



**CENTRE FOR POLICY STUDIES**

**PIA Vol. 19, No 8**

**ETHIOPIA, SOMALILAND AND SOMALIA  
AMID AN ISLAMIST RISING STORM ON THE HORN:**

**The African Union and the case for urgent preventive diplomacy**

**Iqbal Jhazbhay  
University of South Africa**

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Publication of this paper was funded by the Swedish International Development Agency  
(SIDA)

ISBN: 1-919700-60-X

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## ABSTRACT

This paper attempts to factor the undetermined fate of the unrecognised Somaliland Republic into the increasingly complicated calculus of conflict and accommodation in the Horn of Africa. The prolonged anarchic statelessness of the Somali peninsula, save for Somaliland in the northwest area, has emerged as a vortex of wider regional instability in the northeast core of the Horn of Africa. The reflexive sequence of actions and reactions surrounding the Islamist ascendancy in Somalia via the Union of Islamic Courts (UIC) has drawn both Ethiopia and Eritrea into the Somali power-struggle, as a proxy for their continuing hostilities. This expansion of Somali's turmoil to encompass Ethio-Eritrean rivalry, confronts the African Union (AU) and its Peace and Security Council (PSC) with yet another crisis of credibility in terms of the effectiveness of its conflict resolution diplomacy via the Inter-Governmental Authority for Development (IGAD) as its sub-regional pillar, along with other actors: the United Nations (UN), the Arab League (AL) and various Western state actors led by the U.S.

In southern Somalia itself, the Transitional Federal Government (TFG), the latest in a series of failed attempts by the international community - principally the AU, IGAD, the UN and a clutch of Western powers, including the U.S. - to reconstitute a Mogadishu regime, has been destabilized and thrown on the defensive by the UICs. From a Somali perspective, a major dilemma presented by the UIC Islamists is that while they had initially been widely considered a stabilizing force that would finally help fill the governance vacuum in southern Somalia, irrespective of fears of a Taliban-like Islamist ascendancy, there is an irredentist tendency that has re-surfaced along with the Somali Islamist ascendancy. Apart from the fact that Addis' geopolitical security calculus cannot countenance the resurfacing of Somali irredentism, this very tendency has attracted the counter-intervention of Eritrea in Somalia's affairs as the main regional sponsor of the UIC insurgency and expansion of its authority at the expense of the Ethiopian-backed TFG.

The legal case for an independent Somaliland, on the other hand, is compelling. This is acknowledged by the African Union, building on an analysis carried out several years ago by South Africa. Somaliland's claim to independence is not so much a secession from the rest of Somalia as restoration of its former status as an independent former British protectorate colony following the disintegration of the Somali state; Somalia having been the result of an amalgamation of former northwestern British and southern former Italian Somaliland. Given the current regional dynamics, Somaliland's fate could be interpreted as emerging as the key pivotal factor in re-balancing the contestation between secular nationalism and religio-nationalist forces in the Somali region as well as re-balancing the power equation between competing African and Arab agendas in this region.

Further, it is not in the interest of the AU for the outcome of such an accommodation to lead to a military confrontation between an Islamist-led regime in Mogadishu and a Somaliland Republic whose inhabitants show no signs of wishing to go back to southern rule. Hence, recognizing Somaliland, either outright or provisionally, is perhaps the only conflict prevention option available, striking a new regional balance of power between northern and

southern Somalia pursuant to an eventual accommodation between the two regions. However, any AU recognition of Somaliland - either formal or provisional - should be part of a wider AU/PSC strategy of regional conflict resolution aimed at promoting an all-northeast African non-aggression pact and/or peace treaty as a means of defusing and putting an end to the region's inter and intra-state conflicts. Encouragement along this route will have to come from an 'out-of-area' African state.

1. This essentially places the ball in Rwanda or South Africa's court, where diplomacy toward recognising Somaliland could be pursued within a consultative framework that achieves acquiescence from Ethiopia and Kenya, if not their active support. Not pursuing this option, or its failure might mean:
2. a regaining of Egyptian/Arab League momentum in tilting northeast Africa toward an Arab world hegemony at the expense of the AU and pan-African interests; Somaliland's continued isolation to the point of potentially being forced into a violent defence of its sovereignty in another round of renewed regional conflict that will do nothing to enhance stability along the Somali Coast and within the Horn of Africa.

Pretoria could begin approaching a strategy for taking its exploratory dialoguing relationship with Somaliland further by encouraging the AU to follow-up on the logic of its 2005 fact-finding mission recommendation to "find a special method of dealing with this outstanding case". Implementation of the AU fact-finding mission recommendations could then be approached within the context of a larger regional peace plan for Somalia and the Horn of Africa. First and foremost, the overriding objective should be conflict prevention: to forestall a new round of conflict in the Somali-Ethio-Eritrean geopolitical sphere of northeast Africa. Somaliland, in the meantime, would be better positioned to secure the kind of security and economic assistance that will strengthen its position in the future cut-and-thrust of bargaining over the future of the Somali region. The provisional recognition of Somaliland should then be proposed as part of a larger AU initiative aimed at negotiating a Regional Non-Aggression Pact and Peace Treaty for Northeast Africa. This could be accompanied by configuring the following illustrative peace-building formula:

- An *AU-sponsored Ad Hoc Commission on the Somali Region* to augment the weakened role of IGAD as a 'contact group' of African state actors *from outside the region* to exercise mediating oversight on political and military developments in the Somali region among the region's different contending actors; and
- Establishment of a *Conference on Security, Stability, Development and Cooperation for Northeast Africa (CSSDCNA)* as an institutionalized, multilateral negotiating mechanism within which to locate a Somali regional governance forum and to oversee the implementation of a regional mutual non-aggression pact and peace treaty as well as to vet options for regional cooperation within the immediate northeast African sub-region or in some form of association with a greater East African Community-cum-federation and a host of other ongoing governance issues.

## MAPS



Map of the African Horn with Sheikh Sharif Ahmed, leader of the Executive Council of the Union of Islamic Courts (UIC)

Source: Economist, 13 October 2006



Map of Somali borderlands with Ogaden and Oromia

Source: Economist, 10 August 2006



Map of East African coast main ports

Source: Economist, 13 September 2006



Map of areas controlled by the Islamic Courts

Source: Economist, 12 October 2006

## CARTOONS

### Celebrated Somali Cartoonist, Amir Amin's, Depiction of Somaliland and Somalia



First 2005 Democratic Somaliland Presidential Elections

Source: <http://www.aminarts.com> (May 2005)



Arab League closes the door on Somalia, with an IGAD hand lingering and Ethiopian Prime Minister Meles emerges

Source: <http://www.aminarts.com> (7 September 2006)



Somaliland's government take steps to stifle the right to demonstrate

Source: <http://www.aminarts.com> (1 October 2006)



Islamist leaders playing cat and mouse with Ethiopia's Prime Minister, Meles Zenawi

Source: <http://www.aminarts.com> (26 November 2006)

**ACRONYMS**

AL	Arab League
ARPCT	Alliance for the Restoration of Peace and Counter-Terrorism
AU	African Union
AU/PSC	African Union Peace and Security Council
CIA	Central Intelligence Agency
CPA	Comprehensive Peace Agreement (Sudan)
IGAD	Inter-Governmental Authority for Development
NEPAD	New Programme for Africa's Development
OLF	Oromo Liberation Front (Ethiopia)
ONLF	Ogaden National Liberation Front (Ethiopia)
PSC	Peace and Security Council (AU)
RRA	Rahanweyn Resistance Army (Somalia)
SNM	Somali National Movement (Somaliland)
SRRC	Somali Reconciliation and Restoration Council (Somalia)
TFG	Transitional Federal Government (Somalia)
TNG	Transitional National Government (Somalia)
UIC	Union of Islamic Courts (Southern and Central Somalia)

*Ideally, Somalia should have been saved by fellow Africans - a kind of Pax Africana, Africans policing themselves or policing each other. It has been attempted in Liberia by a West African force drawn from several nations...A second preference would have been a rescue of Somalia by members of the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC), a kind of Pax Islamica...A third preference for the Somali rescue would have been under the League of Arab states - a kind of Pax Arabica or Pax Arabiana...A fourth preference would have been a truly multinational task force to both pacify and feed Somalia, a kind of Pax Humanica which would combine troops from carefully and sensitively selected countries. What we have instead is a Pax Americana - a primarily American force. It is essentially a Pax Americana with a UN fig leaf. Ali Mazrui<sup>2</sup>*

*Harmony in the Horn of Africa is in our hands. If we want to destabilize peace in Ethiopia, we can do it. It should cease its aggression and interference. If not, we will double whatever they do to us. Abdullahi Maalim Ali, head of internal security for the Islamic Courts<sup>3</sup>*

*...the United States continues to engage with and support positive developments in the self-declared Republic of Somaliland, which held parliamentary elections in September 2005. Eunice Reddick, Director of East African Affairs, US State Department<sup>4</sup>*

*My colleagues always hide something, but I want to make it clear that we will attack Baidoa and many other areas because our aim is to implement Islamic rule throughout Somalia,' he told the station. 'We will go to (the north eastern region of) Puntland and (the northern breakaway region of) Somaliland. Hassan Turki, senior Islamic courts official<sup>5</sup>*

*The African Union sent a high level team to Somaliland to assess the situation. Their report indicated that Somaliland should be treated differently to other situations of cessation. This report is now being discussed by other countries to determine how to proceed on the matter. It is important to note however that the recognition of Somaliland is one part of a bigger situation with regard to Somalia. South African Deputy Foreign Minister Aziz Pahad<sup>6</sup>*

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2 Hussein M Adam and Richard Ford (eds), *Mending rips in the sky: options for Somali communities in the 21st century*, Lawrenceville: Red Sea Press (1997). I would like to thank Professor Ali Mazrui for his valuable insights, Garth Le Pere, Siphamandla Zondi, Timothy Othieno and key practitioners Kgalema Mothlante, Smuts Ngonyama who challenged my thinking, as well as numerous diplomats, notably Tunji Olagunju, Welile Nhlapo, Aziz Pahad and Patrick Mazimhaka.

