

SOMALIA | Trends in Conflict and Cooperation

SECURITY

The Council of Somali Islamic Courts (SIC), which had attempted to unify Somalia on the basis of political Islamism since June 2006, was quickly overthrown by the Ethiopian military intervention of December 2006. External actors consider the Transitional Federal Government (TFG) as the only authority to bring order to Somalia. However, part of the external assistance promised to the TFG has been conditioned on a reconciliation process with moderate elements of the Islamic Courts, dissident warlords and other leaders of the Hawiye clan. Moreover, foreign analysts believe that only the creation of a government of national unity, including an effective power sharing deal with the TFG's current opponents, stands a chance of stabilizing Somalia and especially its capital Mogadishu. Yet the TFG leadership appears reluctant to compromise, and violence between remnants of the Islamic Courts and the Ethiopian Army are on the rise. Rather than improving, there are signs that violence may spread to other parts of the country.

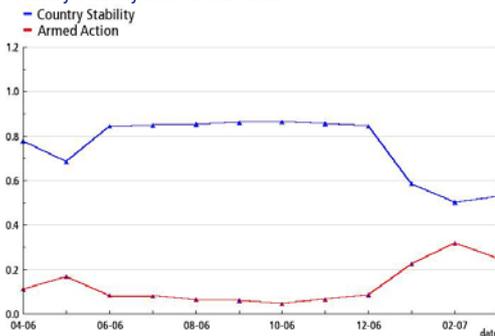
During the reporting period, violent attacks against occupying Ethiopian forces and Ugandan peacekeeping troops as well as militias loyal to the TFG have become nearly ubiquitous, thus seriously affecting overall stability (see graph). Inter-clan fighting as well as the level of crime increased, resulting in loss of life, injury and considerable damage to public and private property.

Rocket and mortar attacks in early February mainly targeted Ethiopian bases on the northern edge of Mogadishu, public facilities and infrastructure. Later in the month, violence spread in the capital and beyond, aimed at leading TFG officials and TFG bases. On 8 February, fighting was reported between TFG forces and local militias in the Afgoye district near Mogadishu. On 11 February, attackers targeted high-ranking TFG officials in Kismayo, killing four Somali army colonels.

The arrival of 1,200 Ugandan troops in the first week of March did not improve the security situation in Mogadishu. On 7 March, insurgents attacked the first contingent of AU forces, killing 14 Somalis and Ethiopians, and injuring 20. On 9 March, attackers fired at a military plane carrying AU peacekeepers, and on 23 March, a supply plane of the AU forces was shot down during take-off from Mogadishu's international airport, killing 11 crew members.

During the second half of March, violence in Mogadishu escalated seriously. The town was rocked by the heaviest fighting since 1991. On 21 March, a first round of heavy fighting between Ethiopian/TFG forces and Hawiye fighters supposedly associated with the Islamic Courts killed at least 34. As March ended, the Ethiopian and TFG forces set out on an offensive that involved the shelling of various urban neighborhoods in Mogadishu. Clan elders in the capital claim that more than a thousand people, mostly civilians, were killed in the course of the fighting.

Country Stability and Armed Action



Source: FAST event data

SOCIAL

Violence put thousands of civilians in danger, killed or maimed many, and triggered major waves of flight. The ICRC on 24 February reported that more than 430 war-wounded had been admitted to two of the city's hospitals. According to UNHCR, over 200,000 people fled the capital since 1 February to Lower and Middle Shabelle, Bay, Gedo and other parts of Somalia. The displacement of people was further aggravated by a cholera outbreak: The number of reported cases of Acute Water Diarrhea in South/Central Somalia since 1 January stands at 5,602, with 251 dead. UNHCR, UNICEF and relief agencies provided emergency relief to the displaced, but insecurity and denial of access by the TFG constrain humanitarian activities.

POLITICAL

The TFG executive and the Ethiopian army continue to focus on military and other forceful attempts to consolidate their power in Somalia, effectively choking a genuine reconciliation process as demanded by domestic and external actors, and muting the political process within the transitional parliament. Sharif Hassan Adan, the previous Speaker of the Parliament, was removed from his position as a consequence of his unauthorized reconciliation efforts with Courts officials. 40 legislators who had supported Adan sought refuge in Djibouti because they felt at risk in Somalia and conditioned their return on a withdrawal of the Ethiopian forces. The newly elected Speaker, Sheikh Adem Mohammed Nour, is known to oppose reconciliation with the Courts movement. Furthermore, the TFG leadership pushed an anti-terrorism law through parliament in February. It aims at the Courts movement and defines terrorism as any act that destabilizes peace and security in Somalia. Potential penalties include execution, confiscation of property and deportation. The TFG announced the establishment of an "anti-terrorism unit" trained by Ethiopian forces. A third move away from genuine reconciliation occurred when, on 20 February, the national security department ordered a reporting ban on Somali government and Ethiopian military operations as well as on civilian

perceptions of the situation in Mogadishu. This announcement was later retracted, yet media freedom remains tightly restricted in the government-controlled areas.

