SOMALIA MATTERS

The ongoing humanitarian crises and a lack of effective governance has made Somalia fertile soil for extremism, fueling instability in the region and raising security concerns in the US and worldwide. The recent attacks in Kenya serve as a tragic reminder that Al-Shabab remains agile, and real stability is urgently needed in the Horn.

A more stable Somalia can dry up public support for extremist activities, begin addressing the serious refugee crisis, and contribute to regional stability. 130,000 Somali Americans are also longing for peace in the region.

Dimensions of the CONFLICT

- Inability to achieve basic economic survival has pushed Somalis to seek refuge through clan and regional affiliations, or join militant groups.  
- Traditionally marginalized clans also lend support to militants as long as there is no place for them in the political system.
- Mistrust towards the state, clan divisions and the lack of successful social reconciliation create obstacles for the reconstruction of the Somali state and the reform of the security sector.

“I didn’t have a job. They told me you will get a lot of money, a bungalow and go to paradise.”  
— Ahmed, 26, former Shabaab militant

Engaging former and potential fighters and creating opportunities for reintegration is essential for achieving security and development in Somalia.

CHALLENGES FOR US STRATEGY

US policy seeks to establish an effective state, a stable society, and to preventing Somalia from being a haven for terrorism. Transitional Initiatives for Stabilization (TIS) is the main USAID program supporting these goals. Foreign Assistance for FY2015 suggests a strong focus on security, with 60% going to Stabilization Operations and Security Sector Reform.  

Stabilization Operations and Security Sector Reform alone cannot stabilize Somalia. Development, accountable institutions and service delivery, and community-owned reconciliation processes are critical. Until Somalis see concrete indications of improvement in these areas, they will continue to seek protection outside of the state, including joining armed opposition groups.
AN ALTERNATIVE APPROACH

The establishment of the Somali Federal Government in 2012 was an important step towards reconciliation and inclusionary politics. Somali authorities have reached out to al-Shabaab leaders, accomplishing high level defections and transforming opponents into stakeholders in the national reconciliation effort.

Development programs in the northern provinces of Somaliland and Puntland have spurred growth creating a better trajectory for the local economies and improving local governance and accountability. These programs can serve as models for culturally-aware development for the rest of Somalia.

"As [al-Shabaab was] pushed out, they bled into the community and just waited for the next opportunity".  
— Ambassador Sherman

RECOMMENDATIONS:

• Support the participation of clan leaders and opposition fighters in the peace process.
  Not all al-Shabaab supporters are extremists. Several marginalized clan leaders have joined the group to express broadly shared grievances. Excluding such stakeholders will perpetuate violence and further radicalize Somali society. Giving ex-militants ways to abandon extremism and join political discourse is essential for the expansion of the Federal State and the restoration of governance.

• Expand funds for long-term reconciliation and political inclusion.
  TIS has mainly concentrated on stabilization, focusing on a narrow set of recovered areas over a short time frame. A more comprehensive approach that prioritizes inclusion and good governance is essential for achieving stability in Somalia and uprooting support for extremism. Providing funds for long-term reconciliation and political inclusion will consolidate political gains to date and ensure their sustainability.

• Increase programs for development in areas formerly controlled by al-Shabaab.
  Young men who feel respected are less likely to join extremist movements. Partnering with the Federal Government, local stakeholders and civil society, the United States should expand development to areas still transitioning from the control of al-Shabaab. Increasing programs in Central and Southern Somalia will provide Somalis with sustainable sources of income and increase resilience.

Sources:
3. USIP, “US Foreign Policy in Somalia: Remarks by Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs Wendy Sherman”
4. USIP, “US Foreign Policy in Somalia: Remarks by Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs Wendy Sherman”

Additional readings:
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