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The Threats of Radical Islam in Somalia: A Typology and Assessment

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Introduction

In the aftermath of the September 11 attacks, renewed international interest in Somalia has been intense. This attention, following years of neglect, is driven by concerns that Somalia could become a base or safe haven for Islamist terrorism. Somalia has consequently been marked as a possible site for an expanded war on terrorism.

Background - Somalia since 1995

Political and economic trends

Quiet but significant changes have occurred in Somalia since the last Un peacekeeping forces departed in March 1995. The contemporary political and economic landscape of Somalia is a far cry from the images of warlordism and famine which prevailed in 1991-94. Political and economic developments in the country have rendered it less anarchic and less prone to the widespread and protracted armed conflicts of 1991-94, and have created pockets of impressive levels of peace and economic recovery. These achievements are, however, fragile and vulnerable to setbacks.

Somalia remains a collapsed state, but not an entirely anarchic one. Its political condition is dramatically different today than in the early 1990s, when state collapse translated into chronic and destructive civil war, predatory banditry, warlord fiefdoms, and general lawlessness. Today, most of Somalia's seven million inhabitants

enjoy at least rudimentary levels of law and order within a wide range of local and regional polities. Some of those polities are formal in nature, some informal.

This trend has been marked by significant regional disparities between the north and south. In the northwest of the country, the self-declared and unrecognized secessionist state of Somaliland has achieved impressive levels of governance, peace, and security over the past six years. The government of President Egal is modest in size and capacity, but it does provide a peaceful and lawful environment for its residents. Until very recently, the northeast of the country also enjoyed enviable levels of political stability. The general peace which prevailed there culminated in an attempt to establish a non-secessionist regional state of Puntland in 1998. The Puntland state, led by Col. Abdullahi Yusuf, never really evolved into a functional administration, and eventually fell prey to disputes over power in 2001, when Abdullahi Yusuf sought an extension to his rule which was deemed unconstitutional. That provoked a split in Puntland which has culminated in armed clashes.

By contrast, the south of Somalia experienced more localized efforts to re-establish rule of law. In some places, city-states have developed their own local administrations, based on a triangular alliance of clan elders, businessmen, and local sharia courts. In other areas, militias and factions claim jurisdiction over regional fiefdoms which they may or may not actually attempt to administer. A number of parts of the south are still plagued by chronic banditry and lawlessness. Finally, a Transitional National Administration was established in Mogadishu in August 2000; it currently controls half of the city and a few areas in the interior. Most day-to-day governance in Mogadishu, however, has been achieved at the neighborhood level, by more informal systems of policing and clan-based sharia courts. Throughout Somalia, the rudimentary elements of local governance and peace are reinforced by the authority of clan elders and customary clan law (*xeer*)(1).

A second political trend in the past seven years has been the rise of the business class as an independent political force. In the main

(1) Discussion of the "radical localization" of Somali politics is found in Ken MENKHAUS and John PRENDERGAST, *Prospects for Governance and Economic Survival in Post-Intervention Somalia*, "Csis Africa Notes" n. 172 (may 1995).

commercial cities of Mogadishu and Hargeisa, a few dozen of the wealthiest merchants and entrepreneurs have assumed considerable political influence, and in some instances constitute the most powerful political bloc in the country today. In Mogadishu in 1999, the businessmen outflanked militia leaders from their own clans by refusing to pay taxes to them, by buying many of the militiamen away from them, and by financing their own security forces and judiciary, the management of which they subcontracted out to local sharia courts. That same circle of businessmen were subsequently the financial backers of the Arte conference in 2000 which produced the Transitional National Government. Many argue the business community is the power behind the throne in both Mogadishu and, to a lesser extent, in Somaliland. Even in smaller cities and towns, leading businessmen are crucial in supporting local governance and are capable of acting independently of militia leaders in their clan(2). That was not the case in the early 1990s.

The period since 1994 has also seen a significant decline in the power and legitimacy of the political factions and warlords which had previously dominated Somali politics. Few if any of the political factions are at all active; Somalis now tend to use sub-clan identity explicitly as the template for discussions of political representation. Most of the militia leaders have either been absorbed into new political structures (such as the Tng) or are considerably weaker than in the past. Many argue that withdrawal of the international community from Somalia is in part responsible. In the past, large flows of international aid provided warlords with funds (diverted aid, "taxes", rent, and protection money) which empowered them, and international mediation efforts tended to legitimize warlords politically. Without those external sources of recognition and resources, most of the militia and factional leaders lost a great deal of their power. A few notable exceptions are individuals like Musa Sudi Yalahow (based in Mogadishu) and Colonel Mohamed Hassan Nur Shatigaduud (head of the Rahanweyn Resistance Army, or Rra, based in Bay and Bakool regions). Both are militia leaders who rely heavily on Ethiopian support

(2) See Roland MARCHAL, *The Post Civil War Somali Business Class* (Nairobi: Ec Somalia Unit, September 1996); MARCHAL, *The Private Sector: Its Role in Governance?* (Unpublished paper, 2001); Mark BRADBURY, Roland MARCHAL, and Ken MENKHAUS, *Somalia Human Development Report 2001* (Nairobi: Undp, December 2001), especially the chapter on the private sector.

but who also enjoy significant bases of support from their clans and who run quasi-administrations in the areas they control.

