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# Less is More?

## The Role of Outsiders in 'Fixing' Somalia



Dickie Davis and Greg Mills

Strengthening Africa's economic performance



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## Executive Summary

The 'world's most failed state', Somalia has defied the best efforts of peace-builders – local and foreign – for decades. Explanations for Somalia's chronic failings in security, politics and development are legion. This Paper does not repeat these oft-repeated arguments, but rather focuses on the reasons why Somalia might finally break from its deeply troubled past to chart a new course. Numerous challenges will need to be overcome, not least continuing attacks by radical Islamist group Al-Shabaab on the state and on the African Union Mission to Somalia (AMISOM), which has been at the forefront of the fight against Al-Shabaab. Yet there are grounds for optimism. Much has been done to improve governance in Somalia since 2012. There are also signs that the international community, which has gained hard-earned lessons about its own limitations to affect positive change – politically

and militarily – in Somalia, is finally adapting its approach constructively to the realities on the ground. 2015 is a key year for Somalia as it sets out to agree a new constitution and elect a new Government. The big challenge is not just to agree to a new constitution, but to build a political structure that is based, as in Somaliland, on a genuine compact between the key constituencies among Somalia's people, not just on a fix between a few bosses who have grown wealthy on aid. The nature of Somalia's challenges show that stabilising and rebuilding a modern state is an internal task dependent on ownership and solutions from the locals and a leadership with skills and vision of a common Somali future. In the case of Somalia, the role of the international community needs to remain one of careful and realistic engagement, not prodding and grand schemes. Less can be more.

## Introduction

With all that is going on in Syria, Iraq, Nigeria, Ukraine and other flash points around the world it is easy to lose sight of the long-running crisis in Somalia. Indeed Somalia has now slipped outside the UN Security Council's top five most discussed topics for just this reason. Described not so long ago (by the British Foreign Secretary, William Hague) as the world's most failed state, the fact that it is missing from the headlines suggests that there are tangible signs of progress – and there are. But huge challenges

remain. Somalia could easily backslide into chaos, particularly if the international community takes its eye off the ball.

2015 is a key year for Somalia as it sets out to agree a new constitution and elect a new Government. These are both huge tasks in their own right; together the challenge may be insurmountable. This paper discusses what has been achieved in Somalia so far and looks at what the future might hold for the country.

## Security

From small beginnings in January 2007, the African Union Mission to Somalia (AMISOM) has made real progress. Comprising 23 000 troops drawn mainly from Uganda, Kenya, Ethiopia, Burundi and Djibouti, AMISOM has demonstrated real staying power in the face of a determined, radical Islamist enemy in Al-Shabaab – losing perhaps over 4 000 troops in the process.<sup>1</sup> Greatly weakened, Al-Shabaab has now been squeezed into an arc in the middle of the country where they remain able to operate in large groups of up to 400. Elsewhere they strike using terrorist tactics: the attack on the AMISOM Headquarters Camp in Mogadishu on Christmas day 2014 and the attack on the Central Hotel in Mogadishu, on 20 February this year, in which several government officials were killed, are two recent examples. Nevertheless, since 2007 Al-Shabaab have been gradually losing ground, a string of their key leaders have been killed and large numbers of their fighters reintegrated back into Somali society.

Perhaps the greatest challenge now facing AMISOM will be the manner of its exit. For success, it must hand over the fight to Somalia's own national security forces, but in doing so not create a vacuum for Al-Shabaab to exploit and thus bounce back. This will not be easy, as both the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan have vividly demonstrated.

The foundations upon which to build a national army in Somalia are weak. The Somali National Army was disbanded in 1991 with the outbreak of civil war. In 2004 the gradual process of reconstituting the military was started with the establishment

of the Transitional Federal Government, but it is only in the last few years that this effort has started to gain momentum. The Army is now being stood up as a 22 000-strong force, with funding and assistance for half of its number from a variety of donors. The challenge is huge, for the starting point is to take the various untrained militias that make up the current Army and turn them into a professional fighting force that operates in accordance with the law and owes its allegiance to the Federal Government of Somalia, not the clan system. At the same time this force needs to deliver real-time security on the ground. From what we have (re)learnt in recent conflicts this will take a long time and sustained engagement, including financial support, from the international community.

