

**AN EMBOLDENED AIAI-UIC & WESTERN INPUTS
(FROZEN EXPERTISE AND UNPRINCIPLED PRAGMATISM)**

ZerihunTeshome

Center for the Study of Federalism and Public Policy Research (CEFPOR)

Prologue

A few days ago Abdurahim Muddey, the spokesman for the Supreme Islamic Council of Somalia (SICS) told AFP the following. "We are inviting the United States to send a delegation to see what is happening in Somalia, The US delegation will be received by our foreign relations chief, Ibrahim Hassan Addow, who is himself an American citizen, the lifting of the UN weapons embargo which is being spearheaded by US is a serious security risk ". And the thinkers and policy advisers of the international community seem to have found once again a gesture to pick and harp their hope on about a peaceful deal with the UIC: warding thereby the danger of Somalia becoming a Jihadist led terror heaven.

Yet just a month and days ago, another official of the UIC, in charge of the Jihadist campaign in the Lower Juba region of South Somalia, Sheikh Mohamed Omar Mursal, said the following: "Our people are ready to protect their religion from the enemies of Allah. We are ready to fight you; Ethiopia....America supports Christians and Jews. We are not waiting for America to endorse our jihad, what we tell America is that we will fight against any invasion.... and fighting will continue until the Islamic courts and the true religion of Allah prevail,"..."

Both Sheik Sharif whom most western experts and the Americans portray as the moderate voice in the UIC, and the hardliner Col. Yousuf Mohammed Siyad (Indhaadde), Head of the UIC's Security Apparatus were in the UAE recently. Talking to members of the Somali community living in Dubai, t on Oct. 7, 2006, ***said that their" rapid victory in capturing large swathes of Somalia was a gift from God and that they aspired to spread their message worldwide once Somalia was secure in their grip"***.

Here we have it: but why are the jihadists of the UIC finding it so easy to play the world at their will, moving freely including in to kenya and conducting an interview with the VOA using mobile phone and while being a wanted terrorist by the USA? What do we make of such political acrobatics the above statements imply? Both the challenge and the opportunity for the world lies in answering these questions as realistically as possible, and come up with a clear picture of itself, the UIC as well as its moves.

THE OBVIOUS AND THE PRESENT: "Patient- Doctor-Wrong Medicine"

"We are all Doctors....., looking at the Somali patient. Right now.... telling the patient you are sick, without really giving the correct medicine" (M. Ali Fom AU envoy to Somalia, July, 29/2006)

When President Mohamed Siad Barre was overthrown in 1991, Somalia became a battleground for warlords. Bringing emergency aid to Mogadishu was the initial aim of the U.S. intervention launched by President George Bush days before he left office. But the mission quickly became embroiled in Somalia's clan warfare. After two weeks of gun battles in June 2006 against secular militia, the Islamic Courts Union prevailed in Mogadishu. Worn out by more than a decade of chaos, the people of the capital welcomed the order brought by the Islamists, who reopened the capital's airport and port, reduced crime and began to clear garbage-strewn streets. **This set in motion also "the immediate prospect of much of the country being dominated by a hard-line Islamic movement -- a first in Africa".** (*Tim Lister*).

Indeed, the rise of the AIAIA-UIC to the helm in Mogadishu & Southern Somalia, a self-proclaimed Jihadist totting guns at all those around, has rekindled world interest anew, and generated volumes of opinionated writings. From Khartoum to Nairobi, from Cairo to New York, from Addis Ababa to Sana'a etc, we have seen a flurry of consultations. Hastily patched networks of Western experts, dubbed as contact groups etc, have been formed. Lone or sponsored "free thinking" analysts of all sort (terrorism, Horn of Africa, Us foreign policy etc) drawn from heavy weight traditional European/us think-tanks abound. They have appeared on almost all the CNN's & the BBC's of the globe: some among them testified before the US Congress. And almost all keep on pouring advice emanating from their 'rare Wisdom & knowledge of Somalia, Ethiopia or the whole region".