3 Guled Mohamed, 'Exclusive - Islamists planning to rid Somalia of illegal guns', *Reuters* (15 October 2006).

4 Eunice Reddick, 'Is Somalia dangerous? US policy in the Horn of Africa', remarks to American Enterprise Institute, Washington DC (4 October 2006).

5 'Rivals in Somalia within striking distance of each other', *International Herald Tribune* (25 October 2006). [http://www.ihf.com/articles/ap/2006/10/25/africa/AF\\_GEN\\_Somalia.php](http://www.ihf.com/articles/ap/2006/10/25/africa/AF_GEN_Somalia.php)

Somali interview to HornAfrik Radio <http://www.hornafrik.com/Audio/turki.ram>

6 'Notes following briefing by Deputy Minister Aziz Pahad', Media Centre Amphitheatre, Union Buildings, Tshwane, South Africa, Tuesday 4 July 2006. <http://www.dfa.gov.za/docs/speeches/2006/paha0704.htm>

## 1. INTRODUCTION: MAPPING THE CURRENT TENSIONS IN SOMALIA AND THE AFRICAN HORN

This paper is an attempt to factor the undetermined fate of the unrecognized Somaliland Republic into the increasingly complicated calculus of conflict and accommodation in the Horn of Africa; a regional dynamic centring on the far-from-resolved reconstitution of the state in southern Somalia; a process now compounded by the added dimension of a concerted Islamist bid to fill the governance vacuum in this Somali region. Thus has the prolonged anarchic statelessness of the Somali peninsula, save for the north-western zone of stability and budding democracy represented by Somaliland, finally emerged as a vortex of wider regional instability in the north-east core of the Horn of Africa.<sup>7</sup>

The reflexive sequence of actions and reactions surrounding the Islamist ascendancy in Somalia has drawn both Ethiopia and Eritrea into the Somali power-struggle as a proxy for their continuing hostilities. This expansion of Somali's turmoil to encompass Ethio-Eritrean rivalry confronts the African Union (AU) and its Peace and Security Council (PSC) with yet another crisis of credibility in terms of the effectiveness of its conflict resolution diplomacy via the Inter-Governmental Authority for Development (IGAD) as its sub-regional pillar, along with other actors: the United Nations (UN), the Arab League (AL) and various Western state actors led by the US. As the Somali crisis of state reconstitution mutates into a wider and more complicated regional conundrum - a veritable subsystem of interlocking inter and intra-state conflicts and rivalries - the regional and international stakes have magnified accordingly.

Somalia's intractable anarchy, in addition to challenging the peace and security credibility of the AU/PSC - alongside the Darfur crisis - and the role of IGAD, challenges the leadership of major regional state actors (principally Ethiopia and, to a lesser extent, Kenya) and such 'out of area' PSC members as South Africa and Nigeria, preoccupied as they are with Sudan's resistance to the pacification of Darfur and other pressing conflict resolution priorities at various stages of accommodation: Côte d'Ivoire, Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Burundi, Ethio-Eritrea and the Sudan's Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA). This complicated African picture merges into becoming yet another yardstick by which to judge the effectiveness of the UN in its ability and capacity to navigate these regional

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<sup>7</sup> This paper takes as its entry points the following *de facto* details:

- >The 'Puntland State of Somalia' in the north-east is a semi-autonomous territory, based on the Charter of the State of Puntland adopted at the August 1998 Garowe Constitutional Conference. Puntland aspires to be part of the future dispensation of reconstituting Somalia and currently favours a federal government in Somalia. It has not held any democratic election since its inception. The current president of the internationally recognized yet enfeebled 'transitional federal government' (TFG) of Somalia, Abdillahi Yusuf, was the last 'president' of Puntland.
- > 'The Republic of Somaliland' on 18 May 1991 at the Grand Conference in Burco declared independence from Somalia. Its 2001 constitution espouses the position of living peacefully with its neighbours as equal partners. It has successfully held democratic local, presidential and parliamentary elections. For the past 11 years, it has resisted any overtures or pressures to join Somalia.
- > The Union of Islamic Courts (UIC) intends to unite all Somali inhabited areas such as Puntland and Somaliland, and is fighting for the rights of Somalis in the Ogaden region of Ethiopia.
- >The African Union Commission deputy chair, Mr Patrick Mazimhaka, and UN special envoy Ambassador Louis Fall have visited and engaged the TFG, Somaliland and the UIC.

contradictions as a means of ultimately stabilizing Somalia and the Horn region - including resolving the Ethio-Eritrean stand-off or at least preventing another round of war. While the credibility of both the AU and the UN is at stake in Somaliland and Somalia, to a lesser extent, the role of the Arab League comes under scrutiny as well, in terms of its seriousness as a mediating actor as opposed to playing a spoiler role in the tug-of-war between Ethiopia and its chief sponsor, Egypt, and in terms of its relevance in addressing the introduction of political Islam as a major factor in the Somali stabilization equation; a factor which, in turn, brings under scrutiny the credibility of US African and anti-terrorism policy as well. To what extent does the Islamist ascendancy in southern Somalia represent yet another challenge or set-back to the US 'war on terror' alongside the set-backs experienced in the Middle East?

How do these stakes interact with the Somali 'situation on the ground' - and who are the contenders in what has been a constantly mutating balance of forces between Mogadishu and Baidoa? On the defensive is the transitional federal government (TFG) headed up by former Puntland leader President Abdillahi Yusuf in the latest in a successive series of failed attempts by the international community - principally the AU, IGAD, the UN and a clutch of Western powers, including the US - to reconstitute a Somali regime in Mogadishu. Yusuf is widely viewed as an Ethiopian-backed former warlord heading up a 'regime' of warlords, for the most part, formerly based in Kenya, Nairobi having been IGAD's host and mentor of the talks establishing the TFG, while also hosting the Somali negotiating teams until earlier this year when the TFG was compelled by Kenya to relocate back to Somalia - the relocation and the planned deployment of a UN-backed AU peacekeeping force having politically bogged down into yet another prolonged crisis of ungovernability pending the recent emergence of the Union of Islamic Courts (UIC) in Southern and Central Somalia (*Golaha Maxakiimta Islaamiga Soomaaliyeed*. Arabic name: *Majlis as-Shura lil Mahakim al-Islamiyya*).

Compelled to relocate to Somalia, but unable to overcome diverse resistance from Islamists and local warlords for the setting up of the TFG in Mogadishu, Baidoa became the 'Capital' of the new transitional regime initiative. As the UIC finally achieved the long-awaited accomplishment of rolling back warlord dominance in and around Mogadishu in what became a mini-civil war between the UIC and allegedly US-backed warlords pretending to an anti-terrorist agenda, the sudden Islamist ascendancy has threatened the eclipse of a haemorrhaging TFG. In the process, the TFG has become increasingly beholden to Ethiopia for its survival; a development that has escalated tensions among Somalis, given that Ethiopia, as Somalia's historic neighbouring rival, is the very last outside actor they would want to become involved in their domestic political affairs on top of a general Somali hostility to external involvement in Somali affairs.

But this worst case scenario, from a Somali perspective, reveals a major dilemma presented by the UIC Islamists: while they had initially been widely considered a stabilizing force that would finally help fill the governance vacuum in southern Somalia, irrespective of fears of a Taliban-like Islamist ascendancy in the Horn of Africa, there appears to have been an irredentist tendency that has re-surfaced along with the Somali Islamist ascendancy. Although Addis's geopolitical security calculus cannot countenance the resurfacing of Somali irredentism, this very tendency has attracted the counter-intervention of Eritrea in Somalia's

affairs as the main regional sponsor of the UIC insurgency and expansion of its authority at the expense of the Addis-backed TFG. This makes for an unprecedented situation in the history of conflict in the Horn of Africa; one where Ethiopia-Eritrean rivalry has finally come to interact with the internal political dynamics of Somali power-struggles against a backdrop of diverse agendas of a range of external actors, including, above all, the geopolitics of America's preoccupation with its 'war on terror' in that segment of the East African Indian Ocean littoral contiguous to the main theatre of its growing quagmires in the Middle East and western Asia.

This, then, is the setting for exploring the as-yet-unaccounted-for dimension in all of this, the Somaliland factor - the implications these dynamics hold for Somaliland, in its quest for diplomatic recognition as a stable and functioning country in an otherwise destabilized region of Africa and the potential role that might emerge for Hargeisa in overcoming the region's tensions and conflicts. What, indeed, could be the pitfalls awaiting a Somaliland foray into the current maelstrom of regional politics amid the power-struggle between an Ethiopian-aligned TFG - with Addis also favourably disposed toward Somaliland - and an Eritrean-backed UIC with the tacit, though perhaps ambivalent, support of an Arab League that must also navigate America's 'war on terror' agenda? Is the timing of the current regional crisis propitious for Somaliland recognition and what are the implications that may accompany the manner in which this recognition might occur?

How should Somaliland's leaders navigate recognition between potential African supporters and Western backers within the context of the power-struggle between the TFG and Somali Islamists? Is there a possible 'middle ground' option? Apart from the Somaliland perspective, there are the interests of the AU and key African actors to factor into the recognition conundrum as well. What is to be gained or lost by breaking the log-jam on recognizing Somaliland amid the continuing instability of the wider Somali region, and to what extent could recognition contribute to a stabilization scenario? These are some of the salient issues to be explored in the remainder of this paper, with the Somaliland recognition question serving as the starting point for reflecting on the failed alternatives up to this point: the failure of international efforts to reconstitute the state in southern Somalia; the Somali Islamist ascendancy and response to state collapse and the 'double-edged sword' the UIC Islamist represent in terms of offering stability against US-backed warlordism on the one hand, and a return to potentially regionally destabilizing irredentism on the other; the potential for the regionalization of southern Somalia's power-struggle to trigger a revival of dissident ethnic nationalisms in Ethiopia via 'Oromia' and the Ogaden and the challenges that this all holds for the AU and its Peace and Security Council (PSC). In the final analysis, the paper confronts the question: can the Somali coast be stabilized and, along with it, the Greater Horn of Africa en route to fulfilling the AU's regional and continental integration agenda?

