



SOMALIA WATCHER

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NDI-SOMALIA

More than 15 conflict-filled years after the fall of its last functioning government, Somalia remains one of the world's most dramatic examples of a 'failed state.' Although a 2004 National Reconciliation Conference resulted in an attempt at reconstituting the institutions of state – the UN-backed Transitional Federal Government, or TFG – Somalia has found itself once more on the brink of conflict.

Since early 2006, the already-weak TFG had been challenged by the sudden rise of the Supreme Islamic Courts Council, or SICC. Although this Islamist group has been accused of harboring terrorists by some in the West, it had also enjoyed some measure widespread popular support and – until recently – controlled wide swaths of the country.

In a dramatic reversal of fortune, however, government and Ethiopian troops routed the Islamist forces in a late December march from Baidoa. A widely-feared regional conflict never materialized and the TFG swept into Mogadishu – Somalia's traditional capital – newly ascendant and eager to govern. After 16 years of political anarchy and warlord rule, these developments appear to present Somalia with a unique opportunity to reconstruct an inclusive and capable governing framework. The country's troubled history, however, cautions that that opportunity is likely both fragile and fleeting.

Somalia Watcher is compiled by the National Democratic Institute (NDI) and its Somalia field office based in Nairobi, Kenya.

Recent Political Developments

- The forcible disarmament of Mogadishu's civilian areas began on January 10, even as the TFG leadership was meeting with Mogadishu traditional clan elders and civil society representatives to discuss the efforts. The initial arms sweeps were carried out in the capital's K4

area by both government and Ethiopian troops. TFG military and police forces had sealed off the area and carried the out house-to-house searches following an overnight attack against a local hotel hosting TFG senior officials. One soldier had been wounded in the attack. A government spokesman indicated that a number of weapons were recovered in the search, and that the routine disarmament process of the local civilians will continue. While concerns about the overall security situation persist, there appears to be a general consensus on the part of the public that weapons recovery operations are necessary for the eventual stabilization of the capital.

- TFG Prime Minister **Ali Mohamed Ghedi**, in one of his nearly-daily meetings with various clan elders, declared on January 11 that the January 8 U.S. military air strikes were intended to “isolate the terrorists” taking refuge in southern Somalia and that the TFG was in full support of the move. The declaration coincided with condemnations of the strikes by some countries in the region, and with the statement made on the same day by Interior Minister and Deputy Premier **Hussein Mohammed Aideed** that the US government should employ ground forces against the “Al Qaeda remnants” in Ras Kamboni area of south Somalia.

- Despite international appeals for dialogue, Ghedi also again ruled out any dialogue between the TFG and the remnants of the Somali Islamic Courts Council. While he characterized the former SICC officials as “terrorists” and reiterated that the TFG does not intend to renew talks with them, he expressed the government's commitment to engaging in

discussion with Somalia's traditional clan elders and key civic leaders.

- According to government spokesman **Abdurahman Dinari**, a group of former warlords have agreed to lay down their arms and work with the TFG to help stabilize and secure Mogadishu. The announcement came upon the conclusion of a January 12 meeting between president **Abdullahi Yusuf**, prime minister Ghedi, and the leaders of several still-powerful militias, including Mogadishu-based warlords **Mohamed Qanyare Afrah** and **Muse Sudi Yalahow**. During the meeting – which took place at Villa Somalia, the country's presidential residence – the former warlords agreed to the government's request that they hand over their weapons and help integrate their militiamen into reconstituted national security forces. The president had met previously with the warlords' respective clan elders to discuss the same topic. Underscoring the volatility of the security situation in the capital, forces loyal to Mr. Qanyare, who is also a member of the Transitional Federal Parliament (TFP), clashed with those guarding the presidential building as the meeting was taking place; 6 members of Mr. Qanyare's militia were killed in the skirmish.

- On January 12, the non-governmental organization Oxfam issued a statement in Nairobi, Kenya on the recent U.S. air strikes in southern Somalia. According to data gathered by its representatives inside Somalia, Oxfam declared that seventy civilians, mainly pastoralists, had been killed in the attacks, and appealed for access to the Somali refugees in border areas. The statement was disputed by the U.S. ambassador in Kenya, **Michael Ranneberger**, who explained that U.S. involvement was limited to one air strike targeting terrorists accused of carrying out the 1998 bombing of American embassies in East Africa. The Ambassador's declaration was reinforced by that of the Foreign Minister of the TFG, **Hon. Ismail Hurre Bubaa**, who stated that the TFG had requested both the Ethiopian military support and the U.S. air strike against "jihadists and terrorists" who, he alleged, intended to destabilize Somalia and the region.