Neither do many appear to contest that with the turn of events seen recently this problem has a potential to spill over beyond Somalia, and, if so, will surely plunge the region in to crisis. Yet by each day, the Al-Qaeda linked AIAI-UIC rather appears more emboldened. With the acquisition of additional territories the AIAI-UIC spread is loaded with an epidemic proportion of catastrophic consequence to all around Somalia (the patient). And the likes of Ethiopia would surely get the larger chunk from this pie of catastrophe.

The only other best scenario we might hope for, if lucky, will not be other than the same old course pre-UIC: wallowing in that same quagmire of continued chaos, flammable flare ups, accompanied with unsustainable containment. The "worst-case scenario imagines Somalia becoming another front in the war on terror, one as intractable as Iraq and Afghanistan and destabilizing" to much of East Africa. Even the relatively peaceful area of "Somaliland is unlikely to be immune". All these are a big obvious.

However many equally believe this gloomiest "outlook for Somalia, and the Horn of Africa," can be averted. But such could only happen if there is the sort of international

commitment and joint action it calls for. Yet, as Prime Minister Meles Zenawi put it aptly, "...the international community could have done more, and should have done more"; but it has not to this date. Why is so? Lack of awareness and/or capability: or is it confusion? And if so, what is the source or the very foundation sustaining it?

The observation of the AU envoy to Somalia, and that of PM Meles Zenawi though brief, speaks volumes. In as much as it states the obvious - the sickness engulfing Somalia, and through it possibly the entire Horn region-it goes deep in pointing out harsh truths with an intellectual incisiveness, only matched by the diplomatic touch of its delivery.

As much a pointer of dissonance between the various actors/interested parties, as regards to performance and promise: plus expectation and actual undertaking, it is equally a moral challenge to account for the lack. One such truth is that agreeing about the obvious i.e. the presence (existence) of a problem, of any sort, could neither pass as nor lend the possession of a shared conceptual and strategic clarity by all involved regarding the causes, evolution and possible steps of addressing it. It also points to the absence of having an equal stake and commitment; because this is derived from the relative place of each in relation to the effect & reality of the problem. Indeed our presumed obvious, and our analysis falls short, and leaves much to be desired: because as the AU envoy stated our common ground stops at only covering a very few yards. Namely it stops at the level of the obvious: a general characterization of the disease and a professed belief of each as healer. Such is the present status of the different actors ("the Doctors") that have or claim to have stake with the situation in Somalia.

When such analysis and understanding is elevated to the status of informing action, the real possibility of catastrophic failure and self-contented confusion, with all its dangerous ramifications, abounds. And this precisely is the case with the international community, which at present appears confused, yet content, to a degree bordering impotence about what to do. Indeed what is contested here is not the obvious, what is contested is the prescriptions for action or inaction derived thereof. Thus, our argument is more specifically an invitation to revisit respective and collective assumptions, actions etc, regarding the reality of the UIC, the present situation in Southern Somalia, and that of 'the Somali crisis' in general.

The Sinking Sand of Frozen Expertise": The Illusion of Inclusion, Ambivalence & an Emboldened UIC

A cursory glance of the analysis, writings and pronouncements of these 'experts' and/or officials, which is sending many in to the comfort of ambivalence and away from standing up to the UIC unveils what belies it. It is both utter ignorance about basic facts and thinking stuck with dead or frozen variables it had been fed long ago. At best, most are appraisals induced by an opportunistic reading of reality, which is both deformed and irresponsible.

"In matters of war, America must be wary of an ally who greets her with a beggar's hand. This is the case with Ethiopia and its involvement in the war on terror: The country hopes that if it helps keep radical Islam at bay in the horn of Africa, the US will send aid its way", writes a certain analyst on the Boston Globe. Mind you; forget the racist and ignorant arrogance contained in this statement, and the furious reaction it might have entailed among many descent Ethiopian Americans. Also forget the question of what moral authority such a deformed being and those it consults in the US administration have to issue such a warning while being eight thousand miles away from any possible havoc that might be wrought on them by the blanket attack of this "self-proclaimed Jihadists" of hate & doom. What is more insulting to all people of decent intelligence is the fact that the policy course of many a super power democracies of the World is dependent on analysis and advice of such "experts". Analysis and expertise based on neither a holistic appraisal of present reality, nor on the proper reading of both the recent as well as the post 1990 history of Somalia and the region.