Just as governance in the country has been localized since 1995, so too have patterns of armed conflict. The broad coalitions and sweeping battles of 1991-92 have been replaced by much more localized, contained, and sporadic clashes. Most armed conflicts in the past seven years have involved intra-clan rather than inter-clan disputes(3). This fissuring of Somali politic is part and parcel of the dynamic of localization. Clans such as the Haber Gedir, Abgal, and Marehan which had in the past maintained political cohesion (as expressed in their clan-based factions) have fallen prey to internal feuds which have spilled over into chronic armed conflicts. One the one hand, this extraordinary level of sub-sub clan fragmentation has been destabilizing, rendering the security situation more unpredictable in many parts of the country. On the other hand, the intra-clan squabbles which characterize post-intervention armed conflict in Somalia have been much more contained, shorter in duration, and less bloody, in part because clan elders are better able to intervene and mediate in feuds occurring within the family, and in part because of a general reluctance among Somalis at home and in the diaspora to support and sustain the militia structures that waged war in the early 1990s.

Despite the disengagement of the international community from Somalia in the wake of the failed Un peace operation there, external factors remain important in shaping the changing political and economic environment there. Ethiopia casts an especially long shadow. Since 1995, it has become directly involved in Somali internal politics. Ethiopia has established a series of alliances with clan militias along its long border with Somalia; it has directly intervened to oust Al-Ittihad from the town of Luuq; and it currently supports a coalition of Somali militias and clans (the Somali Restoration and Reconciliation Council, or Srrc) which opposes the Tng. Ethiopia's fierce opposition to the Tng, based on accusations that the Tng is a

(3) Two major exceptions have been the armed clashes in Baidoa in 1996, when the Ethiopian-backed Rahanweyn Resistance Army (Rra) drove the occupying Somali National Alliance (Sna) of General Aideed out of their home region; and the chronic interfactional clashes over Kismayo. For more on patterns of conflict since 1995, see MENKHAUS, *Somalia Situation Analysis* (Geneva: Unhcr Centre for Documentation and Research , October 2000).

front for al-Ittihad and other Ilsamist groups, is a major (and perhaps fatal) obstacle for the Tng. Ethiopia's political and military dominance in the Horn of Africa effectively gives it veto power over political developments it deems contrary to its security interests in Somalia. At the same time, Egypt and the Gulf states have remained closely engaged in Somalia's internal affairs, providing support to the Tng and directly or indirectly financing Islamic social and political organizations. The long-standing geo-strategic rivalry between Ethiopia and Egypt has had the unfortunate effect of creating a virtual proxy war in Somalia between Ethiopia and the Arab world; the Ethiopia-Eritrea war also spilled over into proxy wars in Somalia. The threat of prolonged regional proxy wars in Somalia is treated in more detail below(4).

This debate over the future structure of a Somali state was seemingly resolved in 1996, when international donors and Ethiopia succeeded in promoting a "building block" approach to Somalia(5). After years of dozens of failed peace conferences attempting to build a central government, external actors concluded that regional administrations should first be encouraged; they would then produce the building blocks for an eventual process of national reconciliation and state-building to be negotiated by functioning regional authorities, not factions. This emphasis helped to solidify gains in Somaliland and to catalyze the establishment of Puntland and the Rahanweyn Resistance Army's administration of Bay and Bakool regions in the south. But efforts to establish regional authorities in most of the rest of Somalia - such as the Benadir Authority and Hiranland - were short-lived or stillborn, due in part to the greater problems of political representation and claims on authority in contested areas of the south, where military conquest and occupation since 1990 is an important motif in local politics(6). Meanwhile,

(4) The problem of proxy wars in Somalia is explored in MENKHAUS and PRENDERGAST, *Conflict and Crisis in the Horn of Africa*, "Current History" vol. 98, no. 628 (May 1999), pp. 213-217.

(5) For an assessment of the building block approach in Somalia, see Matt BRYDEN, *New Hope for Somalia? The Building Block Approach*, "Review of African Political Economy" vol. 26, no. 79 (March 1999), pp. 134-40. See also an important document which laid the foundation for donor thinking on decentralized political structures in Somalia, *A Study of Decentralised Political Structures for Somalia: A Menu of Options* (London: LSE, August 1995).

Mogadishu-based political groupings have consistently rejected the building block approach, claiming instead that the process of rebuilding the central government must originate in the capital city. Their preference for this approach is clearly linked to the advantages it would accrue to them.