Responding to donor pressure, the TFG held a first reconciliation seminar in Mogadishu in February, attended by 200 representatives and sponsored by UNDP. Parallel to this, the transitional parliament organized a meeting and agreed in principle to have reconciliation talks, however without specifying details. Broad-based talks theoretically became possible after the release from custody in Kenya of the former chairman of the executive council of the Courts, Sheikh Sharif Sheikh Ahmed. The US urged the TFG to include Ahmed in the dialog as he is one of the most popular figures in the Courts movement. However, the meeting, which is planned to be held within Somalia, is framed in a way that would preserve the TFG's current structure and personnel. Focusing on "clan-based reconciliation", the conference would bring together 3,000 participants from all parts of the country and the Diaspora for a period of two months. Although the TFG began selecting delegates in March, the conference has been postponed to at least May. This format of the reconciliation conference is challenged particularly by the armed opposition and the Hawiye clan. The major elements of the powerful Hawiye clan family urged the TFG to hold an open reconciliation and requested the international community to ensure the withdrawal of Ethiopian forces and to organize a genuine reconciliation conference in a neutral place. Speakers of the moderate wing of the Courts expressed their willingness to negotiate and called for a genuine reconciliation process involving all sectors of Somali society. Yet the militant wing of the Courts, led by Adan Hashi Ayro, declared that they would continue to fight and calling a *jihad* on occupying troops, including AMISOM.

INTERNATIONAL

The external actors interested in realizing genuine reconciliation and stabilization moved towards a consensus that the two goals needed to be achieved simultaneously. They pressed for the rapid deployment of AU "stabilization mission" (AMISOM) that would protect the TFG and would allow for an Ethiopian withdrawal. At the same time they sought to influence the TFG towards inclusive reconciliation. Yet both goals did not materialize as planned. Through the third week of February, only 4,000 of the 8,000 troops deemed necessary for the mission had been pledged by African states and only in the first week of March did Uganda deploy 1,200 troops. Other committed contributors to the mission, including Burundi, Nigeria and Ghana have showed little enthusiasm for involvement, due to fears that their troops would be subjected to the same insurgent attacks that Ugandan peacekeeping forces presently face. With regard to reconciliation, only the UN shared the concern on the planned conference, warning that the TFG needed to consolidate itself by including all potential opponents. The majority of the external actors that had favored power-sharing negotiation, however, have not shown commitment in pressuring the TFG to implement genuine reconciliation.

It is estimated that 40,000 Ethiopian troops continue to be present inside Somalia, a number that can obviously not be matched by the AU Force. During March, following fighting South of Galkayo, Ethiopian troops were further deployed to Puntland, raising concerns in the neighboring Somaliland. Relations between the two regions recently deteriorated when clashes between their security forces flared up again around the village of Dhahar in Eastern Sanaag.

OUTLOOK

Since the defeat of the Courts, the security situation on the ground proves that the internationally sponsored TFG is failing to bring order to Somalia. Furthermore, with each day the TFG has been moving away from genuine reconciliation, and failed to initiate a reconciliation process that would allow it to broaden its public support. Somalia's politics are returning back to the status quo before the rise of the Courts, as power is falling under the control of faction leaders and other strongmen who divide Somalia into fiefdoms. With all forces mobilizing troops and weaponry while fortifying their positions in Mogadishu, prospects are that the devastating fighting that rocked the capital at the end of March will continue with little chance of a decisive victory for either side. Fighting may also spread to other parts of the country, in particular to Central Somalia, where remnants of the Islamic Courts are believed to have positions.

The immediate challenge is to establish and maintain a truce that may provide the space needed to enter into talks and allow for a credible reconciliation process to begin as soon as possible. Furthermore, the circumstances underline the need to bring in external support to constructively balance the stabilization and reconciliation process. Clearly, pressure to push the TFG to broaden its public support must be increased. But this can hardly work under the current military siege of Mogadishu. There is an urgent need to bring in a neutral stabilization force that would provide the necessary level playing field for genuine reconciliation. The sharing of the same facilities between the Ugandan and Ethiopian military puts the neutrality of AMISOM in doubt. Against this background, genuine reconciliation and the maintenance of an adequate and neutral stabilization force are hardly conceivable unless there is at least a credible prospect if not scenario of an Ethiopian withdrawal.

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