## 2. THE CASE FOR RECOGNIZING SOMALILAND AS A REGIONAL STABILIZING OPTION

From the technical standpoint of legality, the case for an independent Somaliland is compelling and has been acknowledged, if grudgingly, by the African Union (AU), building on a legal analysis and assessment carried out in 2003 by South Africa.<sup>8</sup> Not only does the north-west region of the Somali Coast enjoy all the conventional attributes of sovereign national statehood, including a comparatively good measure of stability by African standards, it has been established that Somaliland's claim to independence is not so much a secession from the rest of Somalia as the restoration of its earlier - though brief - status as an independent former British colony following the disintegration of the Somali state; Somalia having been the result of an amalgamation of former north-western British and southern former Italian Somaliland.

### 2.1 Somaliland's return to sovereignty amid Somalia's chaos

The dominance of an amalgamated Somalia by southerners and the resulting marginalization of the north and its subjection to repression under the military dictatorship of Siad Barre have created a widely acknowledged political reality that Somaliland is unlikely to ever willingly re-amalgamate itself with a Mogadishu-based regime. This is a reality that has been constantly reinforced by successive failures to reconstitute a Somali regime in Mogadishu, including the latest embattled bid by the TFG; a TFG, moreover, led by Somaliland nemesis Abdillahi Yusuf, the former leader of the autonomous north-eastern Puntland region. There have been periodic border skirmishes between Puntland and Somaliland (including one in September 2006 along the disputed Sanaag and Sool border regions), with little love lost between the two, though both have been backed by Ethiopia. But southern politicians have consistently insisted that Somaliland should remain an integral part of Somalia, thereby espousing a potentially threatening commitment to a 'united Somalia' backed by the Arab League under Egypt's influence. Egyptians have been consistently opposed to Ethiopia's dominance in the Horn of Africa, which Cairo sees as its sphere of influence, and therefore is opposed to Somaliland's independence. The AU, therefore, is under no illusion that reuniting Somaliland with Somalia against the wishes of Hargeisa is a non-starter.<sup>9</sup>

However, the AU's preoccupation with reconstituting a workable regime in Mogadishu has tended to move it in the direction of postponing coming to terms with the Somaliland dimension of the stabilization equation in the Somali region. And this is understandable, since the legality of restoring former British Somaliland's independence would not make such a decision immune from the political liability of the charge that the AU was supporting

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<sup>8</sup> African Union Commission, 'Resume. AU Fact-Finding Mission to Somaliland (30 April-4 May 2005)', unpublished 4-page report, Addis Ababa: African Union (2005). This mission was led by the AU deputy chairperson, Mr Patrick Mazimhaka. See also 'Somaliland's claim to sovereign status', Office of the Chief State Law Advisor (International Law), 6-page report, Pretoria: Department of Foreign Affairs (April 2003).

<sup>9</sup> Ibid, p 4.

secession and breaking the sanctity of territorial integrity. The perception of secession would be the basis of the 'united Somalia' proponents. This would require major political, military and security transformations on the ground to override such charges; a situation which may in fact have arrived with the ascendancy of the Islamic Courts. This leads to the question: given the current mutation of the TFG crisis into a much broader and more threatening regional situation with expanded conflict potential, can a coming to terms with the status of Somaliland as a viable independent state in the Somali region continue to be postponed? The argument advanced here is that the changing balance of forces in southern Somalia and internationally in favour of the Islamists, coupled with the overwhelming opposition to the deployment of an AU peacekeeping force in the region, brings forward the Somaliland recognition option as the only viable alternative left to the AU and major PSC powers such as Algeria, South Africa and Nigeria. Somaliland recognition becomes the key to achieving the long elusive stabilizing balance of forces along the Somali coast.

## 2.2 The 'jig is up': Islamist ascendancy alters the balance of forces

In the wake of the UIC's successive occupations of Mogadishu and the commercial hub of the deep south, Kismayo, thereby consolidating its dominance of southern Somalia at the expense of the TFG, the balance of forces, both internally within the southern half of Somalia and externally, has shifted decisively in favour of the Islamists, forcing the AU and IGAD into defensive disarray on how best to address the UIC's momentum. The UIC has strategically legitimized its Islamism by stoking the fires of Somali nationalism against the deployment of an AU peacekeeping force in addition to opposing any intervention by Ethiopia, with the two - an AU peacekeeping mission and Ethiopian military intervention - becoming virtually conflated in the nationalist imagination of southern Somali opposition to all external pressure. An AU/IGAD deployment appears, therefore, increasingly to be a still-born prospect amid growing opposition to such a deployment in Somalia, and the lack of resources by IGAD countries to mount an effective peacekeeping mission amid threats of confrontation issued by the UIC in the event such a deployment would be attempted. Moreover, the capture of Kismayo by the UIC has been assessed as a pre-emptive strike aimed at blocking an African peacekeeping deployment which, according to such analysts as Michael Weinstein, would have to be mounted from the south.<sup>10</sup>

The UIC has now, according to Weinstein, 'established a front line on the Kenyan border and controls Somalia's southern coast, raising a serious, if not insurmountable obstacle to the deployment of the I.G.A.D. mission'.<sup>11</sup> While checkmating the AU/IGAD peacekeeping initiative, the UIC has 'assumed the stance of affirming the Khartoum peace process' of engaging in talks with the TFG 'in which it has a decisive advantage' and which is backed by

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<sup>10</sup> See: 'Somalia's Islamists resume their momentum and embark on a diplomatic path', by Michael Weinstein, <http://www.pinr.com>, (27 September 2006). Weinstein contends that blocking a potential deployment of an AU force influenced the UIC's decision to take Kismayo.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid, p 1.

the Arab League.<sup>12</sup> Furthermore, with the UIC being seen to exhibit renewed signs of moderation - social services delivery, appointing university professors to key administrative posts, emphasizing greater overall social tolerance - after the apparent ascendancy of its more militarist hardline faction known as *as-Shabaab* a diplomatic dialogue has opened up between the UIC and the US, which only recently had burnt its fingers by inexplicably backing Mogadishu warlords in a contrived 'counter-terrorism' offensive against the courts.<sup>13</sup>

As Weinstein points out, establishing 'cooperative relations' with Washington serves the UIC's purpose of strategically isolating Ethiopia and the TFG. This has happened to a point where, now, the US is seen as backing away from Addis Ababa and the TFG, thereby further strengthening the UIC, while coming down 'on the side of the Arab bloc, which has brokered the Khartoum process, against the African bloc'.<sup>14</sup> Meanwhile, Ethiopia's preoccupation with bolstering the TFG and apparent show of military support for Puntland against an autonomy challenge has strained what had otherwise been good relations between Ethiopia and Somaliland. According to Weinstein, '[a]ngered by Addis Ababa's military support of Puntland's administration, Somaliland president Dahir Riyale Kahin met with Ethiopia's prime minister, Meles Zenawi, to discuss their strained relations', with Riyale emerging only with 'an 'agreement in principle' to strengthen ties'.<sup>15</sup> Meanwhile Ethiopia has played a positive diplomatic role by persuading Puntland's warlords and its militias to leave the border area of Las Anod in Somaliland.<sup>16</sup>

Within this maelstrom of regional geopolitical instability, Somaliland is appearing increasingly vulnerable with analysts such as Weinstein seeing it as only a matter of time before the UICs expand their offensive into Somaliland and/or begin penetrating its domain via the establishment of a presence in places like Burao. Moreover, Ethiopia's increasing insecurity amid fears of a resurgence of irredentism emanating from a Mogadishu regime consolidated under the UIC appears to have shifted its politico-diplomatic security priorities away from Somaliland toward a focus on holding a defensive line of division between southern Somalia and northern Somalia that would revolve around a Baidoa-Puntland axis, irrespective of Somaliland's security concerns vis-à-vis its border dispute with Puntland. The upshot could be increasing isolation for Somaliland as well as potential vulnerability to UIC expansion. This is the situation as summed up by Weinstein:

*The complex pattern of conflict in Somalia's far north brings all the major players in the country, signaling the likelihood of greater instability and attendant uncertainty. The I.C.C. has established an incipient presence, the Puntland administration is under duress from within and without, Somaliland's government is facing greater dissent and feels abandoned by Addis Ababa, and*

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid, p 3.

<sup>13</sup> David H Shinn. 'Somalia: regional involvement and implications for US policy', paper presented at the American Enterprise Institute for Public Policy Research (4 October 2006).

<sup>14</sup> Ibid, p 4.

<sup>15</sup> Michael Weinstein, 'Somalia drifts toward fragmentation as regional powers polarize', <http://www.pinr.com> (20 September 2006), p 8.

<sup>16</sup> Interview with new Somaliland Foreign Minister Abdillahi Duale (8 October 2006).

*Addis Ababa's strategy of divide and rule is collapsing, weakening its position as it is constrained to league with Puntland to check an I.C.C. advance north. With a functioning elected government, Somaliland, which has declared formal independence, but has failed to receive international recognition, is having to tighten internal control and assume a defensive posture, bringing all of Somalia into play.<sup>17</sup>*

### 2.3 Somaliland Recognition: The Strategic Logic

The key question that emerges is what is it that the AU wants to see happen with regard to Somalia and Somaliland within the context of the AU's pan-Africanist integration vision which has to include a stabilized Horn of Africa? Flowing from that, how is north-east Africa to be stabilized and incorporated into this broader integrationist vision? To what extent can the AU acquiesce in having this pan-African vision amended by the dictates of Arab/Islamic realpolitik at the expense of the African agenda? In answering this question, the events of 2006 surrounding Somalia have pushed the Somali Coast to centre-stage alongside the turmoil in the Sudan as determinants of the future - the Somali Coast even more than Sudan, given the Somali conflict's expansion into a broader regional power-struggle between Ethiopia and Egypt/Arab League on the one hand and Ethiopia and Eritrea on the other.

Within this context, the Islamist momentum in southern Somalia via the UIC appears to have shifted the geopolitical, military and diplomatic balance toward the Egyptian-Arab League agenda; one which is not in synch with the African integrationist and democratizing governance and development priorities for the continent and the IGAD sub-region within a greater East African framework. Moreover, all of the Sunni incumbent regimes comprising the Arab League status quo are themselves under increasing democratizing pressures as a result of the Shiite ascendancy in Middle Eastern affairs which is challenging the brand of Islamism trying to gain a foothold on the Somali Coast - which, in turn, is having to come to terms with a more tolerant Somali Islamic culture to stave off a backlash that could yet unsettle the UIC ascendancy.

