



A NEW TALIBAN IN SOMALIA? NOT YET

Karin von Hippel – PCR Project

For the first time in 15 years, Mogadishu is ruled by one faction.

This time, it is not one of the many warlords who have dominated its neighborhoods since Somalia officially collapsed in 1991, but rather the city is now under the control of the [Islamic courts](#). These courts are run by a mix of Islamic fundamentalists and conservative clan-based Islamic leaders who want to establish strict Sharia law in Mogadishu, and will likely want to [spread their power beyond the former capital](#).

Why have the Islamic courts been successful? The answer transcends military might.

First, they have increased public support by delivering social services, Hamas-style, through a number of Islamic charities.

Second, they have benefited from Somali perceptions that the U.S. government is anti-Islam, demonstrated by its alleged support for the loose affiliation of warlords fighting the Islamic militias, one that calls itself the Alliance for the Restoration of Peace and Counter-terrorism.

This virtual alliance is one of expediency, hastily pulled together in order to garner American support for what is essentially a local political fight for control of Mogadishu; there is probably no Somali-language term for this alliance. If [external funding for the warlords disappeared overnight](#), so too would this alliance.

The U.S. government worries about an extreme Islamic state being established in Somalia, one that might [link up with al-Qaida](#). Yet supporting the warlords [is not the way to prevent this outcome](#). The U.S. government learned this lesson during the U.N. days in Somalia. The warlords failed to deliver their constituencies then, and they will fail to do so again today.

Moreover, fears of an Islamic state in Somalia are not new. This was a concern in the mid-1990s. At that time, the Islamists were defeated militarily by a combination of Somali and Ethiopian forces.

A more [strategic approach](#), which in turn would help Somalis build an accountable and decentralized state, requires a different focus, one that supports civil society, promotes the rule of law and helps the Somalis themselves root out the handful of extremists that use Somalia for sanctuary, weapons transshipment and other illegal activity.



THURSDAY
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The United States should build on its successful support of the peace process in Sudan and apply its full weight to [bolster and empower the transitional federal government](#), agreed to by Somalis from all clans over a year ago.

The prospects for such a strategy are more encouraging than most Americans realize. Somalia is populated primarily by moderate Muslims. It has a strong civil society and an incredibly vibrant private sector. It is neither a black hole nor the Mad Max society depicted by the media, but rather a country of sharp contrasts.

One is the static and depressing Somalia, familiar to American television viewers, in which large pockets of the population live in extreme poverty. The United Nations estimates that far too many Somalis suffer from grave human rights violations, chronic drought, food insecurity and sporadic violence, all of which inhibits development and prevents international aid workers from accessing many parts of the country.

In humanitarian and development terms, official indicators place Somalia at the bottom of all human development indices - including life expectancy, adult literacy, school enrollment, infant mortality, per capita income and malnutrition.



Source: BBC News

Somali Internet user

But there is also an extremely dynamic Somalia few outsiders appreciate. For example, in many parts of Somalia, electricity lights up the streets at night (a service sadly lacking in most of neighboring Kenya), while the [mobile telephone network is the cheapest in East Africa](#), and one of the continent's most competitive.

Somalis from the [diaspora remit funds into Somalia](#) at a lower cost and faster rate than most other money transfer services worldwide, both formal and informal. A Somali's \$250 sent from Galveston, Texas, for example, will arrive at the door of her mother's house in Galkaayo in northeast Somalia 12 hours later, and the transfer fee will be lower than that charged by Western Union or Citibank.

Mogadishu has schools providing elementary, secondary and even tertiary education, as well as television stations, hospitals and medical clinics and even a Coca-Cola bottling plant. Hargeisa has car insurance, Internet cafes, hotels and restaurants, and several Somali airlines operate scheduled services throughout the country. All are [private, Somali-run businesses](#).

Somalia has not fallen into the abyss since the state collapsed precisely because of the [efforts of Somalis themselves](#) - both in the diaspora and in Somalia.

The tight Somali social networks, based on close ties of clan and kinship, have been critical to the survival of Somalis and Somalia. And if in recent weeks Somalis have been protesting alleged U.S. interference in the fighting in Mogadishu, it is not only because of perceptions that the U.S. government is anti-Islam but also because they don't want the warlords to be any stronger than they already are.

Despite assertions to the contrary, the U.S. government has not prioritized state-building in Somalia. Rather, it gave up on Somalia after the [18 U.S. soldiers were killed in October 1993](#). Since then, and similar to Iraq, U.S. intelligence-gathering capacity throughout the country has been extremely limited. It's time to take a different approach, one that supports Somali energy rather than saps it.

This article originally appeared in [The Baltimore Sun](#).

SUGGESTED READING ON SOMALIA

Somaliland: Time for African Union Leadership

International Crisis Group – May 23, 2006

On May 18, 2006, the self-declared Republic of Somaliland marked fifteen years since it proclaimed independence from Somalia. Although its sovereignty is still unrecognized by any country, the fact that it is a functioning constitutional democracy distinguishes it from the majority of entities with secessionist claims, and a small but growing number of governments in Africa and the West have shown sympathy for its cause.

