



**Unpacking the Somali Conflict
Conference Report
21st January 2009, Burgers Park Hotel
Pretoria**

The objective of the conference, titled ‘Unpacking the Somali Conflict,’ was to provide a forum upon which key experts on the Somali conflict could shed light on the shifting complexities of the crisis, the future challenges facing the Transitional Federal Government, the African Union and the international community, and to provide a new perspective of the conflict that would allow for the discussion of alternative peace and conflict resolution paradigms. Underlining the current gravity of the Somali conflict, Dr. Jakkie Cilliers, Executive Director of the Institute for Security Studies, cited in his welcoming remarks, the unanimous adoption of United Nations Resolution 1863 as a welcome development and an indication that the international community take seriously, the need to bring to an end one of the continents most intractable conflicts.

Briefly, Resolution 1863, adopted by the United Nations Security Council on January 16, expresses an intention to establish a U.N Peacekeeping operation in Somalia. While the Security Council concluded that the proposed mission could be subject to deployment by June 1, it called upon Secretary General, Ban Ki Moon to, in the interim:

- Deliver a report that would include developments in Somalia, progress towards full deployment of the existing 3,200-strong African Union force, known as AMISOM, and progress in the political process and security conditions on the ground.
- Set out, within the report, the proposed mandate for the mission, whose tasks in and around Somalia’s capital, Mogadishu, would be to assist in the delivery of humanitarian aid; protect political actors and Government buildings and staff, and United Nations staff; monitor implementation of the Djibouti Peace Agreement and any subsequent ceasefires and joint security arrangement; and build up Somali security forces.

- And, to establish a trust fund to provide financial support to AMISOM until a United Nations peacekeeping operation could be deployed and to assist in the re-establishment, training and retention of all-inclusive Somali security forces. The Secretary-General was also requested to hold a donors conference as soon as possible to solicit contributions to the trust fund, and the African Union was asked to consult with him and submit budgetary requests to the fund.

However, it is important that the proposed UN peacekeeping force avoids the pitfalls of the last U.N missions to Somalia in 1992 (UNISOM I and II), which were both failures in terms of the achievement of their mandates. While he expressed a degree of confidence that this would not be the case, Dr. Cilliers highlighted various features of the present conflict, such as the civil war and inter-clan rivalry, which were prevalent during the U.N's last mission in the early nineties. These parallels make it difficult to envisage a successful mission this time around. The proposed mission, he argued, would also have to navigate through the constraints of the current international peacekeeping system, which has been adversely impacted by the global financial crisis. In concluding his opening remarks, Dr. Cilliers introduced the first moderator, for the first of three sessions, Ms. Paula Roque.

The first session of the conference, titled "The Somali Conflict in Perspective" sought to look at the various yet interrelated factors contributing to the Somalia crisis, as well as dispelling some of the misconceptions surrounding it. Ms. **Sally Healy** OBE (Chatham House) was first to speak from the panel. Ms. Healy shed some light on the motivations behind the regional and international actors' involvement in Somalia. Noted was the variety of perspectives about what the Somali Conflict is all about, as well as differing perspectives about the nature of the problem and different interpretations about what the solutions to the crisis may look like. It was also highlighted that the plethora of different ideas about a possible solution is in itself an impediment to the resolution of the crisis.

The following speaker, Dr. **Ken Menkhaus** (Davidson University), began his presentation by noting the growing apathy with which the international community is viewing the Somali conflict. He suggested that it is easy to lose sight of the gravity of the socio-economic as well as humanitarian crisis in the country, due to their imperceptible growth year on year. While acknowledging that there are some in the international community with, for either national security reasons or other foreign policy objectives, vested interests in the achievement of a lasting peace in Somalia, he echoed Ms. Healy before him, suggesting that many of these are equally unsure about what a possible solution to the Somali crisis would entail.