The external environment has been even more important in shaping Somalia's post-intervention economy, which has undergone significant change. First, Somalia's main port areas (Berbera and Bosaaso in the north, Mogadishu in the south) have developed into important entrepot economies for transit trade through Somalia into the profitable markets of Kenya and Ethiopia. This has produced new opportunities for commercial sectors (and related service sectors such as transportation) along several trade corridors in Somalia, and has encouraged trans-regional business and security partnerships. Second, remittances sent back into Somalia by the large Somali diaspora working abroad has become the most important source of hard currency in the country. Both business and remittance activities have generated demand for telecommunication and money transfer companies with global partners and reach. Telecom and *hawilaad* (remittance) companies are among the most dynamic enterprises in post-intervention Somalia.

By 1999, political and economic trends in Somalia appeared quite promising. Economically, parts of the country were in full recovery and were generating significant commercial opportunities. Transit trade, remittances, and livestock exports were strong, and improved security in much of the country encouraged Somali investments in fixed asset businesses such as pasta and bottled water factories as well as a boom in new home construction. Politically, the country as a whole was generally experiencing improved levels of security, reduced levels of fighting, and expansion of local rule of law. The northern regional polities of Somaliland and Puntland were providing not only impressive levels of law and order but were variable levels of administrative services. Though the country remained one of the poorest in the world and was still not without a central government, trends were positive.

(6) For close analysis of the issue of land as a central aspect of the war in southern Somalia, see Catherine BESTEMAN and Lee CASSANELLI (eds.), *The Struggle for Land in Southern Somalia: The War Behind the War* (Boulder: Westview, 1996).

Current situation

Over the past two years, however, both economic and political prospects have deteriorated. Economically, the country has been hit with multiple setbacks. An extended and ongoing livestock export ban placed on Somalia by the Gulf states (due to a deadly outbreak of Rift Valley fever in Saudi Arabia) has deprived Somalia of one of its most important sources of hard currency. This has been especially hard on pastoral populations, but has also meant significant reduction in tax revenues for local governments. Second, a prolonged drought in 2001 in parts of northern and southern Somalia has led to crop failures and severe duress for rural households. Third, the importation of millions of dollars of counterfeit Somali shillings by some leading businessmen in Mogadishu in the spring of 2001 created hyperinflation, severely depleting the savings and purchasing power of poorer households. Finally, the American government's move in October 2001 to freeze the assets of the leading Somali money transfer and telecom company, al-Barakaat, on grounds that it was a conduit for al-Qaeda financial transactions, has slowed the flow of remittances and damaged business confidence in Somalia(7). Collectively, these factors have pushed Somalia into the worst economic crisis in many years; Un agencies are ringing alarm bells over the prospect of a large-scale humanitarian crisis and analysts are worried about growing immiserization of Somalia's poorer households(8).

Politically, governance and security have generally worsened in the past two years. In the north, Somaliland appears to have weathered a political crisis over a contested shift toward a multiple-party system. What initially appeared to be a thinly veiled attempt by President Egal to retain power in a one-party dominant system now appears to have the potential to develop into a more vigorous multi-party system than originally expected. President Egal's poor health may prevent him from continuing in office, which could precipitate a succession struggle. Puntland is in the midst of its worst political crisis

(7) For analysis of the freezing of al-Barakaat assets, see Roland MARCHAL, *The Outcomes of Us Decision on al-Barakaat*, (unpublished paper for the Ec, January 2002).

(8) *Humanitarian Situation in Southern Somalia on the Edge, Warns Wfp*, "Reliefweb" (December 28, 2001) (www.reliefweb.org); Andre LE SAGE and Nisar MAJID, *The Livelihoods Gap: Responding to the Economic Dynamics of Vulnerability in Somalia*, "Disasters" 26, 1 (2002), pp. 10-27.

in a decade; armed conflict has broken out between the supporters of Ali Jama Ali and the Ethiopian-backed militia of Abdullahi Yusuf. The region is currently divided between the two groups and the Puntland administration is non-functional; the immediate future of regional stability is uncertain..

In the south, tensions are rising between the Ethiopian-supported Srrc and the Tng, raising the possibility of renewed fighting on a much larger scale than the region has seen in a decade. There are signs of military preparations on both sides. In contrast to public expectations, the establishment of the Tng in August 2000 did not produce improved security and law and order in the capital. Instead, banditry is worse and episodes of armed clashes have grown considerably in and around the city. The high levels of security on main commercial arteries which the Mogadishu businessmen were able to achieve through the sharia court militia in 1999 has been lost; the main seaport and airport in Mogadishu remain closed; and the Tng has yet to expand its authority beyond half of the city itself. The increase in banditry is in part due to the Tng's inability to pay its troops. In late January 2002, Tng President Abdiqassim paid his troops one month's salary with money he received from Libya, told his forces that their next month's wages would depend on their ability to secure Mogadishu's main port and airport as sources of revenue, raising the possibility of immanent confrontation between the Tng and opposition faction leaders in the city.

