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Leaving a Legacy

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Leaving a Legacy

Abstract

The ongoing conflict in Somalia, and the complexities that come with finding lasting solutions to a conflict that has raged for decades now, continue to perplex the international community. While a range of previously tried and tested approaches to conflict management are being applied, it is becoming apparent that the international toolkit for responding to conflict situations of such complexity is extremely limited. Indeed, as one international conference after another on Somalia takes place, compacts are signed and funding windows established, old frameworks are abandoned and new ones are forged, and roadmap after roadmap pave the way for further engagement, and as an increasing number of international actors are developing series upon series of strategies for Somalia, the timeframes for engagement are becoming increasingly protracted, and Somali reliance on external actors is being entrenched. Perplexingly little attention is being paid to one core question though: what do the Somali people themselves want?

Keywords

Human rights, Somalia, African Union, Al Shabaab, United Nations, Democracy

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Leaving a Legacy

by Walter Lotze

The ongoing conflict in Somalia, and the complexities that come with finding lasting solutions to a conflict that has raged for decades now, continue to perplex the international community. While a range of previously tried and tested approaches to conflict management are being applied, it is becoming apparent that the international toolkit for responding to conflict situations of such complexity is extremely limited. Indeed, as one international conference after another on Somalia takes place, compacts are signed and funding windows established, old frameworks are abandoned and new ones are forged, and roadmap after roadmap pave the way for further engagement, and as an increasing number of international actors are developing series upon series of strategies for Somalia, the timeframes for engagement are becoming increasingly protracted, and Somali reliance on external actors is being entrenched. Perplexingly little attention is being paid to one core question though: what do the Somali people themselves want?

International attention turned once again to Somalia in 2007 when the African Union first deployed peacekeepers to the country, ostensibly to facilitate the withdrawal of Ethiopian forces from the country and to oversee the implementation of an extremely fragile peace process. The peace process quickly collapsed however, and the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM) soon found itself supporting a besieged fledgling transitional government, and being attacked by the Al Shabaab armed movement. It was only in 2010 that Somali forces, heavily supported by AMISOM, were able to liberate and secure Mogadishu. While this created the necessary space for the conclusion of the transitional political process, security conditions outside of Mogadishu were not conducive for the hosting of elections, and thus the political transition was concluded, without much in the way of public participation. While the political transition in Somalia was concluded in August 2012, much of the country remains in the hands of Al Shabaab, and AMISOM, with limited resources and even less funding from the international community, has struggled to secure much more than the major urban centres and supply routes. While the UN Security Council is expected to authorize a minor surge in troops by November 2013 as well as the provision of direct logistical support to the Somali National Army, it will prove exceedingly difficult to dislodge the remnants of Al Shabaab from their remaining strongholds. What will prove impossible however is securing a military victory over Al Shabaab throughout the country. What is more likely to happen is that as the Somali armed forces, support by AMISOM, continue their military offensive to secure greater swathes of territory, so Al Shabaab will put up a good fight, and then simply melt away into the population, strengthening its capability to conduct both asymmetrical warfare within Somalia, and terrorism within the region.

What is required therefore is greater fusion between the political and the security approaches being developed in Somalia. Efforts in this regard have begun, but they are slow to take shape. Several things need to be done if the threat posed by Al Shabaab is to be countered. For one, both the authority and the legitimacy of the federal government operating from Mogadishu need to be strengthened. This involves getting the recipe for relations between the federal and the regional levels right, which has to date proved rather tricky. For another, greater emphasis needs to be placed on service delivery, and the Somali people must be given the opportunities they need to return to a normal way of life after decades of conflict. At present, even getting from one

point in Mogadishu to another can take hours due to roadblocks and security checks, and the poor state of the roads in the country's capital. Small improvements go a long way towards building confidence. Further, basic security needs to be attained in areas from which Al Shabaab have been pushed out, which involves getting the police on the streets and strengthening community security approaches.

All of this hinges on creating the space for dialogue in Somalia, something that has proved extremely difficult to date. This dialogue needs to happen at all levels, including between the federal and the regional levels, between men and women, and between peoples of all ages, religions and clans. It may even need to happen between the federal government and Al Shabaab, or the less radicalized elements of Al Shabaab. The root causes of conflict in Somalia need to be understood and addressed, a common narrative of the country's history, and the last decades of conflict, needs to be developed. And the Somali people need to be given an opportunity to be heard, and must be listened to. The Somali people themselves have suffered most from the last decades of conflict, insecurity, loss of life, absence of governance, and a lack of protection of their rights. If the threat posed by Al Shabaab and deep-seated historical grievances are to be meaningfully addressed, and lasting human security in Somalia to be attained, all international engagement, every strategy and compact and framework, should put one thing first: the ability of the Somali people to articulate and drive the process. A popular Somali proverb is *Waari mayside war haka hadho*. The English translation more or less goes: "You won't last, so leave a legacy." If the international engagement in Somalia should leave one legacy, it should be that the security and the space were created in which the Somali people themselves shaped their own destiny.

Walter Lotze is a Visiting Fellow at the Berlin-based Centre for International Peace Operations (ZIF). Prior to joining ZIF, Walter worked as a Planning and Liaison Officer in the Peace Support Operations Division at the African Union Commission, which is responsible for the management of AU-mandated peace support operations. Before joining the AU Commission Walter was a Visiting Researcher with the Norwegian Institute for International Affairs (NUPI), before which he headed the peacebuilding work of the African Centre for the Constructive Resolution of Disputes (ACCORD). Walter holds a Masters in International Relations from the University of Stellenbosch (South Africa), and a PhD in International Relations from the University of St Andrews (Scotland).