



## **WHAT'S NEXT IN SOMALIA?**

**by Garrett Jones**

Somalia's Transitional Federal Government, with extensive help from the Ethiopian Army, has run the Council of Islamic Courts out of the country. The warlords have turned in their heavy weapons, and their personal militias have joined the national army. The African Union is poised to send in troops to replace the Ethiopians. Peace is about to break out all over, right? I would not bet the ranch.

One can think of Somalia as a heavily armed version of "king of the hill." Right now, the Ethiopian Army has kicked everyone else off the hill. The clans and warlord militias are making polite noises in hopes the Ethiopians do not single them out for the artillery and airpower treatment they inflicted on the Islamic Courts. Nobody thinks the game is over.

The Ethiopians have made their point and run off any potential Islamic fundamentalist threat to their southern provinces for the moment. They also succeeded in embarrassing the Eritreans, who spent a lot of money and prestige in backing the Islamic Courts with the hopes of pinning down at least part of the Ethiopian Army on its southern border. The venture did not go very well, except to reveal the bizarre thinking that characterizes Eritrea's leadership these days.

After living with the Somalis as neighbors for centuries, the Ethiopians understand there is little to be gained by hanging around. Their presence will act as a rallying point for Somalis, and they can look forward to increasing attacks as the days go by. They have already announced their intention to leave within the next week or so, and they will begin a pullout to positions they can support in the Ethiopian-Somalia border areas.

With the departure of the Ethiopian Army, the TFG exists at the sufferance of the various clans. It was originally created by the United Nations in an effort to give the world a single representative for the Somalia people with which to deal. While perhaps a laudable ideal, no one in Somalia believes it is worth backing up with guns or money. If the Ethiopians had not intervened when they did, the TFG would now be sitting in hotels in Nairobi pondering their future. They may not want to lose the number for the reservation desk; this is not over yet.

The TFG understands its weakness and is pinning its future on some sort of AU force to replace the Ethiopian Army. In theory, the AU force would keep the warlords at bay, let the transitional government take root, and eventually be replaced by UN force, which would shepherd Somalia back into the fellowship of nations.

There are a couple of problems with this plan. The TFG has to survive the interregnum of the Ethiopians leaving and the AU force arriving. Without the hammer of the Ethiopian Army hanging over the clans, it is unlikely any of them will be able to resist the allure of strengthening their positions in Mogadishu and the countryside. Once the intraclan fighting begins, the TFG will be forced to retreat from Mogadishu and return to the north where the Ethiopians can extend their protection. Once the TFG is forced from Mogadishu, it loses all credibility as a potential player on the political scene. The Somalis are then back to square one and the warlords are in charge.

If by some miracle the TFG is able to survive the pullout of the Ethiopians, and if the AU manages to get a force organized and ready to deploy to Somalia (so far, only Uganda has stepped forward), the TFG will then need to continue to control the airport and the seaport in Mogadishu. (No AU force is going to be capable of making a forced entry into Somalia.) For the clans and the warlords, the airport and the seaport are the most lucrative areas in Mogadishu to control and extort their percentage through roadblocks, and Mogadishu is the most lucrative location in Somalia. All of these goals are fairly high hurdles based on Somali history to date.

Assuming the TFG stays put and the AU force is allowed to deploy, the question of governance comes up. If all the clans are not willing to submit to the TFG's decisions and police their own clan members, the AU force will be called on to back up the government. In Somalia, this will mean taking and inflicting casualties. Somalia is a tough neighborhood, and generally, sooner rather than later, disagreements are settled by force of arms. The AU force will then become a "foreign interloper" in an intra-Somali squabble and such forces have not been treated well by the Somalis in the past.

Once this litany of accomplishments takes place, then Somalia will be ready for a UN force to come in and act as peacekeepers until a permanent form of government can be established. (This assumes that UN members can be persuaded that they will be better treated than the last UN effort to aid the Somalis.) With the withdrawal of the UN force, Somalia would then resume its place on the international scene.

None of the above scenarios are likely. They would require the Somali people to display a unity and goodwill that have never been demonstrated in living memory. Until and unless the Somalis are willing to work together and pull themselves out the "Mad Max" nightmare they have created for themselves, the outside world can do little to mitigate the internal carnage. The international community can and should insist the Somalis not spread their anarchy to their neighbors. This is why almost no furor was raised in Africa over Ethiopia's invasion of Somalia. Somalia's African neighbors have watched in disbelief as the Somalis have squandered chance after chance to set themselves on the path to peace and normalcy. There is very little sympathy among Africa watchers for Somalia's plight. While there are undoubtedly innocent children suffering in Somalia, at some point the parents of those innocents must take responsibility for the future they are forming for their children.

Finally, it is premature to count the Council of Islamic Courts out just yet. Their fundamentalist financial sponsors and their Eritrean military trainers are unlikely to write off their investments. If or when chaos returns, so will they. The fundamentalists want their version of Islam to rule the world, the Eritreans just want to bleed the Ethiopians.

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