Dr. Menkhaus proceeded to chart several dynamic elements of the Somali conflict that are often overlooked by the international community, but nevertheless pivotal to the establishment of an appropriate solution. Some of the factors cited included radicalization, diasporization and governance. With regards to the latter in particular, Dr. Menkhaus advised the international community to take cognisance of Somalis' preference for customary law, Sharia Courts and other forms of traditional authority, over government. This, he argued, is an important factor to consider however deviant from western norms

of governance. He also emphasised the significance of a Somali driven solution to the conflict and moved on to underline on three points – the Ethiopian withdrawal from Somalia; the recent resignation of President Abdullah Yusuf, and changing U.S administration – that may change the context of the crisis for the better.

Picking up on some of the themes alluded to by the previous panellist, Mr. **Jabril Ibrahim Abdulle**, further highlighted issues that are either neglected or misunderstood in the Somali debate. The perception of Somalia is that it is synonymous with famine, disease and failed states. But of course there is another side of the country that is seldom referred to, and that's is the Somalia with a very vibrant civil society. Mr Ibrahim Abdulle referred to three possible scenarios to emerge from the present conditions:

- The first scenario sees the establishment of a viable Government of National Unity, but highlights that the international community needs to commit itself fully in supporting this unity government
- The second scenario considers how the Transitional Federal Government may collapse and as a consequence further in-fighting within the Islamists, long-term radicalisation, and a continued culture of impunity
- The third scenario sees a new kind of engagement from external actors

Mr. **Henri Boshoff**'s presentation focused on the role and effectiveness of, as well as the challenges facing the African Union's peacekeeping mission in Somalia (AMISOM). To assess the mission's effectiveness, Mr. Boshoff considered the tasks set out in its mandate, which include: the provision of protection to the Transitional Federal Institutions and security for key infrastructure; contribution to the creation of the necessary security conditions for the provision of humanitarian assistance; and protection of its personnel and facilities, as well ensuring the security and freedom of movement of its personnel. He argued that due to a lack of capacity, noting in particular troop contributions, in addition to the precarious state of security in Mogadishu, AMISOM has thus been unable to fully discharge its lengthy mandate. Boshoff expressed a degree of scepticism about the proposed U.N mission and questioned where the mooted peacekeeping force 22 000 would come from, given that an additional 3000 troops has been pledged to MONUC (the U.N mission in the DRC) and none has been forthcoming. Boshoff went on to highlight the casualties sustained, and concluded his presentation with the challenges to AMISOM, some of which may confront the U.N mission. Included among these were lack of capacity, funding, lack of force protection and the slow political process.

Session 2 “Dynamics and Issues of the Current Crisis”

The second session, “Dynamics and Issues of the Current Crisis”, chaired by Mr. Graham Maitland from the South African Department of Foreign Affairs, highlighted several of the fundamental aspects that are not being properly considered in attempts to stabilize Somalia, such as issue of impunity and the humanitarian crisis. In order for security to be reestablished in the country, it was suggested that the best long-term solution would be

the establishment of an effective security sector based on the rule of law as part of a more sustained political development strategy.

Mr. **Jeremy Brickhill**, the first of the panelists, focused primarily on three dynamics fueling the current crisis. The first was the context of the ‘war on terror.’ The new US administration, he argued, is a welcome departure from President George W. Bush’s misguided “war on terror”. According to Brickhill, the rhetoric of the “war on terror” has been inflammatory, unethical and counterproductive and has negatively affected the process of peacemaking in Somalia. He went further to suggest that both the UN and the AU had largely failed in providing leadership by uncritically accepting the American version of events and called for an alternative African approach towards the resolution of the conflict.

Brickhill also spoke of the need for a legitimate security sector in Somalia. The difficulty in separating security issues from politics, he argued, necessitates a centralized approach to security sector reform in Somalia. He further emphasized that any attempt at reforming the security sector had to be a national project to ensure success and suggested that the reforms could be used to establish an environment for negotiation and dialogue.