**Somalia could easily backslide into chaos, particularly if the international community takes its eye off the ball**

If rebuilding the Army looks challenging, rebuilding the Police Force looks more demanding. There is a fundamental 'Federal versus National Police Force' debate currently going on in the country. On paper at least, there is a 7 500 strong National Police Force and growing international support for its development. During the Turkish President's visit to Somalia on 25 January, amongst the agreements he signed

was one on police support. Initially this support has manifested itself through the biometric registration of the existing officers, the paying of stipends and the provision of training and equipment. As AMISOM has moved out into the countryside the Police Force has attempted to back-fill the security and now operates in Mogadishu, Baidoa and a handful of other areas. Whilst the focus is on the provision of basic security there is still much to be achieved in the development of investigative capabilities and to

improve the focus upon community policing and respect for human rights. Locals in Mogadishu frequently complain about wanton police corruption. One poll in the city revealed that they prefer dispute resolution by clan elders because they distrust the police. Establishing a trusted Police Force in Somalia – with all the necessary cultural change – will be a generational enterprise, requiring sustained engagement with external advisors and trainers.

## Governance

Much has been achieved in recent years to set Somalia on a new course. Agreement on a new provisional constitution was reached in August 2012, which re-established Somalia as a federation and marked the start of the new Federal Government of Somalia. On 10 September 2012 Hassan Sheikh Mohamud was elected by parliament as the eighth President of Somalia. The Somali Compact was agreed in September 2013 after consultation with the Somali Federal Parliament, and representatives of civil society and the International Community. The Compact set out a series of principles and priorities for the development of the country across six pillars and reflects the unique positions of both Puntland and Somaliland. Whilst the first priority of the governance strand in Compact is to 'advance inclusive political dialogue' its second priority is to 'finalise and adopt a Federal Constitution by December 2015' and its third priority is to 'prepare for and hold credible elections by 2016'.<sup>2</sup>

These are huge tasks and during a recent visit to the country we could find few people who believed the timescales as set down were achievable. In the intervening two and half years there have been three Prime Ministers, with the current one, Omar Abdirashid Ali Sharmarke, being appointed on 17 December 2014. The removal of Prime Minister Ahmed, after a disagreement with the President over a cabinet reshuffle, resulted in a particularly turbulent last quarter of 2014.

The core historical problem of Somalia has been the virtual impossibility of governing Somalis, both from without and within. The 19th century traveller Richard Burton's famed comment on the Somalis,

'every man his own sultan', is still apposite more than a century and a half later. Somali society has little respect for authority or concept of a common good and Somalis have been ruthlessly opportunistic in exploiting both one another and outsiders. Furthermore, while the international community views Somalia as part of Africa, Somalis view themselves as more Arab than African. Some – somewhat astonishingly – even retain a fondness for the era of Mohamed Siad Barre, the dictator forced to flee Mogadishu in January 1991 after more than two decades of rule. The preference for big government and the mystique of Somali nationalism over clans are two which do not sync with current realities.

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Just as some Somalis mythologise the idea of a strong centralised state, the International Community effectively perpetuates the notion of Somaliland as part of a greater Somalia. In reality, Somaliland has operated as a de facto independent state since 18 May 1991 when, following a long and brutal civil war against Mogadishu, its leaders declared the re-establishment of the Somaliland state (it was independent for five days in June 1960<sup>3</sup>).

Focusing on the reason for Somaliland's comparative success – where the locals truly own the solution, the clan system is a force for cohesion, and where democracy has worked on a one person one vote basis – may be instructive for those trying to help from outside. Critics say that Somaliland's democracy was facilitated by the dominance of a single clan, the Isaaq, unlike Somalia, which has to balance the competing interests and ambitions of four major clans and several smaller ones. But this understates the differences between the Isaaq's sub-clans and sub-sub clans, ignores the internal violence that accompanied the birth process, which had to be resolved, and overlooks the tremendous hard work that went into it.