Within this milieu of regional and geo-cultural political dynamics, Somaliland's fate could be interpreted as emerging as the key pivotal factor in re-balancing the contestation between secular nationalism and religio-nationalist forces in the Somali region as well as re-balancing the power equation between competing African and Arab agendas in this region and in the greater Horn of Africa in the interest of the AU. This means that the AU's progressive movement toward a greater understanding and accommodation of Somaliland's political, economic and security interests, while a welcome sign, is increasingly inadequate against the increasingly fluid pace of the events in the Somali region which could lead in the direction of greater conflict and instability. In other words, the decisive moment for the AU and powers sympathetic to Somaliland's predicament to 'move off the dime' and advance recognition is now. Whether this would be outright, full diplomatic recognition of

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid, p 8.

Somaliland's sovereignty or provisional recognition contingent on conditionalities relating an integrationist agenda in the greater Somali region and the Horn of Africa, the zone of peace, security and stability that Somaliland has brought to the north-west Somali region is an achievement that should be strengthened and consolidated in the interest of the AU's wider aims of stabilizing the Somali Coast. This can no longer be achieved under the TFG, which will have to negotiate an accommodation on the terms of the UIC and its Arab backers.

Furthermore, it should not be in the interest of the AU for the outcome of such an accommodation to then lead on to a military confrontation between an Islamist-led regime in Mogadishu and a Somaliland Republic whose inhabitants show no signs of wishing to go back under southern rule. Hence, recognizing Somaliland, either outright or provisionally, is perhaps the only conflict prevention option available at the moment for stabilizing the increasingly unstable balance of forces in the Somali region while, in the process, striking a new regional balance of power between northern and southern Somalia pursuant to an eventual accommodation between the two regions. However, any AU recognition of Somaliland - either formal or provisional - should be part of a wider AU/PSC strategy of regional conflict resolution aimed at promoting an all-north-east African non-aggression pact and/or peace treaty as a means of defusing and putting an end to the region's inter and intra-state conflicts. This is especially critical, given the mutation of the southern Somalia power-struggle into a proxy confrontation between Ethiopia and Eritrea and the dissident nationalist contradictions threatening cohesion within both states.

The problem with Somaliland recognition as a stabilizing option for the Somali region and the Horn of Africa is who, on their own and/or in collaboration with others, is willing to make the first move in recognizing the Hargeisa regime? Clearly this is not likely to happen from within north-east Africa itself, though logic would seem to dictate a more efficacious strategy on the part of Ethiopia in aligning more closely with Somaliland than in placing all its security eggs in the ever-weakening TFG/Puntland basket. Under the circumstances, playing the 'Hargeisa card' would appear to strategically strengthen Addis's weakened hand and at least partially take it off the defensive. Otherwise, as Weinstein has observed, its 'divide and rule' diplomatic strategy and tactics appear to have run to the end of their tether. As for Hargeisa, while it continues to experience sympathy toward its quest for recognition in London, Washington and other Western capitals, it has run nevertheless up against their inevitable unwillingness to make a move in its favour in the absence of a clear signal from the AU and/or a major African state actor. This essentially places the ball in South Africa's court along with its key strategic partners.

However, Pretoria, for obvious reasons, will not want to act unilaterally, but rather within some sort of consultative framework that, at the very least, achieves a buy-in from Ethiopia and Kenya, if not their active support. The aim would be to tilt the balance within IGAD in a manner that regains initiative for African diplomacy vis-à-vis the Arab bloc, while paving the way for an eventual bridging of divisions within the organization. Even the AU peacekeeping option could conceivably regain momentum, but within a different context having to do with stabilizing a north-south border between Somaliland and a reconstituted Mogadishu regime. But here again, the stabilizing objective is not simply to shore up

Somaliland by conferring recognition, but to adopt this course of action with a view toward a wider regional conflict resolution stabilizing strategy (which will be elaborated later).

Suffice it to say that there should be no illusion about the uphill struggle facing the Somaliland recognition option. For with all the compelling logic supporting recognition - historical, legal, strategic - the boldness that such a move would represent within the conservative drift of African diplomacy may be too much even for South Africa, which is loath to move out too far in front of other AU member states. What this means then is, first, a regaining of Egyptian/Arab League momentum in tilting north-east Africa toward an Arab world hegemony at the expense of the AU and pan-African interests; and, second, Somaliland's continued isolation to the point of potentially being forced into a violent defence of its sovereignty in another round of renewed regional conflict that will do nothing to enhance stability along the Somali Coast and within the Horn of Africa. Perhaps at that point or after the fact, the AU, South Africa and other continental state actors will intervene to retrieve some semblance of stability - and credibility. In the absence of Somaliland recognition, the current predicament of the TFG amid the advance of the UIC-led Islamist underlines the failed international track-record in reconstituting the Somali state in Mogadishu. Revisiting this scenario may be instructive in placing southern Somalia's current predicament in perspective.

### **3. FAILURE OF INTERNATIONALLY BACKED STATE REVIVAL AND THE ISLAMIST ASCENDANCY**

The current crisis surrounding the Somalia's TFG has to be seen against the following backdrop: repeated internationally backed failures at reconstituting a credible Mogadishu-based regime, coupled with the stubborn African and international commitment to recognizing such untenable efforts at the expense of recognizing a real state based in Hargeisa, plus the resulting vacuum of ungovernable warlordism this stubbornness nurtured in Mogadishu, resulting in this vacuum finally being occupied by the UIC.<sup>18</sup> This scenario is critical to understanding the popular legitimacy of the Islamists, irrespective of external apprehensions about terrorism, al-Qaeda's influence and the like; concerns that occupy a low priority among Somalis tired of living under warlord gangsterism and their arbitrary mercies. But Islamist rule bringing a semblance of long-sought governing stability to southern Somalia could turn out to be a 'double-edged sword' if it also brings with it a revival of the bane of Somali irredentism - yet another threat to regional stability.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Ali Mazrui, 'Public intellectuals in Africa's experience', Mazrui Newsletter No 30 (Spring 2006), p 8, 'Somalia versus Somaliland'; Carolyn J Logan, 'Rebuilding Somali political systems: growing new roots in indigenous realities, or merely reconstructing the past?', PhD thesis, The Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy, Tufts University (2002).

<sup>19</sup> 'Heroes, terrorists and Osama', interview with Sheik Hassan Dahir Aweys, by Rod Nordland, *Newsweek* (23 July 2006). <http://msnbc.msn.com/id/13986567/site/newsweek/>

Into this mix have also to be factored the various geopolitical agendas of regional and external actors which, taken together, have not contributed to achieving stability in Mogadishu. Moreover, their inflexible and politically motivated adherence to such shibboleths and ‘territorial integrity’, ‘sovereignty’ and ‘Somali unity’ prevented them from building on the stability established in the Somaliland north-west as a means of leveraging stability and governability in the rest of the Somali region. Somalia is not simply a case-study in state failure and collapse. It is also a case-study in African and international failure at restoring governing stability and regional peace and security.

### 3.1 The international relations of putting ‘Humpty Dumpty’ together again

Southern Somalia could almost be likened to the children’s ditty about ‘all the king’s horses and all the king’s men’ not being able ‘to put Humpty Dumpty together again’ - the lesson being that all the external effort imaginable cannot reconstitute a disintegrated state that has fractured into sundry pieces in the absence of an internally driven dynamic capable of restoring order. Here, the roots of failure, including many of the issues currently at play - Islamist influences, Ethiopia’s security interests and self-interested interventions in Somalia’s affairs - go back at least to the Djibouti-initiated Arta process. John Drysdale<sup>20</sup> and Roland Marchal<sup>21</sup> have reflected on certain salient aspects of Arta. In fact, given the TFG’s base of operations in Baidoa, it is instructive to refer back to prescient observations made by Drysdale in 1994 on the fateful decision by TNG leader Abidkassim Salad Hassan to pass up Baidoa for Mogadishu - what Drysdale, in his preface to the new edition of his book, termed ‘The fatal attraction of Mogadishu’. The sub-clan dynamics between the Abgal and Habar Gidir wings of the Hawiye militated against Abidkassim’s decision to establish a transitional national government (TNG) in Mogadishu:

*...without reconciliation between the two major sub-clans in Mogadishu, where a future central government for Somalia was expected to be seated, any attempt at imposing an extrinsic national government on top of unfriendly independent power bases, supported by Ethiopia and opposed to the Arta process, was folly.*<sup>22</sup>  
(italics added)

In Drysdale’s assessment, ‘the only realistic strategic opening for a credible follow-up to the Arta conference’ would have been to plant the TNG’s provisional capital in Baidoa, the regional capital of the Rahanweyn, which would have enlisted the support of the Rahanweyn Resistance Army (RRA), which had supported Arta and where the fledgling TNG could have concentrated on ‘what was politically possible’, and slowly build up success by making the

<sup>20</sup> In his book, *Whatever happened to Somalia?* (Haan, 1994)

<sup>21</sup> In his contribution in Alex de Waal’s edited work, *Islamism and its enemies in the Horn of Africa* (Hurst, 2004)

<sup>22</sup> John Drysdale, op cit, p xxiii.

TNG the neutral adjudicator of Rahanweyn land grievances in southern Somalia. He continues:

*If it had been only moderately successful in starting up a realistic land tribunal, and had demonstrated its genuine concern to right the wrongs of the past by correcting just one blatant transgression of human rights by one enforceable presidential decree, the really serious issue of colossal land alienation in southern Somalia would have come alive for the first time in decades with an air of expectancy. The Transitional National Government would have received the admiration of all beholders, respectability for its integrity and organizational skills, and probably serious money from the international community. By selecting Mogadishu instead of Baidoa, Abdikassim has found himself and his weakened government in mid-June, 2001 squeezed by a combination of severe economic problems, and by Ethiopian-supported militias and their leaders, now united (it is said) as the SRRC and the RRA...The fatal attraction of Mogadishu persists.<sup>23</sup>*

### 3.2 Islamists bide their time

The Ethiopian angle was an ongoing dimension to influencing the outcome of Arta and the build-up to the Kenya round that ultimately produced the TNG's successor, the TFG. This was understandable, given the irredentist-origins of the Ethiopia-Somali war of 1978 over Ethiopia's Somali-inhabited Ogaden region. Apart from accusations against Addis Ababa for wanting a weak, disunited Somali region, the reality of Ethiopia's legitimate security interests in the nature of a Somali regime restoration in Mogadishu naturally balances the equation of Somali resistance to external, especially Ethiopian, intervention in the affairs of all things Somali - hence, Ethiopia's support for the Somaliland and Puntland autonomous entities, along with a preference for seeing Somalia reconstituted along federalist lines. Such inclinations flowed naturally from Addis's security concerns, while the emergence of Somali Islamist tendencies revived the Ethiopian state's insecurities stoked by the fears of a return of irredentist destabilization in the south-east borderlands exposed to such sentiments emanating from Somalia.

