

Remarks by Dr. David Shinn to the Somali Conference in Columbus, Ohio

By David H. Shinn

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--Let me be clear on one point. I don't speak for the US government. Deputy Assistant Secretary of State Jim Swan ably performed that responsibility.

--Speaking as a private individual, I look at Somalia from the standpoint of what I believe is best for US policy based on my understanding of US interests.

--In my view, US interests are:

- the establishment of a stable and peaceful Somalia with a widely accepted national government that re-establishes the rule of law and a functioning economy;

- the minimizing or elimination of humanitarian disasters; and

- successfully countering extremism and terrorism that emanates from Somalia.

--I do not necessarily view challenges in Somalia the same way Somalis, Ethiopians, or others in the region see the problem and the solutions.

--My analysis is based on the following assumptions:

- The Transitional Federal Government (TFG) is the only Somali government recognized by the UN, African Union, Arab League, and international community generally.

- It is important to help the TFG succeed **so long as** it is willing to become more inclusive than it has become so far.

- The TFG is weak, not as representative as it should be, and is highly dependent on the presence of Ethiopian troops for its survival.

- No Somali government will succeed unless it represents all significant parts of Somali society.

- From my independent American perspective, the only elements that should be excluded from a Somali national government are those:

- that urge war or support terrorist acts against neighboring countries;

- have indisputable links with international terrorism or criminal organizations; and

- hold views so extreme that they will prevent a national government from functioning successfully and peacefully.

--Other assumptions I make are:

- Islam is an essential component of Somali society and political Islam has probably become a permanent feature of Somali politics.

--The US and the West must learn to live with this situation and even be supportive **so long as** Somali Islam seeks to deal with problems peacefully.

--Somali Islam has a long tradition of moderation and in spite of some recent radicalization among a small minority, usually supported by outside interests, this continues to be the case.

--The oft-postponed national reconciliation conference, now scheduled for July 14, will probably not end Somalia's internal conflict. It is occurring too late, is too unwieldy, and seems destined to exclude key individuals and Somali groups.

--An 8,000 member African peacekeeping force is incapable of maintaining order in Somalia **unless there is first** a political agreement accepted by all the major Somali clans and political interest groups.

--Although the Ethiopian military force is the only one in Mogadishu today capable of maintaining a semblance of order, it is important that it leave soon, which Ethiopia probably would like to do. The longer Ethiopian forces stay in Somalia, the greater will be the animosity between Somalis and Ethiopians.

--This poses a short-term dilemma. If Ethiopian troops leave immediately, there is no group capable of maintaining order in Mogadishu. A compromise solution may be the establishment of a timetable for the complete withdrawal of Ethiopian forces from Somalia.

--But as long as foreign forces from any country remain in Somalia contrary to the wishes of many Somalis, it will be virtually impossible to achieve long-term peace.

--This assumption even applies to an African peacekeeping force **unless** there is a Somali political settlement and a request from a widely supported Somali government that an African peacekeeping force should remain until Somalia is able to reconstitute a national security force.

--There have been two major missed opportunities over the past year.

--First, following an initial, useful meeting in Khartoum last summer, the Islamic Courts failed to engage the Transitional Federal Government in serious power sharing talks. The Islamic Courts concluded that they were in a strong position and saw no reason to allow the TFG to play any role in governing the country. The Arab League and its individual members were in a position to use their leverage with the Islamic Courts to encourage serious power sharing. They failed to do so.

--Second, the TFG, with Ethiopian military support, pushed the Islamic Courts militia last December and January to the Kenya-Somalia border. Following a few positive efforts to reach out to groups or individuals that were not part of the TFG, it failed to engage moderates in the Islamic Courts and certain sub-sub-clan leaders in Mogadishu in serious power sharing talks. The TFG, supported by Ethiopia, concluded that it was in a strong position and decided there was no need to reach out to anyone other than those who were sympathetic to its agenda. In this case, the African Union and Western countries including the US, were in a position to use their leverage with the TFG to encourage serious power sharing. They failed to do so.

--So what is the solution now?

--The TFG needs to reach out immediately to business persons, civil society and women's groups. It particularly must engage disaffected moderates, including some that it now considers its enemy, in an effort to bring them and their supporters and followers into the political process and even be made part of the government itself.

--This includes individuals like Sherif Hassen Sheikh Aden, former speaker of the Somali Transitional Federal Parliament, Sheikh Sherif Sheikh Ahmed, former Chairman of the Executive Council of the Union of Islamic Courts, and Hussein Aideed, who apparently still holds the title of TFG Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Public Works and Housing, although he has broken with the TFG leadership and has minimal popular support.