The next panelist, Mr. **Raghe Abdurahman**, focused on current developments in Somalia. He began his presentation by speaking at length about his delight for being in South Africa. He recalled his associations with former South African liberation movements when they sought refuge on the continent in the 1970s. In that vein, he sought to evoke the spirit of African solidarity and how this could be applied in the case of Somalia. Mr. Abdurahman moved on to speak about the voter registration underway in the north of the country and the complexity of the political in Puntland. While expressing pride in the manner in which the transition was handled, he noted that support is still needed to face challenges such as human trafficking, piracy, money laundering and other cross-cutting issues in Somalia.

Mr. Raghe Abdurahman then offered a few points for considerations, including:

- The conflict cannot be resolved quickly and that certain processes should not be rushed (as part of the lessons learnt from the previous peace processes)
- Ownership of the conflict by the Somali people, and the need to have greater representation and Somali input
- Shrinking international support
- Problematic regional players
- The escalation of violence after the conclusion of every mediation process, as well as the shifting of alliances and factionalism
- The humanitarian crisis
- The need for a containment policy in support of the fight against piracy and radicalisation

Dr. **Abdulahi Osman** began his presentation by posing a somewhat controversial question in which he asked whether Somalis want a government or deserve a

government? He followed up this question by asking, “if yes, then what kind of government?” The underlying theme of his discussion was that all of the parties to the Somali conflict view political power as a zero-sum game. As consequence of this, he argued, warlordism and the quest for capturing power, has become a rational and potentially lucrative activity, referred to as the profiteers of negotiations. He then moved on to recommend various ways in which the problem of warlords could be approached, including:

- The maintenance of strong peacekeeping forces.
- Countrywide disarmament
- Reconstruction of the economy
- Ending ethnic discrimination: there are underlying ethnic divisions in the country, even de facto segregation, particularly when it comes to political power.
- Massive education drive inside and outside of the country.
- The establishment of some kind of truth and reconciliation or the provision of a platform for dialogue.
- The need to address victim’s concerns and issues like compensations and restitution

Dr. Pat Johnson’s presentation focused on the broader context of the humanitarian crisis in Somalia. Dr. Johnson reiterated a long-established belief that Somalia is the world’s worst humanitarian disaster, with approximately 40 % of the population in need of emergency food relief. She noted the dire nature of the situation, but also expressed the difficulty of conducting proper assessment to determine precisely the extent of the humanitarian crisis. It is often difficult to get to the villages where people are suffering because of violence and poor infrastructure; as a result the full extent of the crisis often goes unreported by the media. Dr. Johnson stressed the importance of full access to the country in addressing the humanitarian needs of Somalia, suggesting that without it, aid agencies cannot ascertain the needs of those in the villages, and therefore cannot adequately plan their missions. The issue of lack of access is further exacerbated by the establishment of checkpoints throughout the country, making it more difficult for aid workers to move around.

Dr. Johnson also raised the important issue of security particularly for aid workers. She stated that the lives of aid workers are constantly at risk and used the example of the 36 aid workers (mostly Somali nationals) that have been killed in the past few months.

Mr. Richard Cornwell focused on the complexity of the situation in Somalia and how it is often misunderstood. He warned that state reconstruction as the single end goal is misleading, as there is a myriad of issues that have to be addressed, and that these have unfortunately been reduced to state reconstruction. He traced the history of the conflict and suggested that the current crisis is a consequence of the Cold War and the use of Somalia as a state where proxy wars have been fought. Cornwell argued that the Cold War militarization of Somalia engendered the culture of solving political differences

through violence and that with the control of the state, whoever is in power, could be a super predator.

Cornwell also reflected on what he called the conundrum of international aid agencies. These agencies, he argued, are faced with the challenge of neutrality. They are often at the mercy of the local warring factions and face the risk of being manipulated by political actors. In his conclusion, Cornwell called for mediation to resolve the Somali crisis and increased accountability on the part of the AU and UN.