Two factors are chiefly responsible for political destabilization in the south. One is the ripple effect of the creation of the Tng itself. The Tng displaced a functioning security arrangement in Mogadishu without replacing it; raised political tensions and rivalries in the capital; and invited a negative Ethiopian reaction, which in turn produced an Ethiopian-backed opposition coalition in the interior. The establishment of the Tng and deterioriating political conditions in southern Somalia are probably not coincidental(9). The other, more recent factor is the aftermath of the September 11 attacks. American contingency plans for possible anti-terrorist actions in Somalia have increased political tensions exponentially. Accusations that the Tng is

(9) This argument is forcefully made by Bernhard HELANDER, *Will There Be Peace in Somalia Now?* "American Diplomacy" vol. 5, no. 4 (Fall 2000) (www.unc.edu/depts/diplomat).

a front for radical Islamists (coming mainly from Ethiopia and its proxies) have led to fears of a possible war and even American attacks and have heightened tensions between the Tng and its adversaries.

The establishment of the Tng in August 2000 has without question been the single most important political development in Somalia in the past two years. It was greeted with hope and enthusiasm in many quarters, but that optimism has largely evaporated in the wake of minimal Tng accomplishments. The Tng remains plagued by a number of fundamental problems which it must resolve if it is to become more effective and gain international recognition. First, it was formed on the basis of a very incomplete peace process which must be rectified. Very important constituencies, including Somaliland and Puntland governmental authorities, the Rra, and five or six major militia and faction leaders did not participate. Those opposition groups refuse to recognize the Tng's claim to be the sole legitimate national authority of Somalia, and instead treat it as the "Arte faction". That greatly weakens the Tng's claims to be a government of national unity and makes it very unlikely that the Tng will be able to extend its authority into much of the country. Second, the Tng must actually govern. To date, it has had only minimal success in providing the most rudimentary administration to the half of the city it claims to control. Unless it governs, the Tng runs the risk of becoming irrelevant and losing credibility. Third, the Tng faces a crisis of legitimacy. Within its own population, its legitimacy has been damaged by infighting, numerous instances of corruption, and the scandal of its business backers importing counterfeit shillings and producing hyperinflation. Outside Somalia, the Tng's legitimacy has been damaged by charges that the Islamic group al-Ittihad is a junior partner in the government. Suspicions that the Tng is infiltrated by al-Ittihad are so high in some circles that it may no longer be possible that the Tng can win the confidence of the Us government. The Tng's legitimacy is also threatened by the difficulties it faces in reconstituting itself following the dissolution of the cabinet by the parliament in October 2001. To date, the Prime Minister has been unable to form a cabinet and is encountering predictable but dangerous problems in striking a political balance acceptable to all. Finally, the Tng faces the daunting problem of Ethiopian opposition. Ethiopia views the Tng as a stalking horse for Arab and Islamic domination of the Horn of Africa, and accuses the Tng of being a front for al-Qaeda. For the Tng,

the problem is that Ethiopia can effectively exercise veto power over political developments inside Somalia. Unless the Tng can re-establish a working relationship with Ethiopia it is difficult to see how the Tng will succeed.

A final trend of significance in post-intervention Somalia is the rise of Islamist political activism. This has been a subject of intense scrutiny (and considerable misunderstanding) in the wake of the September 11 attacks. On the broadest level, there can be no doubt that Islam is a more important political and social factor in Somalia today than in the past. Most of the functioning judicial bodies at the local level in Somalia are sharia courts; many of the functioning schools are run by the Islamic charity al-Islah; and the Somali Islamic group al-Ittihad has emerged since 1990 as a significant political force in some parts of the country. The sharia courts are in most instances little more than a local effort to establish rule of law in a collapsed state, drawing on the source of law known best in the community. They are usually not part of a broader political agenda. Likewise, the rise of externally-funded Islamic aid agencies are generally social, not political, in orientation. These Islamic schools are in no way comparable to the madrasse schools of Pakistan which are recruiting grounds for radical Islamists.

However, some Islamic social outreach movements are, or may be, trojan horses for radical political agendas. In practice, it is very difficult to determine when an Islamic Ngo or social movement is being used as cover for extremists and terrorist networks and when it is a legitimate outreach program. One such movement is Al-Islah, a Saudi-funded outreach program which supports and runs numerous Islamic schools, health posts, and community centers in Somalia. On the one hand, Al-Islah is considered by many to be a relatively progressive Islamic movement, one which promotes women's rights and which does not embrace armed struggle[10]. Yet others point out that Al-Islah's long-term political agenda - preparing Somali society for an eventual Islamic state - is radical. The fact that al-Islah's charter also calls for an Islamic state in Somali-inhabited regions of neighboring countries has earned it Ethiopia's enduring hostility and increases worries that the movement is itself a security threat.

(10) Andre Le Sage, *Prospects for Al-Itihad and Islamist Radicalism in Somalia*, "Review of African Political Economy" vol. 27, no. 89 (September 2001).