In the absence of a government that can really deliver security, justice and effective basic services, Somalis have come to rely on the clan system to protect themselves, provide employment and help when things go wrong. In an environment where systems are weak and group identities are pervasive, democracy is difficult to engineer. To persuade people to change their allegiance to the government may in the short to medium term be just too big an 'ask'.

In an environment where systems are weak and group identities are pervasive, democracy is difficult to engineer

Unlike most Africans – who are inherently heterogeneous – Somalis are fiercely nationalistic and share a common language, culture, ethnicity and religion despite the little central government has given them. Even though they have faced expansionist threats from Portugal, Ethiopia, France, England and Italy, they have always resisted. As one British officer remarked after bombing and, finally, subduing Muhammed Abdullah Hassan, the so-called 'Mad Mullah', in 1920, 'It is wonderful how little we have managed to impress the Somalis with our superior power.'<sup>4</sup>

In practice, however, the 'fierce nationalism' failed against the clan differences. Today the state operates as a clan-based mafia, where entwined

business and political interests feed off each other. Little wonder that the President has been at war with his Prime Ministers and appears reluctant to open up the political process and finalise the electoral system, preferring the 'election by selection' system that gave birth to the current parliament. It is no surprise too that Mogadishu's political elite are sceptical about devolving power to the regions. Diplomats routinely paint a picture of a disjointed and fragmented government, of widespread corruption as a political way of life and of clans intent on fighting over economic space and for political influence. Rather than seeing the donor-government New Deal and Compact as a fresh start, a reflection of Somali unity and ownership, some prefer to view them as 'just documents' and as 'conduits for money'.

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It can be fairly argued that the international community's approach has been overly focused on building the institutions of a state – the Army, the Police Force, the Central Bank and so on – and not enough on devising a political deal that is workable. That will require that each of the major groups and interests within the country has something to gain and in which the space available to Al-Shabaab and other spoilers is reduced. Put bluntly, this is about, in the short term, creating a 'mafia that works' – or at any rate that works a bit better – in place of a mafia that doesn't work. Somalis are highly adept at fixing deals with local leaders; what is needed are deals that are broadly supportive of a countrywide settlement. The challenge is to do this, in the first instance, without resorting to elements of nepotism, corruption and the carefully calibrated application of force.

The stage is set for a bumpy political ride over the next 18 months.

Delivering a new constitution might just, in the view of several insiders, be doable. Delivering the election is probably not. Part of the intrigue will be who blinks first: the International Community or the

Federal Government of Somalia. The International Community's view is that it is not for them to suggest to the Government that these objectives are undeliverable.

It is telling that during the run up to the removal of Prime Minister Ahmed entreaties to 'seek a mutually satisfactory compromise' in order to 'allow Somalia's political and security progress to continue without interruption' by the UNSRSG for Somalia, Nick Kay, and EU representatives were met with rebuttals and complaints of interference. Progress appeared only finally to be made when a League

of Arab States delegation, led by the Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Affairs Minister of Kuwait, visited Mogadishu.<sup>5</sup> It is interesting too, given the state of the Somali education system, that in January, at an event to commemorate the 42nd anniversary of the introduction of Somali as a written language, the President directed the use of Somali language in all written government documents and banned the use of foreign languages saying, 'Foreign languages should only be used when communicating to foreign countries and nationals'.<sup>6</sup>

## Development and the Economy

In many respects the fortunes of the Somali Shilling are a parallel for the fortunes of the country. The last official notes were printed in the 1990s; all others produced since are fakes (some estimates put the amount of fakes as high as a trillion shillings<sup>7</sup>). Somaliland has its own, internationally unrecognised, currency – the Somaliland Shilling – and a lot of transactions take place in US dollars; increasingly so with the advent of mobile money. Yet after years of weakness the currency has bounced back: in December 2012 the exchange rate was 19 000 to the US dollar, in December 2014 it was 750 to the dollar; making it the strongest performer among the global 175 currencies tracked by Bloomberg in 2013.<sup>8</sup> The appreciation in the value of the currency is a reflection of: increasing confidence as a consequence of improved security, the expected boost to the economy provided by the large sums of money pledged by the International Community to help rebuild the country, modest levels of foreign investment, and a reduction in new fake currency. But for this potential to be fully realised there remain some considerable obstacles to be overcome.