Certainly the expansionist implications of a messianic Islamism reinforcing Somali irredentism tended to mandate Ethiopia's vigilance over, if not periodic intervention into, the vacuum that became post-Barre Somalia. The Somali Reconciliation and Restoration Council (SRRC), bringing together the former antagonists to the TNG from Mogadishu, Puntland and Baidoa and the RRA, emerged as Ethiopia's proxies in the follow-up negotiations with the TNG, mandated by the latter's increasing weakness and ineffectiveness in consolidating a regime in Mogadishu. The federalist TFG was supposed to emerge as a correction of Arta. Yet Arta's TFG successor has replicated many of the weaknesses of the

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid, p xxv.

TNG. Ken Menkhaus observes that 'most regional experts knew it was too narrow a coalition' comprising the TFG which wittingly or unwittingly replicated the downfall of the TNG by excluding two of Mogadishu's most powerful clans.<sup>24</sup>

However, Arta also contained the Islamist seeds of the current UIC nemesis to the successor TFG. Roland Marchal<sup>25</sup> points out that although the TNG did not have a clear Islamist agenda, as some apparently assumed, 'the Islamic Courts constituted the bulk of the new police force and armed forces' and that 'although their cadres were not always at the forefront, they were in charge' - and that 'Ethiopia was the most concerned by these developments'.<sup>26</sup> This was during a period when the main Islamist insurgent threat was the *Al-Itihaad* movement.

Ethiopia intervened in August 1996 and wiped out Islamist bases in Luuq and Buulo Haawa. This was an operation in which 'nationals of several Arab countries were killed' and was followed up by subsequent interventions with the aim of securing a buffer zone through alliances with what Marchal terms 'dubious leaders' who were to eventually become the Addis-backed SRRC.<sup>27</sup> Al-Itihaad, meanwhile, changed tack and rather than prioritize a 'strategy of developing an independent military base', decided instead on what could be termed a more 'hegemonic' approach whereby it would be 'working within Somali political and clan structures such as *the Islamist Courts* and the institutions established by the TNG'<sup>28</sup> (italics added). This strategy apparently applied to Somaliland as well as Somalia and may be at the root of apprehensions that have recently emerged, alongside UIC territorial advances in the south, that the UIC has a ready base for assuming control of Somaliland without marching into Hargeisa. Thus, according to 'editor-cum-poet of *Awdalnews* in Somaliland, Bashir Goth, the Islamists' grip of Somaliland's economy is an open secret, for they control all small businesses, including small money transfer institutions as well as own and run several schools'.<sup>29</sup> Furthermore, 'several prominent members of the Islamist Court Movement in Somalia were said to be part of Al-Ittihad, a Somali jihadist movement put in connection with Al-Qaeda, but defeated in the end-1990s'.<sup>30</sup> So the fact that the Islamic Courts were already integral to the security forces of the old TNG, whereas Eritrea, in the late 'nineties was already assisting Oromo and Ogadeni insurgents (as part of its campaign against Ethiopia over Badame), provides an almost seamless historical continuity between events then and now amid the recent Eritrean-backed military ascendancy of the UIC in southern Somalia. What was low intensity in the late 'nineties has become much higher in intensity during the mid-first decade of the 21st century.

<sup>24</sup> Catherine Maddux, 'Success of Islamist Courts in Somalia raises questions about future of shattered nation,' *Maddux Report* (8 October 2006), p 1.

<sup>25</sup> In his article, 'Islamic political dynamics in the Somali Civil War: Before and after September 11', in: *Islamism and its enemies in the Horn of Africa*, edited by Alex de Waal (2004) p 138.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid*, p 138.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid*, p 138.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid*, p 138.

<sup>29</sup> 'Islamists threaten Somaliland from within', *Afrol News*, <http://www.afrol.com> (5 October 2006), p 1.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid*, p 1.

In effect, in the light of current developments, the Islamists appear to have been biding their time amid the internal and external contradictions that were working against the restoration of a credible, internationally recognized regime in Mogadishu. And here, strategic imagination may influence a differentiated approach by the Islamists in a bid to extend their political influence into Somaliland as well. Here, it is important to revisit Drysdale's fundamental insight that 'without reconciliation between the two major sub-clans in Mogadishu...any attempt at imposing an extrinsic national government on top of unfriendly independent power bases...was folly'. Why this is important has everything to do with the difference between governance in the north-west Somaliland republic and an absence of governance in southern Somalia; the fact that democratic governance in Somaliland has emerged from within, emanating from the endogenous dynamics of conflict and accommodation between clans and sub-clans and building upon the bottom-up, grassroots emergence of the Somali National Movement (SNM), the SNM having made its peace with clan elders, which advanced their armed struggle against the military dictatorship of Siad Barre.

To the extent that the Islamists via the UIC are able to overcome clan and sub-clan contradictions in southern Somalia, they may well introduce the missing endogenous factor that has doomed the reconstitution of the state in Mogadishu. Clan accommodation appears to be the key to stabilization and governance in the Somali region - and this could turn out to the Islamists undoing as well. In the event, a 'divide and conquer' strategy against massively unpopular CIA-backed warlords on the one hand and an increasingly isolated Ethiopian-backed TFG on the other seems to have allowed the Islamists an opportunity to judiciously apply their advantage in fire-power in expanding their territorial control around 70 per cent of southern Somalia. Islamist ascendancy has been as much a local political as a military victory.<sup>31</sup> And this may well indicate limits to the potential for UIC hardliners to impose a Taliban-like Wahabist regime on Somali society anywhere along the Somali Coast, as there are already signs that incipient backlashes have already forced them to moderate and relax attempts to impose elements of a theocracy in the areas under their control.

### 3.3 Somaliland and the UIC Islamist challenge

What has worked in the UIC's favour is the sheer exhaustion of Somalis with warlord anarchy, not any popular wish for, or acquiescence to, an imported brand of puritanical Islamic fundamentalism. The AU, and especially Ethiopian opposition to an Islamist beachhead in the Horn of Africa, will also operate as a constraint, which is where, once again, Somaliland increasingly emerges as a viable alternative to an Islamist-dominated south, given the (perhaps) terminal weakness of the TFG, which seems fated to ultimately accommodate the Islamists on their terms. Belligerent rhetoric about marching on to Hargeisa notwithstanding, any UIC ascendancy in Somaliland would appear more likely to emerge through the electoral route as a result of Somaliland's institutionalized democratic, constitutional process. Thus, if Bashir Goth's assessment is anything to go by, the translation

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<sup>31</sup> Harun Hassan, 'Somalia's stony path', *One Democracy* (5 October 2006), p 1.

of the Islamists' alleged grip on Somaliland's economy into a political challenge might be the more likely route to UIC ascendancy. Presumably, were this to happen, an Islamist takeover in Hargeisa via the ballot-box could theoretically lead to a process toward eventually reuniting Somaliland with the rest of the Somali region. This scenario depends heavily on the views of the clan elders, elites and the wishes of the Somaliland masses.

However, there are already signs that Somaliland's government is cracking down on Islamist dissidence such as in the case of the arrest last year of Burao cleric Sheikh Mohamed Ismail. UIC commander Sheikh Hassan Turki has asserted that 'we will forcefully free Sheikh Mohamed [Ismail] from Somaliland if it does not release him immediately'.<sup>32</sup> As Sheikh Hassan was issuing this challenge, in the first week of October, 'Muslim groups held a demonstration in Burao, calling for the cleric's release'.<sup>33</sup> According to the same report, correspondents were already speculating on a possible clash between Somaliland and the UIC, noting that 'clashes between the Union of Islamic Courts and Somaliland would mark a major escalation of the unrest in Somalia, which has not had a functioning national government for 15 years'.<sup>34</sup> But such an escalation in belligerence is not an inevitability, as Weinstein notes that though the UIC's position has 'substantially improved' in a strategic sense, it 'still faces the presence of Ethiopian forces in Somalia' and, among other concerns, 'the problem of if, when and how to move north into the sub-states of Puntland and Somaliland'.<sup>35</sup> This could be taken to mean that a concerted attempt at a UIC northern expansion is hardly imminent, and more than likely a political settlement will have to be reached between the UIC and the TFG; one that will have to meet with Ethiopia's favour on the pain of a possible Ethiopian military occupation of central Somalia and a prolonged war of attrition with Eritrea aiding the UIC in getting Ethiopia bogged down in a quagmire in Somalia, while stoking renewed insurgencies in Ethiopian 'Oromia' and the Ogaden.

In the process of such a hypothetical conflict, it is also possible that UIC efforts to impose its own brand of stringent Islamism could contribute to a popular anti-Islamist backlash of resistance in what would amount to yet a new chapter of expanding civil war within southern Somalia, with Ethiopia backing 'secularist' forces more or less aligned with the TFG. UIC Islamists have already had to lighten up on their presence in Mogadishu as a result of a backlash to some of their crackdowns. Then, again, it is still not clear how secure the UIC's inter-clan and sub-clan constituency base is, which will be key to the sustainability of their power over the long term. Gerard Prunier believes that were it not for the UIC's anti-Ethiopianism as a mobilizing recruitment tool, 'the support base of the courts - like the transitional government - does not represent a wide section of Somalia's deeply clan-divided population'.<sup>36</sup> This being the case, the UIC would likely face a tall order were it to attempt a frontal assault on Ethiopian forces, the TFG, Puntland and, ultimately, Somaliland. In effect, the TFG-Puntland-Ethiopian intervention nexus buffers Somaliland from any potential UIC

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<sup>32</sup> 'Somalis demand cleric's release', *BBC News* (5 October 2006).