Another religious movement with questionable political agendas is the Pakistani-based Tabliiq organization. Tabliiq is an apolitical organization whose members undertake to propagate *da'wa* (the call to Islam) by becoming itinerant missionaries. This arrangement permits Somalis to travel abroad and for foreigners to enter Somalia. There is little doubt that more radical Islamist groups have misused the cover of Tabliiq to send Somali recruits to training schools in Pakistan or Afghanistan. Conceivably, some foreigners with membership in radical movements may travel to Somalia using Tabliiq as a pretext.

Al-Ittihad, by contrast, has an overt political agenda. The movement is comparable to those of other Islamic countries - it is comprised mainly of young professional men who have worked or studied in the Gulf states or Egypt, who are appalled at the violence, clannism, and corruption of contemporary Somalia, and who believe a strict Islamic state is the solution to their country's chronic problems. In this sense, the long-term agendas of Al-Ittihad and Al-Islah are hard to distinguish. The theology of the movement is Wahhabist, and as such is viewed by most Somalis as an ideological import rather than a belief system with strong indigenous roots([11]). Some adherents are committed to the movement; others are merely opportunists who see in Al-Ittihad an ascending political movement with good linkages to external patronage.

Al-Ittihad tried to gain control over key towns in the first years of the 1990s, but found that holding territory made them a fixed target for their enemies. Somali clans and factions drove them out of Bosaso, Kismayo, and other locations in the first half of the 1990s. Ethiopia drove al-Ittihad out of Luuq in 1996 following several terrorist attacks that the organization claimed responsibility for inside Ethiopia. Since that time, al-Ittihad has embraced several strategies in Somalia - integration into local communities; decentralization of the movement within rather than across clan lines; focus on preparing Somalia for eventual Islamic rule by work in education, local judiciaries, the media; strengthening of the financial sustainability of the movement

(11) For a detailed history of Islamist movements in Somalia since 1990, see Roland MARCHAL, *Islamic Political Dynamics in the Somali Civil War*, paper delivered to the *Islam in Africa: A Global, Cultural, and Historical Perspective* conference, Binghamton University, Uk, (April 19-21 2001).

through recruitment of businessmen and placing of its members in commerce.

In practice, al-Ittihad movements appear to vary significantly by region, with some appearing more moderate and others much more radical. The group embraces a mainly domestic agenda, not a global one, with the important exception of its agenda and actions in Ethiopia. Though sometimes accused of being a local branch of al-Qaeda, al-Ittihad's links to Osama bin Laden do not appear significant, though a few individual Somali Islamists may have close connections to al-Qaeda. There is some evidence to suggest al-Qaeda had linkages with the movement in Luuq from 1991-96, and again in the coastal lower Jubba region (Ras Kiamboni) in 1997, as part of al-Qaeda's plans to attack the Us Embassy in Nairobi. That al-Qaeda had contact with members of al-Ittihad is unquestionable. What is more difficult to establish is the significance of these associations and contacts. This is a topic about which much more needs to be learned(12).

The fortunes of al-Ittihad in Somalia over the past few years are the subject of debate. Some observers contend that the group has grown weak and discredited, and is a "spent force" in Somalia. They argue that the group never recovered from the Ethiopian offensive in 1996, and that the group lost credibility ion Mogadishu when it scrambled for positions in the Tng like any other faction seeking to secure its "piece of the pie". Others argue that it is a strong political force, but seeks to expand its political influence indirectly, so that is remains discreet and seemingly innocuous. This interpretation notes the growing influence of Gulf Arab charities and the impact of such a large Somali diaspora in the Gulf states. Conclusive evidence is simply not available about al-Ittihad's current political strength in the country.

Current conflict faultlines

The above situation analysis points to a number of worrisome political faultlines in contemporary Somalia which have the potential to develop into serious armed conflicts. None of these is inevitable;

(12) A preliminary attempt to explore these questions is made in MENKHAUS, *Political Islam in Somalia: Implications for Current and Future Conflict in the Horn of Africa*, "Nouveaux Mondes" (January 2002) (updated and reprinted in *Middle East Policy,* forthcoming 2002).

most are not even likely. But collectively they present a picture of a country at significant risk of levels of armed conflict. These flashpoints include:

- the possibility of direct Us armed intervention in the country in pursuit of terrorists. If conducted in remote rural areas, these operations will have minimal impact. If operations occur in crowded urban centers such as Mogadishu, they run a high risk of producing spontaneous firefights and high casualty rates. Clans will pick up arms to protect a clan member, and Somalis as a whole will fiercely resist foreigners entering their country uninvited and presuming the role of judge, jury and perhaps executioner over one of their own(13).
- proxy wars pitting Somali forces backed by the Us and/or Ethiopia against groups seen to be hosting or supporting Islamic terrorists. Were this to occur, it would most likely manifest itself in armed clashes between the Srrc and the Tng in and around Mogadishu, and could produce enormous levels of displacement and casualties. If the Srrc were given enough support from Ethiopia, it would likely prevail in driving the Tng forces out of Mogadishu, leading to the collapse of what little administration exists in the capital. Scenes of banditry and lawlessness would certainly ensue. Proxy wars could also take place south of Mogadishu, in Kismayo or the Lower Shabelle region, where the Srrc could score easier victories aimed at discrediting and embarrassing the Tng and where Ethiopia could secure a region which has been a worrisome site of Islamist activity.
- unilateral Ethiopian military action against the Tng. If Ethiopia senses that the Us will not take steps against the Tng, it may act on its own, using the expanded war on terrorism as justification for an assault (almost certainly in combination with the Srrc) against the Tng. This too would produce very high levels of displacement and casualties in the Mogadishu area, and could invite Arab states to respond with their own military aid to the Tng.
- internal Mogadishu fighting. Periodic outbreaks of armed conflicts between the many factional and clan militias in Mogadishu are commonplace, but more serious and sustained

(13) Various US policy options are considered in MENKHAUS, *Somalia: Next Up in the War on Terrorism?*, "Csis Africa Notes" no. 6 (January 2002).

armed conflict between the Tng and its main opponents is a much greater possibility today than in the past. President Abdiqassim's statement to his militia that they must open the seaport and airport if revenues are to be generated for their pay, combined with rising tensions generated by the war on terrorism, make this a worrisome possibility. A Tng attack on Musa Sude's forces would almost guarantee an Ethiopian/Srrc response, widening this war to dangerous and destructive levels. The division in Mogadishu between the Tng and its adversaries is the tinderbox awaiting a match thrown either carelessly or intentionally.

- armed clashes in Puntland. Ethiopia has thrown its weight decisively behind Abdullahi Yusuf in the dispute over control of Puntland, enabling him to capture Garowe by force. This was done in part because Abdullahi Yusuf's rival, Ali Jama Ali, is closely associated with the Tng; in part because of the visible role of some al-Ittihad figures in nominating Jama; and in part because of allegations Ali's campaign was financed from the Gulf. Elders in Puntland are attempting to broker a peace, and the community as a whole appears split. Renewed armed conflict in this divided region is not inevitable, but only if solutions acceptable to Ethiopia's security interests in Puntland are found.
- Intensified local clashes. Outbreaks of localized armed conflict have been endemic in Somalia since 1995, but several could increase in scope and destructiveness due to the new, post-September 11 security environment in Somalia. The port city of Kismayo is contested by several major clan and political groupings and is a leading candidate for spillover conflicts should clashes occur in Mogadishu, Gedo region, or Galkayo. The Lower Shabelle is also increasingly vulnerable to armed clashes.

Somalia as threat to regional or global security

To date, the terrorist threat posed by Somalia has been articulated in very general and often confusing terms. There are in fact a wide range of potential security threats in Somalia related to Islamist radicalism. These need to be disaggregated and considered as distinct, though not mutually exclusive, possibilities. Each possibility may require a different policy response.

Somalia as operational base for non-Somali al-Qaeda terrorists. This concern has dominated Western media coverage of Somalia; speculation about this threat has made Somalia a leading target in an expanded war on terrorism. It is also one of the less plausible scenarios. There is at this time no credible evidence that al-Qaeda is using Somalia as an operational base - i.e., as a site for training camps or bases. Indeed, there is little evidence of non-Somali al-Qaeda members having a presence in Somalia today. This was actually a more realistic worry prior to 1997, when al-Ittihad held the town of Luuq and was active in the coastal settlement of Ras Kiamboni; then, there is some evidence to suggest non-Somali al-Qaeda members visited the areas. But since al-Ittihad lost Luuq in 1996 and more recently abandoned Ras Kiamboni, it operates no discrete bases or camps. Non-Somalis running camps in Somalia would find it extremely difficult to keep such an operation secret in Somalia, both because Somalis would report them and because they would be easily detected by aerial and satellite surveillance now being undertaken in the country. They would also present themselves as an easy, fixed target for an aerial attack, which presumably they will no longer be foolish enough to do.

Somalia as safe haven for non-Somali al-Qaeda terrorists. Because Somalia remains a collapsed state with little to no local law enforcement capacity, and because of its long, unpatrolled coast line, external countries are understandably concerned that it may serve as a safe haven for fleeing al-Qaeda members. Those al-Qaeda members would not be attempting to build an operational base in Somalia; they would only use Somalia to hide undetected, either in crowded urban centers or remote rural areas, until they deem it safe to depart. This concern has led to patrols and interdictions by US and European naval vessels off the Somali coast. This scenario is possible but not inevitable, because non-Somali Islamic radicals would be very vulnerable to being turned in by Somalis, and presumably know this. Still, given the very poor alternatives facing fleeing al-Qaeda members, it is conceivable they may try to hide in Somalia, relying on local counterparts to shelter them. This is the type of threat which could lead to a snatching operation by Us Special Forces if local authorities are unable to apprehend a known suspect. It is also the primary reason for the Us and European naval patrols off the Somali coast.

