/10304.pdf.
[19] Paul D. Williams, *Security Studies: An Introduction*, Chapter 5 (New York: Routledge, 2013), 63-76.

associates at this time and in doing so justified the application of a counter-terrorism mindset to Somalia's Islamist movements that persists to this day.

Whilst AIAI was by no means a peaceful movement, it is argued that setting their methodology in context is important. The movement's violent path is not unique in the power struggles that continue to exist in the region but rather typifies what many groupings, whether clan, criminal or religious in intent, see as a necessity in order to survive and project. The extent of AIAI's affiliations with Al-Qaeda has since faced scrutiny. Whilst their ideologies of Islamic governance were shared, AIAI remained a nationalist focused movement in contrast to the global jihadist ideals of Al-Qaeda. It is also debated how much influence Al-Qaeda had over AIAI, "For their part, Somali Islamists seem to acknowledge the basis for that scepticism [Al Qaeda's role in Somalia in the 1990s] and have made efforts to address the apparent historical discrepancy."[20]

AIAI's militancy against Ethiopia in the contested Ogaden region eventually saw Ethiopian retribution. Military operations against AIAI in the late 1990s reduced its influence and the movement stalled. In their wake, however, emerged a series of splinter groups, the most prominent of which was the Union of Islamic Courts (UIC). After what began as a series of disparate Islamic-based militias opposing the continued domination of warlords, significant areas of south and central Somalia fell under their authority. United to fight a US-backed warlord alliance, the UIC proved victorious and in 2006 brought peace and stability to Mogadishu and large parts of south/central Somalia. In late 2006 a US-backed Ethiopian intervention ousted the UIC and, although under the supposed governance of the Transitional Federal Government (TFG), Somalia once again fell into lawlessness. The six months of UIC rule is deemed to be the

only period in the past 25 years that stability has been brought to Somalia, albeit under the

banner of Shari'ah law.[21] The Islamic movement once again fractured and it was out of the

remnants of the UIC that Al-Shabaab, an increasingly radical Islamist group emerged.

The rise of radical Islamists such as Al-Shabaab will be discussed later but a distinction

must be drawn between their current ideologies, espousing global jihad, vice their Islamist

forefathers. The critical distinction is that AIAI and UIC were nationalist movements with a

regionalised agenda, bringing stability and governance, under Islamic law, to a Somali state. Al-

Shabaab's aspirations are more in line with those of Al-Qaeda and ISIL, sharing aspirations for a

global caliphate.

> AIAI and ICU were, in essence, nationalist Islamist groups, focused primarily on creating a
> stable Islamic state in Somalia and willing to make political compromises in order to
> achieve their goals. Al Shabaab, on the other hand, espouses a strict global jihadist
> ideology, seeing itself simply as a regional foot soldier in a larger, millenarian struggle
> between Islam and infidelity.[22]

It is questioned therefore, whether the West's securitization of Islamists in Somalia,

specifically the precursors to Al-Shabaab, has deprived the state of a functioning government

who has the authority to bring stability to the region. It is evident that such a regime, whether

under the banner of the AIAI or the UIC, would not have governed according to the ideals

espoused by Western liberal democracies. It may, however, not only have prevented the decade

of conflict that continues to this day but also provided a platform for negotiation between the

West, its regional allies and a Somali government to bring international legitimacy to the state

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[20] Lorenzo Vidino, Raffaello Pantucci & Evan Kohlmann, "Bringing Global Jihad to the Horn of Africa: al Shabaab, Western Fighters, and the Sacralization of the Somali Conflict," *African Security*, vol. 3. 4 (25 November 2010): 219.

[21] Cedric Barnes and Harun Haasan, "The Rise and Fall of Mogadishu's Islamic Courts," *Chatham House*, April 2007, accessed 6 April 2016,
https://www.chathamhouse.org/sites/files/chathamhouse/public/Research/Africa/bpsomalia0407.pdf.

thereby enabling it to function as part of the international system. As it proved, external actors

such as the US and Ethiopia chose an alternate path and instead sought to degrade Islamist

groups through either direct engagement or, adding further friction to the failed state dilemma,

exploiting historic clan-based rivalries.