Session 3 – Challenges and Prospects for Achieving Peace

The third and final session of the day, moderated by Prof. Maxi Schoeman, dealt with the need to devise strategies to contain radicalization, the role played by the Diaspora, and the emergent sectarian violence.

Prof. **Iqbal Jhazbhay** stressed the importance of establishing zones of stability and the need to learn on how other countries, like Jordan, have managed to contain radicalization. Jhazbhay also highlighted the need for the Somali population to benefit from peace dividends as a matter of sustained peace, the absence of this will see groups choosing to join armed factions.

The second panelist, Mr. **Mark Bradbury** cited the example of Somaliland (which has maintained a government since the defeat of the Somali Army in 1991) as evidence that peace could be achieved in the region, as long as the peace building process is designed, mediated and managed by Somalis, and whose leaders were locally selected and respected. Some of the factors said to have played a stabilizing role in Somaliland after 1991 included a sense of political consensus and united vision for Somalia between the various clans, dire economic consequences and the fact that the SNM held the monopoly over violence in the region, after their defeat of the Somali Army. Somaliland's success was dependent on region-wide large multi-clan peace conferences dealing with constitutional issues and the establishment of systems of security.

Mr. **Nuur Mohamud Sheekh**, stressed how radicalism will only be defeated ideologically as opposed to militarily. Nuur also pointed out that a big challenge will be resettling the 1.3 million IDPs who have been displaced as a result of conflict. IDPs receive very little assistance from international organisations due to the shrinking humanitarian space. On opportunities, he said that the Djibouti process should be supported by all. He also opined that the trade between Ethiopia and Somalia and Djibouti should be encouraged as a way of creating trade-led cooperation between neighbours. Highlighting issues dealing with the perpetuation of the crisis, Mr. **Rashid Abdi**, suggested that although Ethiopia has pulled out of Somalia, it will maintain a robust military presence on the border. Notwithstanding a non-aggression pact, Ethiopia will still be involved and if need be the troop withdrawal could be reversed. Abdi spoke about the possibility of Somalia descending into sectarian war with the rise of certain Sufi groups taking arms against Al-Shabaab. To worsen the situation is the reality that

warlords have always been interested in positioning to join and explore social movements themselves.

Session 4 - Summary of day's discussion: Paul- Simon Handy

Paul- Simon Handy, head of the African Security Analysis Programme, concluded the conference by summarizing the day's events. He commended the conference as an enriching and enlightening event. His summary of events was presented as follows:

1. Understanding the conflict

- This is an important aspect, and the conference has managed to offer a good understanding of the conflict. There is much ignorance when it comes to the Somali conflict, hence the need for an event of this nature.
- Understanding the changing context of the conflict.
- Emergence of various forms of governance without government
- The incapacity of the international world to understand the conflict.
- Our understanding of statehood has been questioned through the Somali conflict.

2. The many forms/types of actors

- The extreme fragmentation of the Somali society
- A weak Transitional Federal Government (TFG)
- The role of neighboring countries in the conflict
- The pronounced role the United States in the conflict.
- The globalised character of the conflict

3. New opportunities/ solutions

- Resignation of President Abdulahi Yusuf in December last year.
- Withdrawal of Ethiopian troops
- A new US administration
- Engagement with the diaspora and continuing support of local institutions.
- Giving support to the Djibouti process
- Ending the culture of impunity

In her closing remarks, Ms. Paula Roque (Conference organizer and coordinator of the Somalia Working Group) used the information vacuum around the Somali crisis, as well recent developments, to emphasize to underline the necessity of the conference. She noted the importance of understanding the shifting context of the conflict in order to offer informed analyses.

Ms. Roque explained the rationale behind the establishment of the Somalia Working Group, which had its inaugural meeting the day after the conference on 22 January 2009.

The working group comprises several Somali experts from around the world, and will meet occasionally and produce outputs such as occasional papers, policy briefs, monthly updated reports, monographs and seminars. Ms. Roque thanked the audience and the panelists who had traveled from near and far in order to be part of the conference.