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>35</sup> Weinstein, *op cit*, p 4 (27 September 2006).

<sup>36</sup> Catherine Maddux, *op cit*, p 2.

military adventure. This would, all the more, imply a more indirect political strategy toward expanding influence into Somaliland. In the likelihood that a political accommodation will have to be reached between the UIC and the TFG (including Puntland) before the UIC can turn its attention to Somaliland, Hargeisa's response to the UIC's ascendancy in the south has been relatively cautious as opposed to strident. Somaliland president Dahir Rayale Kahin has declared Somaliland will not take sides with either the TFG or UIC and is willing to have friendly bi-lateral relations with any government in Somalia that recognizes Somaliland as a country.

The UIC's momentum does not change the position that Dahir Rayale Kahin has taken in the past that Somaliland is willing to discuss common issues with Somalia when a stable government actually assumes control of the south: 'We will talk about how they [Somalia] must reach the state where we are now. We can talk as two equal states.'<sup>37</sup> At this stage, moreover, President Kahin is said to believe the situation is fluid in Somalia and only time will tell whether Islamists will be a power to reckon with, 'whether they will stay in areas they [the Islamists] are ruling'.<sup>38</sup> Kahin's reaction is probably informed by the reality that although the TFG and their Ethiopian sponsors are on the defensive, the UIC will ultimately have to sell itself to the rest of Africa and its immediate neighbours, who join Ethiopia in being wary of welcoming an Islamist beachhead in the Horn of Africa. And there may be serious limits to the ability of the UIC's Arab backers to impose it on Somalia as the core of a new regime in the Somali region.

Thus, while the Arab League has raised the diplomatic stakes in tandem with the Khartoum hosted UIC-TFG peace talks, by calling for an international conference on Somalia to take place in short order, IGAD and the AU are said to be uncomfortable with such an approach as they 'want to avoid the collapse of the secular government in Somalia in the face of a growing Islamic movement' according to analyst Harun Hassan.<sup>39</sup> He sees the Arab League, Egypt and Sudan wanting to 'influence a process which could result in the emergence of an Islamic government across Somalia'.<sup>40</sup> Yet it is questionable to what extent the Arab League and states such as Egypt and Sudan can influence such a scenario when they themselves, especially Egypt and other Middle Eastern Sunni states, are on the defensive from Islamist political pressures that have heightened since the Shiite ascendancy of Hezbollah and Iran in the wake of 2006 Lebanon war.

Is it credible that they can impose an Islamist regime on the coastal Horn of Africa when they, themselves, are trying to stave off an Islamist ascendancy in their own backyard? Thus, while the Arab League et al may torpedo an AU peacekeeping force advocated by Ethiopia, Kenya and Uganda, it seems unlikely that the Arab bloc has the wherewithal to impose an Islamist regime, even if the US is willing to open a dialogue with the UIC - which would only be realistic, since the Islamists cannot be wished away by Washington or by Addis. But it is

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<sup>37</sup> Tom Maliti, 'Somaliland president warns Islamic group', *Seattle Post-Intelligencer* (30 September 2006). <http://seattlepi.nwsourc.com>

<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

<sup>39</sup> Hasun Hassan, op cit, p 4.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid, p 4.

highly unlikely that Washington will endorse an Islamist regime being imposed on Somalia against the wishes of the AU, no matter how much it feels a need to placate Arab governments in the wake of its disastrous policies in Iraq, Afghanistan and Lebanon and attempts to play off Sunnis against Shiites in an effort to isolate Iran. This background is germane to the fluidity that Somaliland's Kahin sees operating in Somalia and may explain why Somaliland is not overly concerned about the rise of the UIC Islamists in the south, although Kahin points out that should they decide to expand their influence northward into Somaliland, 'they will be an enemy like others'.<sup>41</sup>

Pending an accommodation between the TFG and the UIC, the Somali region can now be said to reflect three power centres: the unrecognized Somaliland Republic in Hargeisa, the Arab League, Egypt, Djibouti/Eritrean-backed UIC Islamists in control of much of southern Somalia, including Mogadishu and Kismayo, and the Baidoa-based Ethiopian-backed TFG with its rump territory of Puntland - the weakest of the three. This constitutes a situation that might be described as an unstable stalemate, depending on whether and how the power-struggle between the TFG and UIC is decided. Against this backdrop are the interacting dynamics of external influences which bear a more detailed understanding of their interests and the implications of where their contestation might lead in terms of regional stability. Here, the key state actors are Ethiopia, Eritrea, Kenya and the US.

#### **4. REGIONALIZING THE SOMALIA CONFLICT: US, ETHIOPIAN, ERITREAN DIMENSIONS**

It may well have been the US hair-trigger overreaction against the UIC as a perceived stalking horse for al-Qaeda that inadvertently unleashed the current scenario of Islamist ascendancy along the Somali Coast. In fact, Horn specialists such as Ken Menkhaus tend to disagree about an al-Qaeda connection, while Menkhaus suggests that al-Qaeda is probably not trying to gain a foothold in a region widely considered inhospitable for anyone wanting to operate in the Somali region of the Horn of Africa.<sup>42</sup> In any case, Washington seems bent on a course correction. Thus, if the current US change of tack in reaching out to the UIC is now tipping the balance toward the Islamists, this may be because of an emerging awareness in Washington of a need to calibrate a more differentiated 'war on terror' strategy than the 'one-size fits all' approach to an alleged monolithic 'Islamofascist' threat that has been animating US policy thus far. Moreover, in light of the failures registered in its sectarian geopolitical Middle East strategy, Washington is having to scramble to recoup credibility with its Arab League allies.

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<sup>41</sup> Maliti, *op cit.*

<sup>42</sup> Catherine Maddux, *op cit.*, p 2. See also Ken Menkhaus, 'Somalia: spiraling toward war', CSIS Online Africa Policy Forum (15 September 2006).

#### 4.1 American tone deafness in its Somali 'war on terror'

Opening a dialogue with UIC Islamists in Somalia as a corrective for their policy of supporting Mogadishu warlords against the UIC may be part of such an amelioration. However, America's alleged Central Intelligence Agency (CIA)-backing of the 'anti-terrorist' warlord coalition, calling itself the Alliance for the Restoration of Peace and Counter-Terrorism (ARPCT), in their battle for control of Mogadishu, exposed the essentially cynical nature of US policy in the Horn of Africa at the expense of the need for regional stabilization; also, at the risk of polarizing the region between pro-US and pro-Islamist forces much like the Cold War destabilized and polarized much of Africa between pro-US/Western and pro-Soviet camps. Thus, restoring some semblance of stable governance to southern Somalia was not seen as the key to combating terrorism - by dovetailing it with 'nation-building' - as much as supporting factions in and around Mogadishu that could help it nab certain 'high value' terrorist suspects using Somalia's anarchy as a safe-haven.

The fact that Somalis were beyond tolerance for continuing to suffer under warlord misrule, therefore, was not as important as reflexively reacting against the Islamic Courts by supporting continued warlord dominance under the guise of combating terrorism. Now that it is clear that there is popular support within southern Somalia for the UIC Islamists as a stabilizing alternative to warlord gangsterism and that, in the process, this popular support may sweep away the Ethiopian-backed TFG, Washington is looking at the UIC more seriously. What remains to be seen is whether this change of tack toward the UIC and its Arab backers can be reconciled with Washington's common interest with Ethiopia in stemming the tide of an Islamist advance in the Horn of Africa generally, and the Somali region in particular. In fact, except for Ethiopia's stalemated hostility with Eritrea over Badame, Ethiopia and Eritrea, along with Kenya, have comprised a 'coalition of the willing' with Washington in America's 'war on terror'; a coalition that includes the Somali Islamists-inclined port city-state of Djibouti where the US established a rear base to its operations in the Persian Gulf in the build-up to its 'Enduring Iraqi Freedom' campaign, accompanied by smaller bases or 'points of contact' in the region: Jijiga and Kabre Dahre in Ethiopia, Manda Island in Kenya and Bosasso in north-eastern Somalia.<sup>43</sup>

Combating jihadist terrorism dovetailed naturally with Ethiopia's anti-Islamist interests in geopolitically forestalling any possibility of a revival of Somali irredentism in its south-eastern Oromo and Somali region's bordering on Somalia's chaos. In neighbouring Eritrea as well, the Christian background of the predominantly Marxist regime, grounded as it is in the Tigrinia-speaking highlands that extend into northern Ethiopia's Tigre province, tended to influence Asmara's alignment with the US in the 'war on terror'. For a while, in fact, there was competition between Addis and Asmara over which regime was better suited to serving America's anti-terror strategy, with Eritrea even holding out the possibility of hosting an American base as a staging area and monitoring post for the western Indian Ocean strategic backdrop to the Persian Gulf. However, with both Ethiopia and Eritrea increasingly backing

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<sup>43</sup> 'The challenges of change,' Integrated Regional Information Network (IRIN), Nairobi (6 July 2006), p 2.

each other's anti-regime dissidents and insurgents, interacting with Eritrea's natural alignment with Egypt and the Arab League in their 'sphere of influence' power-struggle with Addis, Somalia's UIC Islamists must have emerged as a convenient 'window of opportunity' for Eritrea; Eritrea emerging as a major arms supplier of the UIC's militias in contravention of the arms embargo that is suppose to prevent arms flowing into Somalia and which has become a major peacekeeping bone of contention between the AU and the UN Security Council.

#### **4.2 The Somali conflict's Ethio-Eritrean dimensions: 'the enemy of my enemy...'**

Further, Eritrea's support for the UIC complements its support for the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF) and the Ogaden National Liberation Front (ONLF) forces in south-eastern Ethiopia as proxies in Asmara's confrontation with Addis over Badame. The sudden 2006 emergence of the UIC Islamists in southern Somalia as a major politico-military factor in the Somali region has, therefore, added an additional dimension to the north-east African power-struggle; one wherein Somalia's power-struggle has become a proxy in the Ethio-Eritrean conflict while, in return, both Ethiopia and Eritrea have become inextricably sucked into the morass of Somalia's constantly mutating dynamics. In the process, the UIC's momentum has greatly escalated the conflict in Somalia and further polarized alignments between the TFG and its allies, principally Ethiopia, the AU and such other IGAD state actors as Uganda and Kenya, as well as the UN broadly speaking, and in backing of the UIC, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Sudan and the Arab League as well as IGAD states, Eritrea and Djibouti.