Islamists and the Clans

The clan-based system is central to Somali society. Complex and intertwined, it pervades

all aspects of Somali life and an understanding of the region is not complete without an

appreciation of the power and influence of the clan system:

> Somalia is a political paradox - unified on the surface, poisonously divided beneath. It is
> one of the world's most homogenous nation-states… But in Somalia, it is all about clan.
> Somalis divide themselves into a dizzying number of clans, subclans, sub-subclans, and so
> on, with shifting allegiances and knotty backstories that have bedevilled outsiders for
> years.[23]

Throughout the majority of Barre's socialist-based rule the Somali clan system was

repressed, though in later years as his power declined, Barre exploited clan divides for his own

ends. His ousting in 1991 saw an explosion of clan rivalries across the country, an endemic

problem that lasts to this day. History demonstrates that the relationship between Somali

Islamists and the highly complex clan system is at times symbiotic, at others wholly at odds. So

equally engrained are they in Somali culture and identity that both are used to galvanise support.

In the case of Somalia this typically manifests in the event of a power struggle. In the 1990s

clans dominated the agenda as each sought to exploit the post-Barre power vacuum. Where

Islamists did succeed in opposing clans, such as AIAI in the northeastern regional capital Bosaso,

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[22] Lorenzo Vidino *et al*, "Bringing Global Jihad to the Horn of Africa…," 221.
[23] Jeffery Gettleman, "The Most Dangerous Place in the World," *Foreign Policy*, no. 171 (March/April 2009): 62.

locals welcomed the governance,[24] though such success failed to gain broader momentum. It was in fact this internal conflict that brought about fractures in the Islamist movement as fighting between Somali Muslims was largely frowned upon. On the contrary, fighting external actors such as Ethiopia often aligned clan and Islamic allegiances.[25] More recently, as the Somali population has grown weary of perennial inter-clan conflicts, more radical Islamists such as Al-Shabaab have taken advantage of clan rivalries that continue to fester under the weak governance of the newly formed Somali Federal Government (SFG). As regional expert Matt Bryden argues, "Al-Shabaab's resilience lies in the exploitation of political and social dissent, appropriating local grievances and aspirations in order to obtain support."[26]

It is evident therefore that, as much as Islamism is part of both the failed state problem and the solution, so too is the proliferation of inter-clan rivalries that pervade the region. As the spectrum of Islamist groups have proven in recent years, their form of governance can migrate, exploit and transcend clan afflictions. Providing local solutions such as security, education, jurisdiction and basic services has allowed increasingly radical Islamist groups, such as Al-Shabaab, to dominate the political narrative. Those seeking peace and security in Somalia therefore have two options in this regard. If a conservative Islamist agenda is uncompromisable to the international community, a wedge needs to be driven between Islamists and the clans they dominate. Local leaders need to be offered viable alternatives, convinced of being provided the governance and stability that Al-Shabaab enables in part. In short, an alternative political solution needs to deliver the same grass roots solutions; given Somalia's recent history this

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[24] Afyare Abdi Elmi, *Understanding the Somalia Conflagration…*, 80.
[25] *Ibid.*, 60-61.
[26] Matt Bryden, "Somalia Redux? Assessing the New Somali Federal Government," *Center for Strategic and International Studies*, August 2013, accessed 6 April 2016, http://csis.org/files/publication/130819_Bryden_SomaliaRedux_WEB.pdf. For a comprehensive assessment of the

appears unlikely. An alternative option is to empower a more moderate nationalist Islamist agenda that seeks to work at both the federal and local level to deliver the stability the region so desperately needs. The challenge here will be identifying such a group to empower given the proliferation of an increasingly radical Islamic ideology in Somalia.

Islamists and External Actors

Geo-strategically Somalia remains of significance both regionally and internationally, yet it means different things to different actors. Major trading nations are concerned over coastal instabilities disrupting global sea trade. The US and its Western allies areas are additionally focused on the transnational terror threat emanating from the region. Kenya and Ethiopia both have long-standing territorial disputes with Somalia but are more fearful of the instability generated by a stateless and largely lawless neighbour. In classic realist traditions, Egypt, Eritrea and Sudan have all used Somalia as a proxy in perennial power struggles with Ethiopia, a dominant actor in the region.[27] Beyond individual state interests, alliances such as the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISON) and the United Nations have sought support and intervention methods to bring governance and stability. Furthermore, the proliferation of transnational actors including non-governmental organisations, corporate businesses, transnational criminal networks and terror organizations, have all added to the complexity of bringing a solution to the Somali problem.