As is the case with a certain Gwyne Dyer, identified as an independent analyst/writer, some do not even know whether Mr. Zenawi is a PM or a President. Some others also describe as well as give a statistical margin of Ethiopia's religious mix, which fully is wrong and self-deifying: identifying it as a 'Christian Nation' yet citing a 60 to 65% Muslim population ratio. Unbeknown to them, in fact, is not only the unique historical record of religious harmony & tolerance, but also the present constitutionally enshrined separation between state & religion plus equality of all faiths. Forget about the presence of the more than thousands Shari'a Courts, actively providing justice based on Islamic law and as per the choice of the individual citizen throughout Ethiopia. Referring with no scruple to the so-called "traditional ... quintessential ... animosity between Christian Ethiopia & Moslem Somalia ..." as explanatory of "what is going on" as well as "what should be done" has become a very fashionable & popular addiction of our "army of experts".

A stack of similarly unfounded and uninformed additional "generalizations, conclusions and prescriptions", derived thereof, are also plenty. The "renowned American daily" the **Los Angeles Times**, on its July 31st editorial asserting an "increased support for the militia by mainstream Somali's"...it alone observed passes a verdict: "Ethiopia is making a bad situation worse..." and, as expected calls for sidelining Ethiopia, i.e. "Ethiopia should be pressured to withdraw..."

But the real cause is not that; whether Ethiopia retreats all the way back to the central highlands, whether it does not have any single soldier near Somalia, it makes no difference to satisfy the "mullahs" to come to the embrace of the community of sane political groups. Because the reason for the UIC-AIAI cry against Ethiopia is its ideological fanaticism for which Ethiopia stands as the close by existential nemesis. To put it in the words of that same "moderate" mullah, Sheik Sharif “ **(Ethiopians) are against the application of Islamic Sharia in Somalia and it is the duty of every Somali to participate in a jihad against the infidel Ethiopian forces,**”. Additional factors also include the UIC leaders attempt to **appeal to the patriotic feelings of the**

Somalis, so as to fill the clan and moderation induced vacuum, by fabricating such claims as they recently proclaimed at a Hotel gathering in Dubai:".. hundreds of Ethiopian forces were pouring into Somalia with the aim of capturing the whole country up to the port Kismayo" etc. Yet the true basis is the harsh reality that Ethiopia, being the foremost target provides an impeccable defiance both politically and militarily, to the AIAI-UIC's "crazy project of exporting a jihadist revolution". Even if it is in reality a hallucination so costly to realize, given the many challenges the UIC faces in Somalia, they will keep on repeating the same cry against Ethiopia all over again.

With a rare comfort of absorbing logically incompatible assertions only in abundance with such journalism matched by an equally self-evasive judgmental arrogance typical of a bystander, the **LA times** in the same piece describes how 'Somalia is collapsing in to a terrorist haven' a la Afghanistan. And the reason the LA times asserts is, because the 'World's Policemen' (the likes of the US he means) are distracted by other "Important" conflicts. Yet in what one could only fittingly describe as a line resulting from a Freudian slip, the paper warns that the Israel- Hezbollah conflict will be a picnic in comparison to what is possible in Somalia, if action is not taken fast.

The Times also stated that the "UIC is not acting like the Taliban and imposing religious orthodoxy, but instead has [softened its views](#), delivered social services to residents, and is pushing for democratic elections. It is hard to imagine that this is Mogadishu, the same Mogadishu of "Black Hawk Down," and clan against clan and 15 years of anarchy. But over the past three months, the Islamists in control here have defied international expectations - in many ways. Not only have they pacified one of the most dangerous cities in the world, they also seem to have moderated their message".