But 'the enemy of my enemy is my friend' is largely operative in these alignments as Eritrea's secularist ruling People's Front for Democracy and Justice (erstwhile Eritrean People's Liberation Front) has nothing in common ideologically with the theocratic UIC Islamists. Nevertheless, Eritrea and Djibouti find themselves lined up against Somaliland. Djibouti's relationship with Hargeisa is an ambivalent one, coloured by the competitiveness between them over their respective ports; Somaliland's port of Berbera on the Gulf of Aden already increasingly making a come-back as a major port outlet for Ethiopia, which does not want to rely solely on Djibouti (given Eritrea's ports being off-limits). In addition, however, Arab investment in Djibouti is heavy and seems to be of sufficient magnitude to keep it out of Ethiopia's sphere of influence.

From Ethiopia's perspective, it appears that a regional geopolitical situation in which it has been able to manipulate a range of clients - Djibouti, Somaliland, Puntland, the TFG - in a fragmented Somali region has served its interest, at least in the short-term, as a means of forestalling the reconsolidation of Somalia as a potential counter-balance to its own hegemony. However, the current regional predicament influenced by the rise of the UIC seems to have brought this juggling act to an end. Djibouti is aligned with Egypt and its Arab allies as well as Eritrea, while relations with Somaliland are strained as a result of Addis militarily aligning more closely with the TFG and Puntland. To reiterate Weinstein, 'Addis

Ababa's strategy of divide and rule is collapsing, weakening its position' while Somaliland's leaders, while not in a panic, are nevertheless 'having to tighten internal control and assume a defensive posture'. The emerging regional picture is one of stalemated instability, pointing to the need for some new, untried politico-diplomatic initiative to break the log-jam, bolster the position of the African bloc and stave off a return to outright war in the Horn of Africa.

### 4.3 Whither the African Union?

The failure of the TFG to establish itself and gain traction as yet one more internationally backed bid to restore governance to Somalia, now further complicated by the rise of the UIC as a serious actor that must be contended with, has overtaken efforts by the AU to methodically relate both to the TFG and to the needs of Somaliland. Given the sensitivity of the AU and its member states in dealing with what is widely considered a breakaway sub-state, irrespective of the actual historical and legal background, the approach to working out a normalizing process for Somaliland was always going to follow a gradualist course towards some consensus among member states about how to proceed on Somaliland recognition within the context of stabilizing southern Somalia. On the positive side, through a protracted process of diplomatic engagement, dialogue and fact-finding missions fielded on the ground, the AU has managed to make considerable progress toward recognizing the predicament of Somaliland on its merits.

The AU fact-finding mission to Somaliland of 30 April-4 May 2005 observed that Hargeisa's search for Somaliland's recognition was 'historically unique' and, more important, 'self-justified in African political history'; that, as a result, Somaliland's case '*should not be linked to the notion of "opening a Pandora's box"*', and that, as such, 'the AU should find a special method of dealing with this outstanding case'<sup>44</sup> (italics added). The question is whether this considered judgement by the AU has been overtaken by events in terms of the AU being able to focus on finding a 'special method of dealing with this outstanding case' in the midst of the current phase of the Somali state reconstitution crisis stemming from the Islamist power bid?<sup>45</sup> Alternatively, might not finding a special dispensation for Somaliland, as recommended by the AU fact-finding mission, become part and parcel of stabilizing the current crisis engulfing the Somali region with the TFG/Puntland in alliance with Ethiopia facing off against the Eritrean/Arab League-backed UIC? Or must the AU's follow-up on the Somaliland fact-finding mission recommendations await the stabilizing of the current crisis? Indeed, can it await such an elusive stabilizing prospect and is such a prospect a realistic possibility now that the UIC has sounded its jihadist clarion-call to arms against Ethiopia?

The need for shoring up Somaliland as a zone of stability is underlined by a recent critique of Somaliland that, at least in part, has to be related to its unrecognized status.

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<sup>44</sup> African Union Commission. 'Resume. AU Fact-Finding Mission to Somaliland (30 April-4 May 2005)', p 4.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid, p 4.

Abdul Rehman Hassan<sup>46</sup> contends that Somaliland's citizens, along with those of Puntland, are suffering from 'corrupted public officials' wherein 'people are taxed to their throats, but receive very little in return'.<sup>47</sup> He continues:

*In Somaliland, the stake circulates among the higher ups, and much of the flesh doesn't reach the ground. Solders [sic] and civil service employees are starving, and the cash supply is extremely weak in the local market because the money never makes its way to the retail level.*<sup>48</sup>

It could very well be that this unflattering assessment of economic life in Somaliland is a function of the country's isolation amid non-recognition which places it outside the scope of engagement that might be forthcoming from the African Development Bank and/or the World Bank, along with expanded UN and international non-governmental organization (NGO) and donor involvement. As it is, Somaliland's functioning as a viable state is widely seen as little short of a miracle under the unfavourable circumstances under which it has had to cope as an independent state. On this score, the AU fact-finding mission observed that 'given the acute humanitarian situation prevailing in Somaliland, the AU should mobilize financial resources to help alleviate the plight of the affected communities, especially those catering for the IDPs and Returnees'.<sup>49</sup> This would be accompanied by a conflict prevention initiative to defuse the 'high potential for conflict between Mogadishu and Hargeisa' by the AU taking steps to 'discuss critical issues in the relations between the two towns' at the earliest possible time.<sup>50</sup> Such a dialogue has no doubt been overtaken by events and it is even less clear now during the latter part of 2006 who would be representing Mogadishu: the TFG, the UIC - which has sounded very belligerent about Somaliland - or some 'national unity' TFG/UIC entity?

The other factor contributing to the AU's paralysis would be the divisions that have emerged within IGAD between proponents of AU peacekeeping deployment and those opposed to any external deployment in Somalia. Given the fact that the AU tends to defer to and/or work in tandem with sub-regional economic communities and security organs (as regional pillars of the AU), IGAD's disarray tends to detract from any initiative the AU might take. Thus, given this paralysis, the disarray within IGAD over the best course of action to take in Somalia vis-à-vis the TFG and the UIC and the stalemated instability of the standoff between the TFG and the UIC, the only possible other alternative for breaking the log-jam would be the politico-diplomatic intervention of an 'out-of-area' African state actor. The likely state actor to fit that bill is South Africa (working in close cooperation with Algeria, R Nigeria, Rwanda and Zambia), which, while empathetic to Somaliland, is on excellent terms with all other regional state actors; is a leading member of the AU's Peace and Security Council, and will take up a two-year non-permanent seat on the UN Security Council as one

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<sup>46</sup>Abdul Rehman Hassan, 'Somalia: Courts deserve cautious positive review', *Garowe Online* (6 October 2006) p 2.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid, p 2.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid, p 2.

<sup>49</sup> African Union, *op cit*, p 4.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid, p 4.

of three African states representatives on the council. South Africa, therefore, is well positioned to discretely and consultatively undertake a preventive diplomacy initiative that would centre on the development of a regional peace plan package in which the outright or provisional recognition of Somaliland would be integral, building on the findings, observations and recommendations of the 2005 AU fact-finding mission to Somaliland.

## **5. CONCLUSION: SOMALILAND AND THE STABILIZING OF SOMALIA AND THE HORN OF AFRICA**

### **5.1 Conflict prevention**

At the centre of South African foreign policy is implementation of 'The African Agenda', which embodies the realization of an African renaissance through, among other things, preventing and resolving conflicts. The 'window of opportunity' for advancing this particular aspect of this ambitious agenda is now; now, meaning the period that will encompass the next two years of convergence between Pretoria's two-year tenure on the United Nations Security Council and its occupation of one of the three-year positions on the AU's Peace and Security Council. This period will also cover the culmination of President Thabo Mbeki's second term in office, while South Africa holds the position of chair of the AU's Ministerial Committee on Post-Conflict Reconstruction in Sudan.<sup>51</sup> As such, the resolution of the ongoing tensions and conflicts in the Horn of Africa of which Somalia has emerged as a centrepiece must assume high priority.

It is within this 'picture context' that South Africa should begin to approach a strategy for taking its exploratory, dialoguing relationship with Somaliland further by encouraging the AU to follow-up on the logic of its fact-finding mission recommendation to 'find a special method of dealing with this outstanding case'.<sup>52</sup> But to address Somaliland recognition-qua-recognition separate from the larger Somali/north-east African regional conflict resolution challenge would probably not be persuasive, given the political risk attached to UN/AU issues of 'territorial integrity' and 'sovereignty' versus 'self-determination'. Implementation of the AU fact-finding mission recommendations, therefore, should be approached within the context of a larger regional peace plan for Somalia and the Horn of Africa. First and foremost, the overriding objective should be conflict prevention: to forestall a new round of conflict in the Somali-Ethio-Eritrean geopolitical sphere of north-east Africa.

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<sup>51</sup> This committee includes foreign ministers of Algeria, Egypt, Ethiopia, Gabon, Kenya, Nigeria, Senegal and Sudan.

<sup>52</sup> South African Foreign Minister N Z Zuma, holding the chair of the African Union, invited the Somaliland Foreign Minister to South Africa for talks in 2004.

## 5.2 The provisional recognition of Somaliland

South African *provisional recognition* of Somaliland would, therefore, aim to consolidate and reinforce the Hargeisa regime's stability and security as a 'zone of peace' within the Somali region.<sup>53</sup> The emphasis on 'provisional' is intended to attach a broader agenda to Somaliland recognition which would encourage a regional negotiating process between the power centres of the Somali Coast, of which Somaliland is a key state actor. Provisional recognition of Somaliland by Pretoria, coupled with the promotion of this as an option for the AU to pursue, would send a clear signal to the TFG/Puntland, and especially the UIC Islamists and their allies, that the AU and its leading member states will not countenance an expansion of the Somali conflict beyond its current locus of instability within southern Somalia.

