



Peace and Security Summit

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WORKING GROUP: Somalia and the Global Jihad

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The leitmotif that ran through the conclusions of the workshop on *Somalia and the Global Jihad* was that, in order to reduce the prospect of Somali radicalisation and the effects of Jihadist movements, it would be essential to undertake different forms of engagement with the wider Somali community. To date, the emphasis placed by the international community to date upon the viability of the internationally-recognised government in Mogadishu has been misguided. Meanwhile, the international community should be careful not to exaggerate the interest and capacity of movements such as Al-Shabaab to operate beyond Somali borders in a sustained or consistent way.

The Transitional Federal Government (like many similar entities which have existed since 1992) controls only part of the country and lacks widespread support. It is rife with corruption, operates with little coherence and all too often mirrors the methods of more overt “warlords”. It is, in effect, another component in the balance of power struggles for resources and influence. The importance of movements such as Al-Shabaab was, like the TFG, also seen as exaggerated. A very large proportion of Al-Shabaab’s supporters were in the movement because it offered job opportunities. And while there were others who believed in the movement *per se*, there appeared to be very few who wanted to see Al-Shabaab’s influence spread beyond the Somali borders. Even acknowledging the fact that, in some instances Al-Shabaab offered training facilities for outside “terrorists”, the main interest of the movement’s leadership was focused upon controlling the country.

This discussion resulted in a set of recommendations which might be divided into “onshore” and “offshore” solutions. The former principally concerned those activities that happened within the broad boundaries of Somalia, including Somaliland. The latter were intended to focus on interaction between Somalia itself and the Somalia diaspora who had established themselves in other countries around the world, particularly in the U.S., Europe and the Gulf.

When it came to “onshore”, the group identified those that were “reactive” and those that were deemed to be “pro-active.” Reactive initiatives were intended to acknowledge Somali “success stories” and have such success stories be seen to be

acknowledged by Somalis and the wider international community. The relative stability of the Somali currency, the growing number of small businesses (some with international, as well as national networks), the country's mobile phone network and the democratisation process in Somaliland should all be included in a more positive picture about Somalia – something that is too often ignored.¹

It was felt that such positive Somali stories should not only be acknowledged and disseminated, but also that – wherever possible – efforts needed to be made to build upon them. This meant that successes should be supported by introducing them geographically (e.g. adopting them in geographically proximate areas, or promoting employment through direct support for small businesses).

Onshore engagement also was seen to have a “pro-active” element, focused mainly upon expanding the groups that should be engaging in the “Somali dialogue”. Those who are presently involved in the shaping of the discourse about Somalia's future represent a relatively small band of those who should be part of it. For example, there are a number states that should be involved but are not, particularly those from the Arab world. Opposition groups within Somalia are also often ignored. Finally, there should be a more pronounced role for the diaspora, as part of a systematic discussion about the future of their country of origin.

While the platform or platforms for such expanded discussions will require more creative thought, it was evident to workshop participants that this Somali discourse had to be seen – amongst other things – to take regional interests into account, chiefly those of neighbouring states. Regional relevance and regional engagement and were identified as two important considerations which should be incorporated into discussions.

Linking onshore and offshore initiatives, the working point identified a third stream, which they described as “translocalism”. Translocalism concerned ways to build effective communications between those Somalis in the diaspora and those still living in their country of origin, where concerns over the future of Somalia are more immediate and pressing. It was agreed that it was necessary to pay much greater attention to the interaction between the two, recognising the potential influences that each might exert on the other. It was necessary to give greater attention to a translocal communications strategy with defined outputs and objectives.

Resilience and the success of translocal communications would ultimately depend upon the *offshore* dimensions of the Somali challenge. In terms of the diaspora, it was agreed that greater efforts were needed to engage more effectively with those who might be seen as “under-represented” in host countries. There were myriad initiatives that have and continue to address those who are vulnerable to alienation, disaffection and radicalisation but these were often ineffectual or flawed. On the one hand, such initiatives were often piecemeal and insensitive to the needs of diaspora communities at large; on the other hand, they were often done in ways that emphasised that such communities were of “concern” and were potentially “problematic”. Thus, the need to develop broader and more sensitive platforms to engage with the Somali diaspora and to develop language that is not so alienating was stressed.

¹ The issue about the relative stability of the Somali currency generated inconclusive discussion about the reasons for that perception and the relative importance of the Somali shilling when compared to the US dollar in Somalia.

In the final analysis the three broad categories of recommendations arising out of the workshop were these:

- limit previous inclinations to overtly guide and steer the Somali process of restoring governance and become more effective listeners, as well as promoters of Somali successes;
- in so doing, expand the network – both national and international – with whom one engages;
- recognise the potentially positive impacts that the Somali diaspora could have upon Somalia itself but in doing so also accept the need to change the discourse between host countries and the diaspora.