Given the unregulated, informal nature of the surviving economy, accurate recent data is hard to unearth, but 2012 estimates value Somalia's exports at US\$515m and imports at US\$1.263Bn. GDP per capita is estimated to be one of the lowest in the world. Somalia is not a member of the World Trade Organisation (or even an observer) and does not belong to any regional trade body, so getting what it does produce to the global market is a challenge.

Currently 83 per cent of the country's exports, mainly agricultural produce, go to the UAE, Oman and Yemen. On the development front 70 per cent of the country's population is assessed to be under 30 years old and the 2014 Human Development Index puts Somalia towards the bottom, although the assessment is hampered through lack of data.

Perhaps surprisingly, given the turmoil of the last 24 years, the economy has kept going, but it has had to adapt considerably. The private sector has had to provide all the basic services: water, power, finance and communications. To succeed, businesses have had to develop their own enabling networks and 'work arounds', many registering themselves in the Middle East. To grow, this situation needs to change and the Government needs to take the lead in setting the right conditions. This will take time.

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The potential of the oil and gas sector gives an interesting insight into the challenges that lie ahead. Somalia's potential has been long recognised and indeed BP and Chevron, amongst others, hold exploration licenses that date back to before the civil war. To develop the exploitation of this valuable resource,

the issues of ownership and regulation need to be addressed. In the meantime Soma Oil has signed a deal with the Federal Government of Somalia for exploration in deep water off the Somali Coast, while Somaliland and Puntland have signed two separate development agreements. Federal Government officials argue for a national approach, pointing out the provisions of the Somali 2008 Petroleum Act. This business area alone will add real friction into the process of agreeing a new constitution.

The need to get on with currency reform is pressing. The Somali Banking system was in a state of collapse for several years before Siyad Barre fled Mogadishu. During the late 1980's there was considerable financial chaos, high inflation and eventually the banks failed. The result was the growth in money-changers, the Hawala system and, more recently, mobile money. But to rush into introducing a new currency without creating the right environment would be a mistake. Most importantly the Central Bank of Somalia needs to be strengthened and the challenge is how to do this given the lack of Somali expertise in this area; it is here that international assistance, perhaps from another country's central bank, will be vital. But continuing improvements on the security situation, tackling corruption, and proper control of government taxation and expenditure are equally important enabling conditions, as these provide the required underpinning trust and confidence.

Perhaps the biggest challenge facing those seeking to stabilise and rebuild the country after years of conflict is how to fill the human capability gap. During the last quarter century of conflict, the education system ceased to function and many of those with an education fled the country. Gradually elements of the Somali diaspora are beginning to return bringing with them essential skills and knowledge, but it is unlikely to be enough. The education system needs to be completely rebuilt. There is some progress in this area, but after such a long period of chaos the

biggest strategic challenge is in finding the right numbers of properly qualified teachers. Currently the private sector provides schooling for 20 per cent of children, which leaves 80 per cent of school aged children without an education<sup>9</sup>, reducing their chances of meaningful employment and providing fertile recruiting material for those that want to continue an armed struggle. Furthermore the private schools do not follow a national curriculum; creating a policy – and work is underway on this issue – will be a good start, but ensuring its application will be much harder.

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There is also the added dimension of dealing with those current educational structures that promote radicalism and have links with the armed Islamists in the country. Here again the International Community, particularly Turkey, is playing a key role in both sending students abroad for education and in improving the situation in the country. But the challenge is one of considerable scale, for it is estimated that there are as many as five million children under the age of 18 in Somalia. In the short to medium term the country needs to be able to attract talent from across the world to help fill the gaps; no easy task for a country with such a troubled reputation. The nature of this challenge highlights, once again, the fact that rebuilding (or more properly building) Somalia as a modern state is a generational activity. No amount of international prodding will make it otherwise.