Even Saverio Bertolino, a UN official shares it and played down reports of Islamic extremism.: " International aid organizations such as the World Food Program have praised the ICU for bringing stability to the capital and allowing a resumption of international aid. In 15 years, no one was able to do what they did in 15 days," Even following the recent UN report many had the guts to still hold on to the positive peaceful UIC picture they drew for themselves: a Reuters journalist says it good " Several diplomats and analysts said the aim of these elements and the leak might have been to demonize the Islamists by reinforcing reports they have strong ties with radical Muslim governments and al Qaeda-linked groups."

Indeed, seeing all this bundling of fact and fiction, one is lost about what to make of analysis, the likes of which **we just cited**. But one thing is certain: they are warning bells for all about the need to be open to harsh facts, to pause and assess long held or freshly formulated assumptions before jumping to action.

What many self-styled Analysts to this date miss is not only, as seen in the above writings that has flooded us since the events in Mogadishu, the salient facts contained in both the recent past and the unfolding present. They also bestow themselves the sole knowledgeable non partisan fixer, as the following clearly shows:" international

community can prevent such a chain of events through consistent and even-handed pressure on all sides through the International Contact Group on Somalia". Where as some others playing the doubting Thomas's where none would pass as a necessary intellectual inputs, many among them talk about "lack of evidence...etc to establish UIC's terrorist link & credentials." From such they draw wrong conclusions upon which they have had the "courage" to base their advice to the US administration course of action Vis-à-Vis the current UIC , and as regards to the general situation in Somalis.

The priority, they say, should be to negotiate a power-sharing agreement and establish national institutions absent since 1991. Engage and call on both Al Queda incarnate-UIC, and the TFG to join hands to lead Somalia as a government (a government presiding by carrying the belief & image of the dead Somali democratic Republic territories). If there appears any shed of difference it is minor: the ICU must be engaged, "especially moderates such as Sheikh Sharif Sheikh Ahmed, and the transitional government reinvented; Arab League and African Union mediation needs to be complementary rather than competitive" etc, etc. But, alas, reality is unforgiving, particularly for the willingly blind: none other than the so-called "chosen Moderate" Sheikh Sharif, referring to this very subject of talks with the Transitional Federal Government, TFG, said their fundamental difference was the application of the Islamic Sharia: "They (TFG) want to rule the country by a man-made constitution and we want to rule the country by the Allah's holy book. We are not going to compromise on applying God's rule," Zip, Period: it is an unbridgeable chasm, as far away as the one between the earthly and that of the heavenly.

At the other register, our analysts arriving at the logically inevitable next wrong conclusive piece of advise of assigning "Europe and the United States playing a role in restraining regional actors like Ethiopia and Eritrea", they turn a blind eye to Eritrea's arming the UIC. And above all putting together actors that could not have any shared ground both in reality as well as at the level of moral conduct, they tell the USA to warn Ethiopia publicly to stop its "meddling in Somalia". Embracing it with the usual 'we know it all attitude a la Washington, the state department issues a warning to Ethiopia (which shares beyond a 1000 km border real living beings having ethnic, cultural & family ties) Eritrea and Kazakhstan or whoever on the same footing . Ms Fraaizer picks it and adds on it.

The signal that came out of this mixed at best, and ambivalent at worst move and choice of the west, whether floated as tactical pie to lull the UIC and buy time allowing clear strategy, has already been picked by the Al Ilthad extremists of the UIC, and their regional state sponsors, mainly Eritrea. It has already been put in use by the UICto effectively facilitate the demise of the TFG in Baidoa without opening an all out military showdown (hence saving its military prowess from early onslaught). Rather the UIC has used it to entrench itself in Southern Somalia and by sticking to unpredictable but pragmatic moves milk from every opportunity and secure a highly needed legitimacy & breathing space (respice).

As noted by one Somali scholar, "the Somali Islamists have been fluid and elusive in outlining their true intentions. Repeatedly, they have vowed to hold peace talks with the fragile Transitional Government in Baidoa. But their rhetoric has not been matched by action. While they continually promise peace, they have relentlessly waged a violent campaign aimed at weakening the TNG and taking over the country. Banking on this the UIC, in the medium term amasses needed resources, set up networks and builds the capability required to embark on the final Jihad to clean the "infidels" in the Horn of Africa. Achieving the foundational basis in the campaign to reach their main goal i.e. the creation of an Islamic state, which stretches from the town of Jowhar in Somalia to that of Kasala in the Sudan?