Somalia as transshipment or transit site of al-Qaeda operations. Somalia is not an especially hospitable site for a fixed base of operations for al-Qaeda, but it is an excellent location for short-term transshipment and transit operations by all sorts of transnational criminal and terrorist groups. Its natural beach ports and long coast allow easy and undetected smuggling of people and materiel which can then be moved overland on track roads into Kenya or Ethiopia; its innumerable dirt landing strips also allow access by small aircraft. Local partners is such short-term operations are easily contracted, for the right price, and need not share any ideological affiliation with the group in question. Al-Qaeda could very well view Somalia as playing this niche role in the future, allowing the movement to move goods and people into various parts of East Africa undetected. There are few anti-terrorist policy options which appear likely to prevent this, which is precisely why it will be attractive to al-Qaeda. American policies to improve border patrols in Kenya are intended to address this security threat.

Somalia as financial facilitator for al-Qaeda. Somalia's fast-growing telecom and money transfer companies are a critical part of the country's growing dependence on remittances from its large labor force working abroad. Remittance companies rely on a global network of agents to enable diaspora members to transfer money to relatives informally and businessmen to place orders in Dubai and elsewhere. Given the absence of banks in the country, such informal mechanisms to transfer cash is the only option Somalis have. Since individuals usually do not have an account with these companies, however, *hawilaad* companies are easily misused by criminal elements seeking to move cash without leaving a paper trail. The Us government's move to freeze the assets of the largest Somali remittance and telecom company, *al-Barakaat*, was partially justified on grounds that al-Qaeda was using it to move its funds. Unfortunately, it is very difficult for any financial institution - formal or informal - to prevent criminal elements from abusing its services, and Somalia's remittance companies will remain chronically vulnerable to this charge.

Somalia as revenue generator for al-Qaeda. Some have charged that several of Somalia's top business companies, in sectors such as remittances, import-export, and telecommunication, are fronts for al-

Qaeda's business empire. This was another charge leveled at Al-Barakaat. Businesses may either have secured loans from al-Qaeda (in which case the profit-sharing arrangements which result generate revenue for al Qaeda) or are owned directly by al Qaeda and fronted by Somali business partners. There is little available evidence to assess this concern. The fact that Somalia's financial and commercial capital is now Dubai, which has been known to be a hub of activities for al-Qaeda, has fueled worries about where some Somali businessmen secured funds to finance their businesses and what obligations they may have to those financial backers. At the same time, this concern is easy to overstate. Though the remittance sector in particular is profitable, Somalia is an extremely weak economy and presumably would not constitute an especially good place for returns on investments. To the extent that this threat exists, it surely constitutes a minor aspect of the al-Qaeda business portfolio.

Somalia as host for Somali organizations associated with al-Qaeda. This is an important distinction to make, as it suggests the possibility of a radical Islamic threat inside Somalia without any foreign presence necessarily involved. On this score, the Somali Islamist group Al-Ittihad is the subject of considerable discussion as a possible security threat. The extent to which al-Ittihad is significantly associated with al-Qaeda is uncertain. Two points are clear: al-Ittihad is not simply a local subsidiary of al-Qaeda; and al-Ittihad has had links of some sort with al-Qaeda. What is difficult to determine is the significance of those associations. If links to al-Qaeda have been superficial or expedient, an analysis based on guilt by association runs the risk of misreading al-Ittihad. If those links prove to be significant and enduring, then al-Ittihad is clearly a major security threat as an organization.

Somali local polities as "Trojan horses" for al-Ittihad. A corollary to the above scenario (one which presumes al-Ittihad is linked to al-Qaeda) is the possibility of al-Ittihad infiltrating and indirectly controlling local polities - the "Turabi strategy." It is clear in fact that al-Ittihad has been attempting this, though not with the level of success some alarmist analyses have presumed. By integrating into local administrations and gaining control of key posts such as the judiciary, al-Ittihad hopes to build political power and control within

an ostensibly non-Islamist polity. That way, they avoid making themselves visible target. This is Ethiopia's chief worry, and the basis of its accusation against the Tng. It presents the Us with a set of duel propositions which it must accept in order to view the Tng as a security threat - first, that al-Ittihad constitutes a threat, and second that al-Ittihad has successfully infiltrated and controls the Tng. If that conclusion is reached, it is likely to produce a policy very similar to Us actions in Afghanistan, in which the Tng is likened to the Taliban government and the Srrc is supported as a "Northern Alliance" type proxy to topple the Tng.

Somalia as home to individual Somalis affiliated with al-Qaeda. Here a distinction is made between charging al-Ittihad as an organization with terrorist links and identifying individuals (probably al-Ittihad members) who have dangerous links to al-Qaeda or other terrorist networks. This is one of the most likely scenarios, and one which presents the most difficult policy challenges to the outside world. If these individual Somalis are "big fish" in the al-Qaeda organization, they will need to be apprehended. Because local authorities are so weak, it is unlikely the Us can or should rely on them. But use of Special Forces to snatch a Somali in his home area is high-risk; it may draw fierce armed response from his clansmen, and could lead to dead or captive American forces. Low-level al-Qaeda figures may not warrant a snatching operation; the risks taken should be commensurate to the threat these individuals pose.