- The Transitional Federal Parliament, still based in Baidoa, approved the imposition of martial law on the country by passing the emergency bill submitted by the TFG on January 10. The bill, was amended by the parliament and condensed into 5 articles (from its original 14) and limited to three month period only. According to the deputy Speaker of the TFP, **Prof. Mohamed Omar Dalha** the government can request an extension after three months, but the parliament will discuss whether such an extension is warranted. The new emergency laws give the president legal power to reign in the current lawlessness, prohibits civilians from owning or holding weapons including so called armed technical vehicles, curtails public activity during the three month-period, and prohibits the formation of secret organizations. The president, as chairman of the National Security Council, was given these powers in order to help stabilize and secure the country; however, in a radio address to the public, he stated that the government will continue to use non-forcible persuasion and consultation with clan elders in its efforts to disarm the general population. For his part, the erstwhile the Speaker of the TFP, **Sharif Hassan Sheikh Aden**, issued a statement from Djibouti condemning the passing of the emergency law and appealing to the Somali people to work together so that the Ethiopian troops can be withdrawn.

- On January 14, an Islamic political and social movement known as the *Islah* issued a statement welcoming the consultative efforts taking place in Mogadishu by the president and the premier, calling them the "right path" to full reconciliation. The statement included *Islah's* views on a broad range of topics, including its concern about the recent emergency bill, and an appeal to the international community – and to the Arab world in particular – to contribute the peacekeeping forces necessary for the withdrawal of Ethiopian troops. *Islah* also called for financial and material support to the transitional government and the Somali people. The statement was released the joint TFG and Ethiopian forces continued to be the target of attacks in Mogadishu's Industrial Road while carrying out disarmament activities among individuals and businesses.

- Acting with the emergency powers afforded it by the parliament, the TFG shut down three private radio stations in Mogadishu on January 15. Although the move was reversed the next day, a letter signed by the head of Mogadishu branch of the local security agency had ordered the closure of *Radio HornAfrik*, *Radio Shabele* and *Radio Iqra* in Mogadishu, on the basis that the three media houses were working against “the general good of the people” and for propagating anti-government messages. The same steps were taken against *Al-Jazeera TV*, which suspended its reporting from Somalia. A government spokesman explained that the media houses were broadcasting inflammatory and misleading news to provoke unrest in the country and had been warned repeatedly by the transitional authorities to desist. One of the directors of *Radio HornAfrik* termed the move by the transitional government as “a revenge act” for its reporting of the facts. The government ban on the popular media outlets comes not only on the heels of the imposition of the three-month martial law in the country, but also follows the occasionally-tense relationship between the media and the Islamic Courts, who had also imposed strictures upon reportage.

- Sources in Baidoa report that a motion to oust the Speaker of Parliament, Sheikh Aden, will be introduced to the body in the coming days, and is likely to pass. The Speaker fell out of favor with government officials following an unauthorized November 2006 visit to Mogadishu, during which he – with the support of a group of like-minded MPs – negotiated a ‘peace agreement’ with SICC officials. That agreement was later disavowed by the TFG, and the Speaker has not returned to Baidoa since. If removed, the Speaker would retain his seat as a Member of Parliament.

- Even as these events were unfolding in Baidoa, the Speaker was in Brussels on January 15, for a one-day visit with European Commission officials. In a joint press conference with the Commissioner for Development & Humanitarian Affairs, **Mr. Louis Michel**, the Speaker repeated his earlier call for the withdrawal of the Ethiopian troops from Somalia and the deployment of African and UN

forces to stabilize the country. Commissioner Michel said that the reconciliation process should be revived for peace and stability to become sustainable.

- The Minister of Commerce of the TFG, **Abdullahi Ahmed Afrah**, has selected 25 well-known Somali business people to come up with ideas on how to set-up a national chamber of commerce. While group members are scattered between Somalia, Kenya, and Dubai, those in Mogadishu met on January 16, holding their first meeting and welcoming the task. No functioning chamber of commerce as such exists in Somalia; two attempts were made in late 90s to revive the Bosaso chamber and the Hargeysa chamber, but it is unclear if they are active at the moment. □

National Democratic Institute

The National Democratic Institute for International Affairs has been working in Somalia since November 2005, conducting capacity-building training in support of the country’s transitional governing institutions. NDI is a not-for-profit organization working to strengthen and expand democracy worldwide.

A description of the Institute’s program activities in Somalia and back issues of *Somalia Watcher* are available on NDI’s website: www.ndi.org

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