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inter-relationship between Al-Shabaab and clan factions see: International Crisis Group, "Somalia: Al-Shabaab – It Will Be a Long War," *Africa Briefing* No. 99, 26 June 2014: 13-15.

[27] Alex De Waal, "A Proxy War Between Ethiopia And Egypt: Africa's 700 Billion Dollar Problem Waiting To Happen," *Foreign Policy*, 17 March 2016, accessed 12 April 2016, http://foreignpolicy.com/2016/03/17/africas-700-billion-problem-waiting-to-happen-ethiopia-horn-of-africa/.

Regardless of their orientation and intent, it is contended that the international community, specifically nation-states, have exploited Somalia for their own political ends rather than in the long-term interests of the country. As such, state intervention, both regional and global, has exacerbated the failed state dilemma. Specific to Somali Islamism, it has progressively radicalized prominent fractions that have exploited such interventions to fuel recruitment. Foreign states have therefore been a driving force in the transition from a nationalist Islamist agenda to one of global jihad, a transition referred to by Lorenzo Vidino *et al*, as a "sacralization of conflict."[28] Given the limited scope of this paper, two key actors, the US and Ethiopia will be used to articulate this argument.

The US has a varied history in Somalia. An ally of President Barre during the Cold War, the US invested billions of dollars into the military regime. Taking a backstep in the aftermath of Barre's fall, the US felt compelled to intervene in 1992 as the lead for a UN mission (UNISOM) to alleviate thousands from the threat of starvation in the midst of a civil war. The US promptly withdrew after the now infamous 'Black Hawk Down' episode in October 1993 when 18 US soldiers were killed at the hands of the warlord General Mohamed Farah Aideed. A humiliated America left Somalia to its fate. The events of 9/11 and the ensuing 'War on Terror' refocused their efforts in the region pursuing a counter terrorism strategy that persists today.[29] Fearful of the Islamist agenda in Somalia, the US classified AIAI, together with Al Barakaat, a sizeable telecommunications and finance transfer company, as terrorist organizations. A year later, the latter was taken off this list due to insufficient evidence linking the company to Al-Qaeda or

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[28] "Sacralization of conflict is the process through which religion, or, in most cases, a militant interpretation of it, evolves from being an irrelevant or secondary factor at the onset of a conflict to shaping the views, actions, and aims of one or more of the conflict's key actors." See Lorenzo Vidino *et al*, "Bringing Global Jihad to the Horn of Africa…," 216.

[29] Afyare Abdi Elmi, "Understanding the US Policy toward Somalia," in *Understanding the Somalia Conflagration*, (London: Pluto Press, 2010), 74-75.

terrorist activity.[30] This, it is argued, further demonstrates the US's securitization of Somali Islamism, in turn reinforcing a conceptual framework that such a failed state bred a 'threat' that necessitated an extensive counter-terrorism strategy. The unintended consequences of this approach galvanised the Islamist cause, albeit still nationalist in intent at this stage. US backing of Somali warlords against disparate Islamist groups led to the formation of the UIC and their brief governance in 2006. Backing a successful Ethiopian offensive to drive out the UIC, the US continued to fight an ever more radical Islamist movement:

> ..the US approach toward Somalia has often been flawed and counter-productive, contesting that the United States' containment policy has dealt with the symptoms but has not addressed the statelessness problem that the Bush administration used to justify its limited and negative involvement in Somalia.[31]

Hope for a strategic shift emerged in 2008 amid an anticipated realignment of US foreign policy in the wake of the 'War on Terror'. The approach towards Somalia, however, changed little and America's containment of the Somali 'threat' though counter-terrorism operations remains.[32]

Ethiopia, a hegemonic power in East Africa and a staunch ally of the US, has had a turbulent relationship with Somalia for many years. A largely Christian-led government, presiding over a Muslim majority, it has long been concerned with an evolving political Islamic ideology across its borders. Ethiopia's interventions in recent decades have generated similar dissent amongst the Somali people to that of the US. Amid post-Barre concerns of a rising Islamist 'threat,' Ethiopia backed the Somali National Front in their fight against AIAI throughout the 1990s. This conflict served to fracture the Islamist movement causing a

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[30] Mary Harper, *Getting Somalia Wrong…,* 168-169.
[31] Afyare Abdi Elmi, "Understanding the US Policy toward Somalia…," 73.
[32] T.Y. McCormick, "U.S. Attacks Reveal Al-Shabab's Strength, Not Weakness," *Foreign Policy*, 9 March 2016, accessed 18 April 2016, http://foreignpolicy.com/2016/03/09/u-s-attacks-reveal-al-shababs-strength-not-weakness-

divergence of opinion over fighting fellow Somali Muslims. The offensive against Ethiopian

forces, however, was deemed wholly justifiable. Annexation of the Ogaden region by Ethiopia

added further resentment to the Somali people and continues to be a source of friction to this day.