## International Engagement

The 'New Deal' for Somalia, agreed in Brussels in September 2013 at a conference sponsored by the European Union, offered a rare opportunity for the

Federal Government of Somalia and the International Community to work together in a new collaborative framework. For its part the Government accepted

an obligation to ensure international support corresponds with growing domestic legitimacy and a zero tolerance approach to corruption and nepotism. The international donors undertook to develop a common vision for Somalia, coordinate efforts and to align their support with Somalia's national priorities.<sup>10</sup> The reality on the ground is still somewhat adrift from the vision; tales of lack of coordination on the ground and friction between the various coordination bodies abound.

For many of the Western actors, investing in Somalia's stability and building a state is a means to counter terrorism at arms' length

Arriving at Mogadishu International Airport one cannot fail to be impressed by the brand new charcoal grey passenger terminal, built with help from the Government of Turkey, given the dilapidation that surrounds it. Turkey has also helped to rebuild roads in Mogadishu, built hospitals, opened agricultural and fisheries schools and assisted with well drilling to improve water supply. The commitment by Turkey is impressive; the current Turkish President has visited the country three times since 2011. In a statement released as part of his most recent visit at the beginning of this year he highlighted the long relationship between the two countries 'beginning in the 16th century with ties between the Ottoman Empire and the Adal Sultanate'. Turkey has also advocated strongly for wider international engagement.

For Turkey, its engagement is a test case for its wider engagement in African policy. For many of the Western actors, investing in Somalia's stability and building a state is a means to counter terrorism at arms' length. For the UK and Italy there is an element of atonement for the colonialist legacy. For Somalia's neighbours it is about their own security although it is risky for contiguous countries to be involved in peacekeeping missions, given the inevitable extent of vested interests. Kenya, Ethiopia and Djibouti now have a sizeable chunk of their defence budget met by an international mission. For others their motivation to engage is purely for commercial gain.

State building is, of course, a very difficult and messy long-term business. The modern, externally supported version has bleak military-run bases lodged behind Hesco blast walls, bit-by-bit, yard by yard, sweating at incrementally expanding positive control and influence, restoring a functioning government and basic services. The solution, as with the problem, lies with the locals. This is difficult where the external life support systems are more powerful than the patient.

Somalia is depressingly familiar in this regard, another international mission trying to move the locals to a 'better' system; the locals, in turn, reluctant to accept responsibility for the failure of past ones, willing to admit technical rather than fundamental political problems. This illustrates perfectly the challenges of moving beyond the paradigm of 'perfecting the formula' in which most external engagements are stuck, towards one that recognises – as the Somaliland case to the north so contrastingly illustrates – the political underpinnings of the problems and the solution.

State building is a very difficult and messy long-term business

In this regard, Rory Stewart and Gerald Knaus identify two interventionist schools: one that seeks to 'plan' their way out of conflict, prescribing 'a clear strategy, metrics, and structure, backed by overwhelming resources'; and, second, 'the liberal imperialist school' that 'emphasises the importance of decisive, bold, and charismatic leadership' in rescuing countries from their own citizenry, situations regarded as 'terrifying and tragic: a rogue state, a failed state, a threat to its neighbours or a threat to our credibility ... where "failure is not an option"'.

There is overlap between these two schools in terms of solutions. Both favour improving governance and strengthening (or creating) state capacity from institutions to laws as the means to state stability. This path to stability and recovery goes through 'a decisive and well-planned international intervention (with generous resources, a coherent strategy, coordination, staffing, communication, accountability, research, defined processes, and clear priorities)'.

Both schools are intrinsically optimistic about the role that outsiders can play, and their corresponding ability to define, measure and solve problems. Yet, they are contrastingly (and paradoxically, given the inescapable source of success) pessimistic, Stewart and Knaus note, about local capacity, often portrayed 'as criminals or victims'. This is primarily an outsider-in project: success from the proponent's perspective depending mainly on getting, as is highlighted above, 'the formula right' and resourcing the effort properly.<sup>11</sup>

International interveners battle to operate in these environments, let alone transform the political economy of the recipient states

Given the time frames of the actors, the metrics established by interveners usually gauge the money and resources expended rather than another commonly used term, the longer-term 'effect' of this expenditure on the ground. There are many dangers in supply-side aid measures – the tail attempting to push the horse, put differently – as opposed to the demand of the target state, and their capacity to absorb and usefully employ the funds. Failing the matching of demand and supply, distortions and even more severe developmental damage can occur.