Somalia as host for al-Qaeda-affiliated 'sleepers'. To date, no Somali has been implicated as a perpetrator of terrorist attacks against the West, and Somalis do not appear to have been a prominent or numerous group in al-Qaeda forces in Afghanistan. Still, it is possible that a small number of Somalis have been trained abroad and placed back in Somalia as sleepers. This would be exceedingly difficult to monitor. Because there are no external targets of any consequence inside Somalia (no embassies exist there at present, for instance), any sleeper placed inside Somalia would presumably have to travel abroad to carry out a terrorist mission.

Al-Ittihad as a threat to Ethiopia. Evidence of Al-Ittihad's links with al-Qaeda and with a global agenda of terrorism are weak, but not

so its agenda towards Ethiopia. It is publicly committed to working toward an Islamic state in Somali-inhabited areas of Ethiopia, and it has been implicated in two hotel bombings in Ethiopia and an assassination attempt against an Ethiopian minister in the mid-1990s. Those acts earned it designation as a terrorist organization and are justification in Ethiopia's view for pursuing and eliminating al-Ittihad from Somalia, even if the organization has no links to al-Qaeda. The significance of al-Ittihad's terrorist acts inside Ethiopia are a matter of debate. For many, they stand as compelling evidence of the threat the organization poses to Ethiopia, and justifies the belated Us decision to label al-Ittihad a terrorist organization. Others argue that the terrorist acts in Ethiopia were not carried out by the organization as a whole, but rather by one Ethiopian-based wing; that the attacks were more a reflection of Somali irredentism than Islamic radical; and that other branches of al-Ittihad strongly disagreed with those attacks. Some al-Ittihad spokesmen in Somalia insist that they are a non-violent movement with a focus strictly on Somali politics. Assessing these two positions is not easy, as it requires reaching conclusions about the intentions and nature of an organization about which little is known. On the one hand, it is entirely plausible that al-Ittihad is in fact divided over tactics and other matters, and that treating the organization as monolithic is an error. On the other hand, it would be naïve to accept at face value the claims of a nonviolent agenda from an organization implicated in terrorist acts. Ethiopia's internal security situation is always tenuous, and any movement - foreign or domestic - which seeks to politicize Islamic identity in a country where half of the population is Muslim will be viewed by the Ethiopian government as extremely dangerous. At this point, the Ethiopian government has made a determination that al-Ittihad poses a threat to its security and it is very unlikely to deviate from that view. For Ethiopia, co-existence with al-Ittihad in any manner is off the table. That implies a long-term conflict in the region with the potential to destabilize both sides of the border. To the extent that Western (and especially American) interests lie in promoting Ethiopian security, the possibility of some sort of modus vivendi between the West and al-Ittihad is also highly unlikely.

Somali diaspora as threat to global security. Somalia is now a diaspora nation, unbound by fixed geographic borders. The country's principal export is its own people, its role in the global economy

reduced to that of a labor reserve for the Gulf states and the West. Estimates of the number of Somalis living abroad range from one to two million - perhaps 20% of the total population. The diaspora's role has been mainly positive, as a vital source of remittances keeping Somalia's failed economy afloat. But in some instances individual diaspora members have been attracted to radical movements. Somali communities abroad can be mobilized (and in some cases coerced) into contributing funds to militias and factions, including al-Ittihad. Some Somalis abroad are drawn to Islamic movements both in the West (often as an attempt to maintain their identity and culture) and in Arab and Islamic states where such movements are active. Few Somali diaspora members have been directly implicated in radical Islamic groups, but this remains a possible security threat to host countries.

Somali lawlessness as threat to regional stability. Despite the intense media attention given to the threat posed by Islamic radicalism in Somalia, the greatest security threat emanating from the country continues to be spillover of banditry, gunrunning, refugees, and lawlessness into neighboring Ethiopia and Kenya. Ethiopia has never fully controlled the Ogaden region, and that has not been made easier by a decade of state collapse on the Somali side of the border. Kenya's security predicament is palpably worse. The Kenyan government has lost control of most of the Somali-inhabited territory north of the Tana River; Somali bandits roam across parts of Kenya and even into northern Tanzania on cattle raids and carjackings; Somali-populated refugee camps in Dadaab and Kakuma are sources of chronic tensions with host communities, occasionally leading to armed incidents; and the Somali-inhabited neighborhood of Eastleigh in Nairobi is virtually beyond the control of the Kenyan police, and is a haven for illicit activities and gun-smuggling. In border areas, some argue that security is actually worse on the Kenyan side than on the Somali side. Should the general security situation in Kenya deteriorate as elections approach in December 2002, these spillover problems from Somalia have the potential to exacerbate communal violence.