The military campaign against AIAI divested the group of their power. It was in their ashes that

the rise of more militant groups emerged, leading to the successes of a more conservative UIC.

Once again threatened by a hard-line Islamist force, Ethiopia 'securitized' the threat prompting

US actions in support of Somali warlords in the early 2000s followed by an Ethiopian invasion to

oust the UIC in 2006. Demonstrating a similar pattern to US intervention, Ethiopia has

perpetually manipulated Somalia for its own ends, identifying Islamism as an uncompromisable

threat that must be dealt with in isolation, regardless of the consequences. The unintended

consequences are evident to this day: a resentful Somali population susceptible to an increasingly

radical interpretation of how to protect Somalia from foreign interference.

Treating the symptoms of state failure, though the prism of a historical misunderstanding

of Somali Islamism, has only served to alienate the Somali population, support Islamist claims of

a viable alternative and fermented an increasingly radical Islamist agenda. In a battle of

perceptions, deposition of despised warlords, delivery of governance, and resilience against

continued foreign intervention have galvanised support for Islamist hardliners. The consequence

is a durable Al-Shabaab that, in contrast to AIAI or the UIC before, now preaches a fervent

global jihadist ideology, "Also, while the Courts had a limited goal…the Shabaab had a global

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somalia/. US attacks on Al-Shabaab have intensified in recent months including an airstrike on 150 militants on 7 March 2015.

goal…we are striving to establish the Islaamic *Khilaafah* from East to West after removing the occupier and killing the apostates.[33]

Such a radical ideological migration, an increasing "sacralisation of the conflict," has intensified in recent years. Al-Shabaab's leadership announced its alliance with Al Qaeda in 2012, partner organisations such as al-Hijra (formally known as the Muslim Youth Council) in Kenya are gaining increasing notoriety[34] and, more worryingly, an ISIL-inspired splinter group is believed to have taken hold in the region, in direct competition to Al-Shabaab.[35] From a security perspective the threat from these radical Islamist movements can no longer be argued. Their jihadist intent, evidenced by a resurgence of horrific attacks across the Horn of Africa in recent years,[36] supports the argument for an enhanced counter-terrorism strategy to stem the tide. Military action, it is argued, must be part of the solution; the terror networks must be fractured and irreconcilables brought to justice. Critically, however, such an approach cannot be taken in isolation. Radical Islamists are but one part of a much more complex problem that needs to be addressed. Moreover, Islamism as an ideology, as its evolution in Somalia demonstrates, is not indicative of a threat and must be understood in context. Islamism is part of the Somali complex and therefore part of the solution.

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[33] Global Islamic Media Front (GIMF), "Abu Mansoor al-Amriki: A Message to The Mujaahideen in Particular and Muslims in General," 8 January 2008, accessed 16 April 2016, http://www. myhesbah.com/v/showthread.php?t=165965.

[34] Fredrick, Nzes, "Al-Shabab's Affliate in Kenya," *CTC Sentinel*, 29 May 2014, accessed 2 April 2016, https://www.ctc.usma.edu/posts/al-hijra-al-shababs-affiliate-in-kenya.

[35] Jeffery Gettleman "Shabab and East African Front Militants Compete for Notoriety," *New Yorks Times*, 12 April 2016, accessed 18 April 2016, http://www.nytimes.com/2016/04/13/world/africa/militant-groups-compete-for-notoriety-in-east-africa.html?utm_source=Sailthru&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=New%20Campaign&utm_term=%2ASituation%20Report&_r=0.

[36] In the last 12 months Al-Shabaab has claimed responsibility for: an attack on Garissa University, Kenya in April 2015 killing 148; the overrunning of African Union forward operating bases in Leego, Janaale, and El Adde killing more than 170 soldiers; ambushes and IED attacks on African Union supply lines; car bomb attacks on public places including restaurants in the capital Mogadishu; a laptop bomb attack on a commercial airliner. See, T.Y. McCormick, "U.S. Attacks Reveal Al-Shabab's Strength, Not Weakness…"

The Role of Islamism in Somalia's Future

So what role does Islamism have in the future of a Somali state? Whilst this paper does not intend to provide a solution to the broader issue of state failure, a number of possible futures will be discussed, identifying roles Islamists may have in each.