International interveners battle to operate in these environments, let alone transform the political economy of the recipient states, even though this is what is required, given that simply reinstating the past is not good enough since these conditions contain the roots of failure. And forced state-building involving major social, political, economic and cultural change, cannot be managed relatively quickly, and not by outsiders. Indeed, remedying state weakness is fundamentally a political act, one where 'a social order has become maladapted to the globalising world – when governing institutions are weak, personalised, or kleptocratic; corruption is rampant; and the rule of law is noticeable by its absence ...'<sup>12</sup>

Even so, it is often conceived as an apolitical exercise, one driven by technocratic imperatives, not least because these are easier to deliver. Thus, those trying

to help countries from outside invariably make lists, a failing that both of us could stand accused of in engagements elsewhere, reflecting an impatience and time pressure to 'get the job done'. Lists become a substitute for local knowledge and the longer-term and more tedious job of understanding what lies behind local politics and engaging with its personalities. The following, according to the lists, is needed to build a state and a better future: rule of law, a tax system, civil service, investor-friendly policy, police service, financial system, one-stop shops, and so on. And in the same spirit, plans would be drawn up detailing how this might be achieved, essentially another list of items, this time prioritised, funded, staffed and sequenced. But mostly, these were tautologies masquerading as plans, only fleshing out the relationship between problems – corruption, security, administration – rather than identifying how they might be eliminated.<sup>13</sup>

If things are going wrong in a country, it's not usually that we don't have enough foreigners. It's usually that we have too many

This reflects ownership. Getting from systems where there is corruption, at least as outsiders define it, or insecurity or a lack of civil administration is unlikely to happen, not by foreigners or those attempting to haphazardly graft on outside ideas. Locals know more about their country and its ways than foreigners. 'In the end,' says Stewart, the Tory MP who has worked as a government administrator in Iraq and run an NGO in Kabul, 'the basic problem is very, very simple. Why don't these interventions work? Because we are foreigners. If things are going wrong in a country, it's not usually that we don't have enough foreigners. It's usually that we have too many.'

It is probably too early to see if the 'New Deal' has had a tangible effect, its aims are certainly laudable, but the apparent lack of teeth in the various coordination mechanisms and the continuing frustrations of those on the ground gives some cause for thought. Only time will tell. Although, restoring

states is essentially an internal task, that depends for its success on a leadership with both the vision and the skills needed to build a domestic constituency

in favour of change. This observation applies with particular force to Somalia.<sup>14</sup>

## Reasons for Hope?

Given the scale of the challenges outlined, are there any realistic reasons for hope in such a bleak part of the world? There appear to be four drivers which suggest that peace might stick, with conditions:

1. First, there is a constant refrain that the Somali people have had enough of conflict. If the reasons given by those demobilising from Al-Shabaab are to be believed, given another economic opportunity away from fighting, Somalis will grab it with both hands. Of course personal ambition and sentiment can be modified by the institutionalisation of conflict. It will take tough-minded political leadership and a workable political solution to break this pattern.
2. Second, there remains a tremendous amount of international goodwill, and matching largesse, towards Somalia. In the then Prime Minister Erdogan's speech at the UN General Assembly on 22 September 2011 he said, 'The tragedy of Somalia, where tens of thousands of children died

- due to the lack of even a piece of bread and a drop of water, is a shame for the international community.'<sup>15</sup> In 2012 for example, Somalia received US\$900 million in development and humanitarian aid along with a further US\$972 million spent on the multilateral peacekeeping mission.<sup>16</sup>
3. Third, many in the International Community and particularly neighbouring countries now recognise the threat posed by areas of the world where there is a governance vacuum; it is in their self interest to help out. As one Kenyan intelligence officer has remarked: 'First there were problems with Islamists in Somalia. Then there were problems in Kenya with Islamist Somalis. And now there are problems in Kenya with Islamist Kenyans.'
  4. Finally, Somalis are remarkably adept at business. As the situation stabilises and new opportunities present themselves, this attribute will help to develop a momentum, enabling Somalis to pull themselves out of crisis.