Somalia Joint Needs Assessment Website

United Nations and World Bank

The Somali Joint Needs Assessment (JNA) will provide an assessment of rehabilitation and transitional recovery needs and a reconstruction and development plan for the next five years. It is coordinated jointly by the UN & WB, supported by donors and undertaken jointly with Somali authorities.



Somalia

CIA World Fact Book

Land Area: 637,657 sq km (slightly smaller than Texas)

Population: 8,863,338 (estimate)

Pop. Growth: 2.85 per year

Ethnicity: Somali 85%, Bantu and other non-Somali 15%

Religion: Sunni Muslim, small Christian minority

Languages: Somali (official), Arabic, Italian, English

Literacy: 37.8% (male: 49.7%/ female: 25.8%)

Life Expect.: 48.47 years (ranked 205 out of 226)

Inf. Mortality: 114.89/1,000 live births (7th highest in world)

Economy: Agriculture 65% / Industry 10% / Services 25%

GDP/capita: \$600 (2nd lowest in world)

GDP Growth: 2.4% real growth per year

Conflict in Somalia: Drivers and Dynamics

World Bank Group – January 2005

The objective of this conflict analysis exercise is to increase the understanding of conflict sources and dynamics in the three main regions of Somalia to help guide the World Bank and its partner's policy and program development in the country.

Concerned at Rising Violence in Somalia, Security Council Urges Dialogue

UN News Center – June 8, 2006

Reacting to intensifying violence in Somalia, where Islamic forces were recently reported to have taken control of the capital, Mogadishu, after fierce battles with other groups, the United Nations Security Council today called on all concerned to comply with the arms embargo and avoid any further destabilization

OTHER NEWS

[Football Envy at the UN](#)

Kofi Annan – Guardian – June 12, 2006

The World Cup makes us at the UN green with envy. As the pinnacle of the only truly global game, played in every country by every race and religion, it is one of the few phenomena as universal as the UN. You could say it's more universal. Fifa has 207 members; we have only 191. But there are better reasons for our envy.

[Afghanistan: The Night Fairies](#)

Sarah Chayes – The Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists - March/April 2006

In reality, the four years since the Taliban's demise have been characterized by a steady erosion of security in distinct phases. The most recent phase, signaled by the rebuffs I received from the farmers, may represent a point of no return. These rebuffs are the consequence of a highly effective intimidation campaign that has been carried out in tightening circles around Kandahar by, for lack of a better term, resurgent Taliban. Handbills appear in village mosques threatening anyone who dares collaborate with foreigners or the Afghan government. Homes receive armed visitors, demanding provisions or other assistance. One of my farmer friends, afraid even to pronounce their name, refers to them as "fairies who come at night."

[US and Afghan Troops Launch Southern Offensive](#)

Rachel Morarjee – Financial Times – June 14, 2006

US-led coalition and Afghan troops have embarked on the largest counter-insurgency operation since the fall of the Taliban to oust militants from their strongholds in southern Afghanistan.

[Battle Over Foreign-Aid Spending Heats Up](#)

Michael M. Phillips and David Rogers – The Wall Street Journal - June 7, 2006

The Bush administration and Congress are headed for a clash over how to spend U.S. aid for the developing world. President Bush's decision to consolidate billions of dollars in foreign-aid programs under the State Department puts him at odds with Congress's age-old prerogative of earmarking foreign-aid funds for favorite issues, such as immunizing children or encouraging sexual abstinence for AIDS control.

EVENTS

Monday, June 19

[The Future of Foreign Aid: Reform to Meet Obligations at Home and Abroad](#) – Center for Global Development

[Engaging with Religion in Conflict Settings: A Field Perspective](#) – Center for Strategic and International Studies

Tuesday, June 20

[The U.S. Commitment to Refugee Protection and Assistance: A Humanitarian and Strategic Imperative](#) – Heritage Foundation

CSIS's POST-CONFLICT RECONSTRUCTION PROJECT

Invites you to a Luncheon Presentation

Monday, June 19, 2006

12:00 – 2:00 pm

Fourth Floor Conference Room

1800 K Street, NW

ENGAGING WITH RELIGION IN CONFLICT SETTINGS: A FIELD PERSPECTIVE

With

Dr. David Steele

CSIS Senior Associate

Policymakers have increasingly acknowledged the importance of religion in conflict-prone states. What should be taken into consideration when addressing religious actors? How can the international community approach both the positive and negative impacts of religion in fragile or war-torn states, including how to work with religious groups in attempting to resolve conflict and how to engage with extremist religious elements that are contributing to the escalation of conflict?

Dr. David Steele has over a decade of experience working with religion and conflict management. Most recently, he worked with those involved in Final Status Talks in Kosovo, and developed a report on religious aspects of conflict for use at the June 2006 Oslo Forum. With the Conflict Management Group (CMG) and Mercy Corps, Dr. Steele has led projects engaging government officials and NGOs in the Balkans, South Asia, and the Middle East. Prior to working at CMG, Dr. Steele was a fellow in the Program on Preventive Diplomacy at the Center for Strategic & International Studies.

Please RSVP to Nadia Blackton at nblackton@csis.org.

For more information on the Post-Conflict Reconstruction Project and recent publications, please visit:

<http://www.csis.org/isp/pcr/>