Mwangi Kimenyi *et al* of Brookings Institution's African Growth Initiative, argue that Somalia's future depends on the establishment of functioning economic and political institutions but in order to enable these, order and stability must first be enforced. As no single fraction has the military might or political legitimacy to dominate they argue, foreign intervention is necessary, led by the African Union.[37] Given the history of external intervention into Somalia, enforced state-building is likely to face heavy criticism and internal resistance, though as Kimenyi *et al* contest, successful precedents have been set in Kosovo, Bosnia, Liberia and Sierra Leone. As peace is achieved, governance, development and economic growth can take root, led by the Somali people and managed by semi-autonomous regional authorities. What is not discussed in this proposition is the role of Islamism. Recent history has demonstrated that foreign intervention is at best temporarily successful (Ethiopia in 2006 or the African Union in 2012) and that such actions ferment widespread dissent from Somalis who resort to fractions with whom they can more readily identify, whether a clan, warlord or Islamist fraction, or indeed a multitude of such groups. Kimenyi *et al's* proposition requires extensive investment by the international community in time, resources and political will and it is questionable whether all of those are achievable given the demands of this complex problem. In the unlikely event that such a solution is sought, Islamists across the political spectrum need to be an integral part of the governance

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[37] Mwangi S. Kimenyi, John Mukum Mbaku, Nelipher Moyo, "Reconstituting Africa's Failed States: The Case of Somalia, *Social Research*, vol. 77, no.4 (Winter 2010): 1339-1336.

solution both at the federal and where applicable, the local levels. Moderate Islamists require a voice not only to represent the views, beliefs and ideals of the Sunni population but also to provide a credible alternative to more extremist elements.

A secondary future may see an internal solution in which an Islamist fraction gains power and delivers governance according to Islamic values, beliefs and law. The concept of Islamic law (Shari'ah) has generated much debate in recent years and, akin to Islamism, can incite negative connotations. Shari'ah law provides the guiding principles for how Muslims should live their lives, but as with Islam itself, there exists a spectrum of interpretations. More conservative Islamist authorities such as the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia have a very literal interpretation of Shari'ah that invokes what many deem barbaric practices (including the stoning of adulterous married women and punishment for blasphemy).[38] More liberal interpretations see the laws as contextual and reason that Shari'ah is a guiding not binding law.[39] Understanding such issues is an important step in deconstructing Islamism itself. If an Islamist government is to have longevity, it will need to be considered 'moderate' in its interpretation of political Islam. Whilst moderation is itself a subjective value, survivability of a Somali state depends on its legitimacy in the eyes of the international community as well as amongst the people it governs.[40] A model that may be acceptable is that proposed by Ennahdha, a Tunisian Islamist movement that gained power in the wake of the Arab Spring. According to Rory McCarthy of Oxford University, Ennahdha sought a "post-Islamist" governance aligning Islamic values to a democratic, pluralist

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[38] Adam Taylor, "How Saudi Arabia's Harsh Legal Punishments Compare to the Islamic State's," *Washington Post*, 21 January 2015, accessed 18 April 2016, https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/worldviews/wp/2015/01/21/how-saudi-arabias-harsh-legal-punishments-compare-to-the-islamic-states/.
[39] For an excellent précis of Shari'ah law see John L. Esposito, *What Everyone Needs to Know About Islam* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 158-162.
[40] The debate on who in the international community defines this legitimacy is outside the scope of this paper. Suffice to say dominant external actors such as the US, other liberally orientated Western nations and increasingly China, are likely to heavily influence this debate for some time to come.

society. Understanding that to an international community the inclusion of Shari'ah law in a

constitution may not be politically acceptable, they instead used Shari'ah as a "broader

inspiration."[41] Regardless of the political solution sought, the debate on what is meant by Islamic

law in the Somali context and what role it has in the state's future, is one that needs to be had if

Islamism is to be incorporated effectively into any solution. "Whether people like it or not, many

Somalis see Islamic law as the answer… Still, there is an appetite for a certain degree of Islamic

governance. That desire should not be confused with support for terrorism."[42]