## Conclusions

At a private briefing in February 2015 a NATO government official described the challenge of understanding the various conflicts going on in the world, and their implications for peace and security, as one of 'bandwidth'. The House of Lords EU Sub-Committee on External Affairs, in its report on the Crisis in Ukraine,<sup>17</sup> found that 'the Foreign Office has lost the expertise and analytical capacity on Russia and the region, and that the UK and other member states were unable to read events on the ground'. So perhaps dropping out of the top five crises discussed by the UN Security Council is not such a good sign after all.

Even pre-1991 Somalia was in poor shape; the foundations for building a modern state after years of neglect are weak and in some areas just plain missing.

Looked through this lens, the rebuilding task will be a generational activity that will require sustained international engagement, considerable resources and much patience.

This is why the situation in Somaliland bears much thinking about. Here is a corner of the country that shares many of the challenges of the larger Somalia and yet has managed to achieve a degree of stability and progress without a huge international engagement effort. Just as in Afghanistan where the International Community has gradually become more realistic about what can be achieved given the local circumstances, so aspirations for Somalia will have to be similarly re-calibrated.

The next 18 months, until September 2016, will undoubtedly be challenging. As likely as not, the

constitution will be agreed, a compromise will be reached on the election, slow progress will continue to be made on the security front and the forces that have an interest in instability in Somalia will remain powerful. For progress to continue to be made the international community in its widest sense will need to stay alert and engaged; quite a big ask given the current crises in the world. Most importantly it requires wide recognition of the essentially political nature of the problem; one that cannot be fixed by just building the institutions of state, hard though that is in Somalia.

The big challenge is not just to agree to a new constitution, but to build a political structure that is based, as in Somaliland, on a genuine compact between the key constituencies among Somalia's people, not just on a fix between a few bosses who have grown wealthy on aid.

This is likely to be a long drawn-out process, with some potentially uncomfortable compromises, but is nonetheless essential. In doing this, it is important not to bring Al-Shabaab into the process, but rather to use it to undermine Al-Shabaab by bringing key elements within its own support base into the political arena. Above all, you need some vision of a common Somali future, of a necessarily consensual nature, that does not at the same time alienate the neighbours – Ethiopia, Kenya and indeed Somaliland – whose long-term support will continue to be needed.

Past experience shows that peace-building endeavours of this nature are only successful with both strong local ownership of the problem and leadership in finding its solution. External engagement can at best be only supplementary to the efforts of Somalis themselves.

## Endnotes

- 1 This figure, and others presented here, were obtained during field-work and interviews conducted in Mogadishu and Nairobi in January 2015.
- 2 The Federal Republic of Somalia, 'The Somali Compact', September 2013, [www.pbsdialogue.org](http://www.pbsdialogue.org).
- 3 In June 1960, the protectorate of Somaliland achieved independence from Britain. Five days later, it elected to join Italian Somalia in a union. (French Somalia – now Djibouti – only acquired independence from Paris in 1977.) The marriage did not work, with Somalia descending not into military dictatorship, civil war and chaos, but with Mogadishu repressing its northern Somaliland constituent in good measure throughout. For background to Somaliland, see Ioan Lewis, *Understanding Somalia and Somaliland: Culture, History, Society* (London: Hurst, 2011), also Mark Bradbury, *Becoming Somaliland* (London: Progressio, 2008).
- 4 See David Lamb, *The Africans: Encounters from the Sudan to the Cape* (London: Methuen, 1983), p. 197.
- 5 *Goobjoog News*, 'Arab league delegates meet top Somali leaders in Mogadishu', 4 December 2014, <<http://goobjoog.com/english/?p=6902>>.
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