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# MAMBO !

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## From Fragility to Violence: International Organizations put to the test A focus on the Somalia society

*Many poor countries in the world where the governments can barely ensure that their societies withstand poverty and insecurity may be described as 'fragile states'. Several of these are either in conflict or pursuing reconstruction.<sup>1</sup> Under such circumstances, the country's government cannot effectively administer its territories and provide security and other basic services. Somalia has suffered from warring factions since the era of Mohamed Siad Barre, who ruled the country for more than 20 years before being ousted in 1991. In 1993, the United States took a more hands-on approach to the country's instability and sent troops into Mogadishu. Familiarity with the terrain worked to the advantage of the insurgent forces who pushed the US troops out of the capital city, killing and wounding several others. Since then, several militant Islamic groups have violently fought for control. These include Al-Shabab, which was labeled a terrorist organization by the United States. Al-Shabab has also been the main opponent of neighbouring Ethiopia. In 2006, a group of Somali Islamic leaders going by the name "The Union of Islamic Courts" took control over parts of Southern Somalia before being ousted by U.S.-supported invasion by Ethiopian forces. This led to the installation of internationally recognized transitional leaders to guide the country to a semblance of democracy. U.S. forces have reportedly offered financial, logistical and military support to Ethiopian forces and have also been said to secretly support secular warlords in their fight for power against militant Islamic groups.*

### Social and economic factors that breed violence

Social and economic dimensions of conflict in Somalia have heightened its fragility tremendously, at great cost to its peoples. Peace processes also seem increasingly fruitless.

Indeed, the increase of piracy cases off the Somali coast may have only overshadowed the internal instabilities that have resulted from factional tensions. These instabilities have edged the country closer to the brink of lawlessness, an all-out war and possible collapse of government. Because of the struggle for power, humanitarian emergencies have emerged in the country. Mass exodus of residents from war-torn cities, frequent food shortages, the establishment of sprawling refugee camps and lack of basic services are just a few of the existing problems. Aid flow into the country has not been effective, sometimes

intercepted by pirates or hampered in-land by fighting factions. Hunger and general suffering threatens to exacerbate violence.

Since 2008, some World Food Program (WFP) workers and prominent Somalis calling for an end to factional violence have been reported killed in Somalia. Regardless, the UN has continued with its humanitarian campaigns. Besides supplying food, the UN has struggled to improve and protect the health of women and children in particular.

Humanitarian operations are met with difficult challenges of reintegration of refugees and the resettlement of internally displaced persons (IDPs). Tribal tensions at the community level have meant that without reconciliation, violence cannot end.

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## Local and international contributions

Incursion by Ethiopian forces (backed by the U.S.) heightened internal divisions. A power vacuum loomed in the fragile state due to wrangles. Islamic groups have been battling for control of the country's central region. Making matters worse, a stand-off between immediate former Somali President Abdullahi Yusuf and Prime Minister Nur Hassan Hussein threatened to bring down the fragile Somali government. The internationally and UN-backed president resigned after a row with his Prime Minister. A newly appointed PM also resigned. The row came into the open in July 2008 when the Prime Minister sacked Mogadishu Mayor Mohamed Omar Habeeb, a close ally of the president. The split worsened after eleven ministers loyal to President Yusuf resigned due to the mayor's dismissal.

A UN-brokered peace agreement between Islamic insurgents and the transitional Somali government has done little to defuse the tensions. President Yusuf was largely seen as having failed to create a broad-based government, widening divisions instead. In fact, conditions in Somalia have continued to deteriorate, increasing fears of violence.

After the President resigned, renewed battles between rival Islamic groups led to the death of 40 people.

About 50,000 more were displaced from the Galgaduud region of central Somalia, according to the UN Resident and Humanitarian Coordinator in Somalia, Mark Bowden.<sup>2</sup>

The AU, EU and USA in particular, have sometimes only identified the fragility (blaming Islamic extremism) rather than strongly supporting the peace-building processes. Recognizing Somalia's right to self-determination

The US began urging the Security Council to send in a UN peacekeeping mission. Although the United States has largely kept away from Somali soil despite supporting Ethiopian incursions, the state of affairs could change if a (US) proposed UN resolution allowing international forces to follow pirates ashore is passed. This could breed more violence.

Some of these countries have been deemed to impose "western style blueprints" that local conditions cannot sustain instead of instituting an international action that facilitates local peace processes<sup>3</sup> — the argument is that using local capacities and complementing local actions enables local citizens to create governance structures that augur well with their environments.

The international community should concentrate on re-tailoring traditional forms of governance that have evolved to suit local Somali conditions. Moreover, the international community can defuse tensions by engaging with the Islamic opposition.

Because there is neither clear leadership nor a functional parliament, piracy has taken hold. Pirates attacked and seized many vessels in 2008, leading to increased activities by international armed fleets geared towards fighting the piracy. It is a



Source: <http://geography.about.com/library/cia/blcsomalia.htm>

and international recognition would open a window of hope for peace and democracy within the wider region of the Horn. Timing is vital. The African Union peacekeeping mission (AMISOM) initially sent to Mogadishu to help the Ethiopian forces appeared small and weak against the insurgent attacks after the Ethiopians withdrew.

problem that the transitional government has not had the capacity to deal with.

## Conclusion

The 'anarchy' perceived in Somalia by the international community might be an over-statement. Although there is no government, there are local mechanisms for settling disputes and assigning power. Civic actors strive to address local conflicts. International actors can also find ways in which to engage with the Somali people.

Furthermore, with the tensions in parliament and a weary government, President Yusuf's departure and a possible power vacuum could have easily degenerated to worse fighting and violence. The president's peaceful departure can therefore be viewed as a progressive move.

States operate efficiently when they mirror their fundamental community, history and geography, human resources, as well as economic environment, and when they are incorporated into the societies they claim to represent. Only then can a

government hope to succeed in uniting the informal institutions and loyalties of their populace.

## Notes

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2. Tangney, Christopher J., *Violence Continues Despite Somalia President's Departure* <http://www.unausa.org/site/pp.asp?c=fvKRI8MPJpF&b=4865109>
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## Editor's note

*Mambo* is a Kiswahili word, which strictly speaking, means "news" or "information". However, current usage, and specifically colloquial speakers will recognise the word as a form of greeting, loosely translated as "what's up?"

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