Somaliland, in the meantime, would be better positioned to secure the kind of security and economic assistance that will strengthen its position in the future cut-and-thrust of bargaining over the future of the Somali region. Toward this end, provisional recognition of Somaliland should be coupled with an AU initiative to involve Somaliland in a Somali regional governance forum for open-ended negotiations on the future governance of the entire Somali Coast prefaced on a resolution to the current stalemate between the TFG and the UIC and the formation of a credible southern Somalia regime in Mogadishu and/or Baidoa.

## 5.3 Regional non-aggression

Obviously, security emerges as front and centre among the objectives of any regional peace plan involving the provisional recognition of Somaliland. That being the case, Somaliland's peace and security needs to be nested within a larger regional peace and security framework aimed at defusing the tri-state Somali-Ethio-Eritrean complex of instability. Thus, the provisional recognition of Somaliland should be proposed as part of a larger AU initiative aimed at negotiating a regional non-aggression pact and peace treaty for north-east Africa. This would probably involve a long and protracted process. But the aim would be to shift the current scenario from one of political and diplomatic stalemate in what amounts to a multi-layered proxy conflict by various external actors toward an emphasis of concentrating energies on regional peace negotiations and demilitarization.

All state and non-state actors in the Horn sub-region would be encouraged to buy into a mutual non-aggression arrangement grounded in respect for each state's territorial integrity and non-interference in each other's conflicts. Centring on Somalia, this would translate into all external actors either withdrawing any foreign forces occupying part of Somali territory or refraining from supplying arms to any of the parties to Somalia's power-struggle. Here, a series of symmetries will have to be established: the withdrawal of Ethiopian troops on the

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<sup>53</sup> United Kingdom 2004, Africa Commission Report, London (see section on Somaliland). See also 'Somaliland president calls on Lord Triesman', Downing Street, Press Office (16 August 2006).

one hand, coupled with Eritrea's observation of the UN arms embargo on Somalia amid the establishment of a cease-fire to freeze the current tug-of-war over turf in southern Somalia between the TFG and the UIC. While there is wide-spread opposition to an AU peacekeeping force being deployed in southern Somalia, a system of peace monitors should be considered as an alternative to ensuring a cessation of conflict between the TFG and the UIC and maintaining peace on the Somaliland and Puntland border.

#### **5.4 Overcoming Badame**

Symmetry will also need to be established between Ethiopia and Eritrea in terms of both countries ceasing political and military support for each regime's opponents. Ultimately, this means revisiting the intractable Badame stalemate between Ethiopia and Eritrea. While Ethiopia needs to be encouraged to heed the implementation of mediation outcome to this dispute, some alternative creative options ought to be explored between the AU, IGAD and Addis and Asmara. This could entail transferring the 'sovereignty' of Badame to the AU and/or to IGAD or exploring some sort of 'trans-frontier' spatial development initiative for this region as an Ethio-Eritrean common security confidence-building measure.

Badame is essentially a parochial conflict in what amounts to a trans-national, northern Abyssinian civil war between Tigrinya-speaking Ethiopians and Eritreans that has been allowed to poison the entire north-east African region, spilling over into and complicating Somalia's power-struggle, while rejuvenating 'frozen conflicts' in south-eastern Ethiopia among the Oromo and Ogadeni. Within the framework of a regional non-aggression pact, cease-fire and demilitarization, conflict resolution in southern Somalia could and should eventually involve a bilateral exploration between Ethiopia and Somalia of creating a 'soft border' between the Ethiopian Ogaden and Somalia proper. This is a dimension that leads into another aspect of a regional peace and security initiative that ought to lead from conflict resolution and prevention to regional cooperation.

Here, perhaps, the East African Community (EAC), which is currently preoccupied with its own evolution into an East African Federation, could hold out an accession process for attracting Ethiopia, Eritrea, Somaliland and Somalia into an expanded greater East African economic community or customs union. Alternatively, a more focused process of establishing an economic community between Ethiopia, Somaliland, Djibouti and an eventual government in southern Somalia could be explored. However, in view of the AU's increasing priority given to the need to rationalize overlapping and proliferating economic communities into five AU regions or sub-regions, an expanded greater East African Community could become a pole of attraction for north-east African integration while IGAD could evolve into a greater East African 'security community', given its major preoccupations with peace processes in Sudan as well as Somalia.

## 5.5 The urgent diplomatic angle

How Pretoria should move forward in crafting such a package will be critical in as much as a unilateral initiative without consultation has little promise. However, the spearheaded 'sharp end of the wedge' is the provisional recognition of Somaliland. While committing itself to this course, South Africa might approach such a decision within the context of consultations with Ethiopia, Kenya and the AU Commission, with emphasis on the need to follow through on the AU's fact-finding mission recommendations of 2005 as a matter of urgency in stabilizing the current situation in Somaliland and Somalia. Both Addis and Nairobi should be persuaded to join South Africa in such an endeavour as a means of transforming the stalemated dynamics in the Somali conundrum which is accompanied by a concerted and unprincipled bid by the Arab League to incorporate the Somali region into an Arab sphere of influence at the expense of the AU and its pan-African unity vision.

As a corollary to Ethiopia and Kenya as priority state actors for consultation, South Africa should selectively network with other possible 'out of area' African states. These could include Zambia, Rwanda and Ghana, with which South Africa will share representation of Africa on the UN Security Council; Madagascar and/or Mauritius; Algeria and Senegal. Such consultative networking on the provisional recognition of Somaliland within the context of a broader Somali regional and north-east African peace plan could result in one or two additional 'architectural' dimensions that may be necessary to generate peace and security momentum in the Horn of Africa:

- *An AU-sponsored Ad Hoc Commission on the Somali Region* to augment the weakened role of IGAD as a 'contact group' of African state actors *from outside the region* to exercise mediating oversight on political and military developments in the Somali region among the region's different contending actors; and
- Establishment of a *Conference on Security, Stability, Development and Cooperation for North-east Africa (CSSDCNA)* as an institutionalized, multilateral negotiating mechanism within which to locate a Somali regional governance forum and to oversee the implementation of a regional mutual non-aggression pact and peace treaty as well as to vet options for regional cooperation within the immediate north-east African sub-region or in some form of association with a greater East African community-cum-federation and a host of other ongoing governance issues. Such a mechanism could work in tandem with IGAD and the East African Community while providing a participatory outlet for civil society engagement in these critical issues.

The foregoing are purely illustrative of the kinds of initiatives that might have some relevance for overcoming the seemingly endemic cycle of conflict and destabilization in the Somali region and in the Horn of Africa as a whole. The Horn of Africa represents a challenge that has yet to be successfully engaged by the AU and its predecessor, the Organization of African Unity (OAU) in reconciling this region's unique self-determination strivings within the imperatives of territorial integrity and sovereignty. To some extent, the north-south settlement in the Sudan conflict breaches this track-record and sets a precedent that could

be used to constructive effect in the Somali region. Somaliland presents a litmus test in this regard. In the process, Somaliland also presents something of a litmus test for South Africa's diplomatic imagination and commitment to resolving Africa's conflicts as the base-line precondition to an African renaissance and the advancement of NEPAD's (New Programme for Africa's Development) strategic goal of stability and good governance.

As the recent security situation has deteriorated in southern Somalia and the UIC has apologized to Somaliland for the bombings of Hargeisa at the hands of Siad Barre's military in 1988, the AU's process of deliberating on and engaging with Somaliland has not suffered. To the contrary, there are signs that at the very highest levels of the African Union Commission, there is a keen interest in finding an accommodation with Somaliland, especially in light of the continuing instability and arms build-up in southern Somalia; a situation characterized by Islamist ascendancy amid an erosion of the TFG's credibility and the threat of Somalia becoming a proxy battleground in the Ethio-Eritrean confrontation.

Moreover, the AU Commission has made it clear that it will not tolerate external threats to Somaliland's security and stability though it would behoove it for the consequences of a threat to Hargeisa to be spelled out. In any case, this show of interest by the AU Commission is a welcome sign to Somaliland's leaders at a time when Ethiopia seems more preoccupied with bolstering the security of the TFG and Puntland. That said, the question remains as to how Somaliland's quest for diplomatic recognition can advance beyond the current threshold it has arrived at with the AU. Here, there has been suggestion of one or two options that might be pursued in an interrelated scenario.

The AU could offer Somaliland either full or provisional recognition. Part of this process will be for AU member states to formally table Somaliland's case at the next AU summit in January 2007. Effective AU recognition would break the log-jam, enabling other AU member states or non-African external state actors such as Britain, the U.S. and/or other members of the EU to open official diplomatic relations with Somaliland in recognition of the northwest Somali region as a sovereign state. AU recognition in some form or fashion would be the preferred initial step as this would end a situation wherein no state - African or non-African - wants to be the first to recognize Somaliland. An African AU PSC state, such as Rwanda, could then take the lead in recognizing Hargeisa which, in all likelihood could be accompanied by others such as Ethiopia and other members of the NEPAD heads-of-state steering committee such as Senegal, South Africa and Nigeria not to mention others that might follow suit such as Zambia, Mauritius, Madagascar, Kenya and Ethiopia. Perhaps the Government of South Sudan, as it evolves its east African strategy would reach out diplomatically to Somaliland as well in light of their similar predicaments as newly emerging regional state entities in search of viable arrangements with neighbouring states in an unstable environment.

Among non-African actors, it would seem that Britain, having been Somaliland's colonial point-of-reference prior to its independence and amalgamation with the south, would take the lead in triggering diplomatic recognition momentum in the UN Security Council along

with the U.S. Washington would likely see recognizing Somaliland as a priority in its anti-terror strategy in the Horn of Africa region abutting the Middle East.

Some legal status for Somaliland, UN or AU recognition or not, however, would open the way for Somaliland to engage other multilateral institutions in garnering urgently needed post conflict reconstruction developmental aid and economic and security assistance for Somaliland's security, health, education and infrastructural sectors. Here, likely candidates would include the African Development Bank, the IMF, the World Bank and even, perhaps, the Development Bank of Southern Africa. So Somali watchers are likely to be monitoring the AU arena of Somaliland's fate very closely between now and the time the present AU Chairman, Alpha Konare steps down in mid-2007. The hunch is that Konare will want to leave his post with a legacy of having had the AU move decisively in attempting to stabilize a region of the continent that has traditionally proved most awkward for Africa in sorting out the claims and counter-claims of self-determination and territorial integrity. If so, Somaliland's recognition could likely be his key.

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