Going further they demanded the exclusion & total sidelining of Ethiopia from Somali affairs as a condition to sit for Dialogue. The calculation is simple: While at the same time creating a wedge between the anti terror alliance in the horn, with the sole aim of marginalizing the relatively strong frontline state-Ethiopia. use the "powerful infidel" - the USA- to weaken the 'smaller infidel'- Ethiopia- which knows the UIC & Somalia better which is the regionally strong nation right next door to thwart its ascendance & entrenchment. Then America will get what it deserves, as it is the 'Giant infidel' that can not be cleansed nor accommodated.

The product, as seen evolving could not be anything but, morally bolstered and territorially entrenched jihadists UICs and their regional/international state/extremist sponsors. The target is the weakening of Ethiopia, and the possibility of any strong anti-terror coalition against them, (and before the "final touch") by playing both the temporary diplomatic card, plus by using measured opportunistic military moves and destabilizing attacks to be carried by different organized terrorist groups.

And the guarantee for its success: the international communities, particularly America's time and again proven track record of short changing allies, founded on its fashionable paradigm of unprincipled pragmatism. It feeds on, also, the West's/ America's unhealthy alarm at slightest defeat, both recent and old; priority to domestic political dominance at the cost of equally important global engagements, plus the hegemonic in fight within the administration powerful wings-defense, intelligence, foreign affairs. For example, when the Islamists took control of Mogadishu, President Bush said his "first concern, of course, is to make sure that Somalia does not become an al-Qaida safe haven -- it doesn't become a place from which terrorists can plot and plan." But the U.S. State Department has stopped short of taking sides, calling on the transitional government and Islamists to negotiate a power-sharing deal. "Washington's ability to influence events is handicapped by **a lack of urgency within** the administration "toward events in Somalia.

Conclusion: *Unhealthy alarm and unprincipled Pragmatism*

In most cases the West never lacked Just causes or the right reasons; but it has always denied it self effective translation by sticking to Ossified and/or self effacing analysis and Half baked solutions: not to mention its fragmented & hasty moves. In the fight against jihadist's or other form of terror, the international community and the US in particular, can not achieve a globally supported victory sustained only by a lone might, and while carrying competing values of dwarfing weight. Putting plans from Ivory towers in distant placer is ok: but translating it in to action requires making it face the test of reality i.e. the inputs of those who breathe & live it. And this calls for shedding the '**we know it & have it all**' arrogance displayed in the conduct with others as well as within the ranks of its various think-tanks, and policy makers

Based on such expert advice feeding especially on domestic public opinion many Westerners fear that support for the transitional government would be interpreted by the UIC as interference in Somalia's affairs, and given the weakness of the Baidoa government, it would also likely be counterproductive. But none is unfounded as is this. The attempt of undoing overseas entanglements also allows neither correction nor full learning, and not continuity for sure. Rather, it imposes retreat and at best rehashed perceptions sure to entail renewed damage as is the case with what we have been seeing in the case of the UIC in Somalia.

Pragmatism though highly required & good, smacks integrity and trust if not anchored on clear principles. This is more pronounced, particularly in this part of the world where, in the face of a scorching poverty & lack these values are survival inputs. It does not lend credibility among allies, and surely not respect among foes. In fact, being awash with a history of unsettled accounts from similar deeds, as is the case with US engagement elsewhere, it makes reaction strong and disgust entrenched.

Yes, practical consideration of the political interests of differing stake holders weighs heavy in making choice from among available options, and makes that of pushing for actual setups a difficult process. Equally, relegating brutal facts on the ground impacting the preservation or sustenance of such interests will be an assured suicide for each actor, and that of shared death for all stake holders. Hence, it's potential to be harnessed as a useful counter check supplied by reality to bring actors in line. Otherwise a much emboldened UIC and an international jihad would only be, not a remote headache, but a very intractable pain close by every one's home.