--It is much too late to expect the crisis can be ended through elusive political dialogue (the favorite term of the international community) and a 3,000 member national reconciliation conference, which keeps being postponed. Real power-sharing is required immediately.

--The political positions of the opponents to the TFG seem to be hardening with each passing day.

--It may already be too late to convince both the TFG and moderate leaders who oppose the TFG to come together to create a national structure that will be acceptable to most Somalis.

--Nevertheless, it is essential to try. I do not see a better alternative.

--If the TFG offers to engage in serious power sharing talks with these persons and groups and they refuse to participate, then it is up to organizations like the Arab League and its members, in addition to Eritrea which has been encouraging opposition to the TFG, to insist that they meet with the TFG.

--Somali political and clan leaders who support the TFG and those who oppose it must put aside their personal ambitions for power and show greater willingness to make political compromises in the name of national unity. The history in recent decades of Somali leaders suggests that they are preoccupied with personal gain and a desire to hold power while paying scant attention to what is right for Somalia.

--Each day that fails to achieve progress on the political front, increases the prospects for more violence and another humanitarian disaster resulting in more internally displaced Somalis and more refugees.

--Already, more than 200,000 Somalis have fled Mogadishu and many of them are not receiving any international assistance.

--The international community should continue to do what it can to provide humanitarian assistance irrespective of Somali political developments. The US has been especially responsive to these needs since the early 1990s.

--International support for the TFG **should be contingent** on immediate and tangible steps by the TFG to broaden the base of its government.

--The conference organizers asked me to comment in more detail on the role of the African Union in Somalia.

--While I commend the African Union for trying to help bring stability to Somalia, I am not convinced it is pursuing a plan that will achieve this goal.

--There are currently only about 1,400 Ugandan peacekeeping troops in Somalia out of a projected African Union force of 8,000.

--The Ugandans do not have a clear mandate and, I suspect, are very frustrated with their situation.

--They seem to have worked out an arrangement with Somali clan leaders in Mogadishu that they will not try to disarm or engage Somalis if Somalis do not attack them.

--Under the circumstances, this is a reasonable solution to their dilemma. But it also raises the question why they are there.

--Although other African countries have committed troops to the operation, they are in no hurry to send them.

--In view of considerable Somali opposition to the force and the lack of a clear mandate, this is no surprise.

--As I noted earlier, I do not believe a force of 8,000 troops is capable of maintaining order **in the hostile political environment** in Mogadishu.

--For that matter, I don't believe 18,000 or even 28,000 is an adequate number.

--No number is adequate **unless** all significant Somali factions agree that a force from the African Union is in their interest. Only then does a peacekeeping force make sense.

--It is important to revisit the lessons of the American-led United Task Force (UNITAF) that began in late 1992 and ended in May 1993 and the UN Operation in Somalia (UNOSOM II) that went from May 1993 until the spring of 1995.

--Until it is clear what the African Union peacekeeping mission is expected to accomplish and there is widespread acceptance by Somalis for its presence, the effort seems doomed to failure.

--It will not work if it is perceived primarily as a force to keep in power a TFG **that fails to broaden its base** contrary to the wishes of significant numbers of Somalis.

--At the same time, the African Union force must be strong enough to counter forcefully small groups of extremist spoilers who want to take Somalia in a direction that the vast majority of Somalis do not want to go.

--These groups include the Shabaab militia that operated during the period of the Islamic Courts and new groups that are springing up on Somali websites such as the Popular Resistance Movement in the Land of the Two Migrations. There is no place in Somalia for such extremist organizations.

--The African Union needs to rethink this operation and, together with the European Union, Arab League and the US, insist that the TFG broaden its government and base of political support so that the peacekeeping operation has a clear mandate, the support of most Somalis, and, hence, a chance of success.

--Finally, I want to make a brief comment on Somaliland, which unilaterally declared its independence in 1991. This is not the time to bring Somaliland into the discussion. It is necessary first for Somalis in former Italian Somalia to put their house in order. When this is accomplished, then Somalis in former Italian Somalia and former British Somaliland can sit down and discuss their relationship. For the time being, the issues are sufficiently complicated that there is nothing to be gained by adding Somaliland to the table.

--I am sure everyone in this room disagrees with some of what I have said and some of you may disagree with all of it, but I hope it leads to a constructive discussion of the issues.

--Nevertheless, thank you for inviting me to Columbus.

Mr. David Shinn is a former Ambassador of United State to Ethiopia.