A third future is aligned to current attempts to bring governance to Somalia. A federal

government (currently the Somali Federal Government), supported but not directed by regional

and international backers, presiding over a decentralised political structure that sees power

devolved to local and regional administrations. As the acclaimed think-tank International Crisis

Group argue, this model must identify the political grievances that allow radical Islamists such as

Al-Shabaab to flourish and seek to imitate how they successfully exploit these through inter-clan

reconciliation.[43] The key to such a grassroots approach focusing on local problems and solutions

is the recognition that part of that local solution may be an Islamist agenda. As discussed

previously, where on the spectrum of Islamism is deemed acceptable to both an internal and

external audience is to be debated but should be encouraged:

> Given the shortage of viable national leaders, bottom-up governance strategies might
> appear to be a solution to Somalia's messy perpetually shifting decentralised politics. For
> instance, the experience of the ICU [Islamic Courts Union], which brought unparalleled
> stability to an unruly Mogadishu almost overnight in 2006, is instructive. Its ideology may
> have been distasteful, but its tenure did amount to a kind of inclusive and home-grown

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[41] Rory McCarthy, "Protecting the Sacred…," 450.
[42] Jeffery Gettleman, "The Most Dangerous Place in the World… ," 69.
[43] International Crisis Group, "Somalia: Al Shabaab…," 1-2.

> rule-of-law project: administered by religious leaders, supervised by the clans, underwritten by Mogadishu's business community, and ardently embraced by the public.[44]

Irrespective of the political path taken in Somalia, Islamists, wherever they sit on the political spectrum, need to be brought to the negotiating table. A de-radicalisation and reconciliation programme must also be implemented to fracture the radical threat from those willing to engage in the political debate. Failure to do so will alienate a significant player in Somalia's power struggles and jeopardize future solutions. As former US Secretary of State, Condoleezza Rice said in 2008, "Although we cannot know whether politics will ultimately de-radicalize violent groups, we do know that excluding them from the political process grants them powers without responsibility."[45]

Conclusion

After 25 years of conflict, Somalia remains in the grip of an enduring power struggle between multiple actors seeking to exploit the socio-economic devastation and lack of functioning governance that continues to typify this failed state. Islam, since its introduction to the region in the seventh century, forms a central component of the Somali identity, in a land dominated by Sunni Islam. The politicization of Islam, or Islamism, is a comparatively recent phenomenon, only gaining traction as a credible political option in the 1970s. History has proven that internal and external actors alike have shaped the Somali Islamist movements of today. From President Barre's repression to clan-based rivalries to foreign intervention, all have played their part in the transition of Islamism from a peaceful nationalist political ideology to, at the extremes of the political spectrum, one espousing the virtues of global jihad. It is argued that along this

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[44] Bronwyn Bruton, "In the Quicksands of Somalia…," 91.

transition, Islamism has either been ignored or misinterpreted, with actors repeatedly securitizing the Islamist threat in order to advance their own agendas. The consequences of this ignorance and exploitation have been, at best, to miss opportunities for stable governance, at worse, adding to the power struggles that intoxicates Somalia and driven an increasing number of desperate Somalis into the hands of violent jihadism.

Somalia's future remains uncertain. What is evident is that competing agendas will continue to debate the virtues of alternative solutions to this highly complex failed state problem. Regardless of the path taken, Somalia needs a comprehensive plan that seeks to address the underlying socio-economic problems that fuel conflict and dissent. Security will allow the roots of these reforms to take hold, but it is one part of a much broader solution, not the primary or sole focus, which is where past ventures have fallen foul. In whatever guise security, governance and economic reforms are delivered Islamism has a voice. For a historically antipathetic international community this should not to be feared. Islamists are one of a number of competing fractions in Somalia, fighting for power in what has proved to be an enduring struggle between warlords, rival clans, regional actors, international backers and government officials. The more Islamists are identified as a homogenous, hostile entity, the more isolated, entrenched and irreconcilable they become. It is necessary to deconstruct the concept of Somali Islamism. Internal and external actors need to recognise that a spectrum of political Islam exists, elements of which can and must play a part in establishing a stable state. Understanding Islamism is fundamental to understanding Somalia. It is part of the problem and must be part of the solution.

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[45] Condoleezza Rice, "Rethinking the National Interest: American Realism for a New World," *Foreign Affairs*, July/August 2008, accessed 18 April 2016, https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/2008-06-01/rethinking-national-interest.

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