Africa Programme Meeting Summary

British Government Consultation with the UK-based Somali Diaspora

8 February 2012

INTRODUCTION

In February 2012, Chatham House hosted a consultation between members of the UK-based Somali diaspora and British government officials. To begin the consultation, a roundtable discussion took place under the Chatham House Rule to facilitate open discussion on key issues. These reflected three of the main agenda items of the British Government's London Conference on Somalia: political transition, security and the role of Somalia's regions. The following document is a summary of the discussions and views presented by Somali diaspora attendees at the roundtable meeting.

1. POLITICAL TRANSITION

1.1 International support for a Somali-owned transition process

One participant described the combination of high expectations and mixed feelings about the London Conference, and said that the international community must be prepared for the possibility that its current efforts might fail. The creation of a 'Friends of Somalia' group, including a number of concerned countries coming together to aid Somali-led efforts to take forward the peace process, was proposed. The establishment of a 'know-how fund' that could be used by the international community to transfer capacities to Somalia over the long-term was suggested. Institutional capacity building is essential in overcoming conflicts within Parliament that stall progress and quickly become personal grudges.

1.2 The Garowe process and representation in the Consultative Assembly

Those in favour of the Garowe process lauded it as the first Somali-led attempt to pursue a peaceful political transition in Somalia. It was argued that in order to be representative the process had to be widely consulted on. One participant warned that any overt international involvement in the process would risk being perceived by Somalis as intrusive.

It was questioned whether a Constituent Assembly could be truly representative if its members were only selected by the signatories of the Roadmap. There was a further question about whether the international community's vision for the Constituent Assembly went beyond that envisaged in the Garowe Principles of a straight yes or no referendum on the constitution.

Some participants argued that the Garowe Principles entail a clan bias by perpetuating the 4.5 principle of power-sharing and because its creators and signatories were not fully representative. Others maintained that Somalis should be able to modify the Garowe Principles, particularly in order to allow a longer timeframe for the selection of the Constituent Assembly to take place. It was suggested that to increase legitimacy a group of elders from each sub-clan should be allowed to pick the members of the Assembly, but should not be permitted to select themselves. The broader consultation planned at the Garowe II meeting was welcomed by some participants.

1.3 A legitimate executive authority to succeed the TFG

Many Somalis present agreed that the TFG's mandate should not be extended further, and that the transition should end in August 2012. While the TFG Roadmap and Garowe process were

seen as a good start, the current situation was described as being like 'a map without a road'. One participant stated that speaking of 'ending the transition' was disingenuous, as only democratic elections could end the process.

1.4 Representation of people living under Al Shabaab rule in southern Somalia

Somali attendees emphasised the need for careful consideration of how populations in Al Shabaab-controlled areas could become involved in the political process without risk to their lives. Kenyan and Ethiopian incursions in these areas made the situation more problematic.

Some participants argued that the clan was most useful at the level of social reconciliation, rather than political reconciliation, and that representation should be regionally-based – involving civil society and organised Islamist movements – rather than purely clan-based. Others argued that traditional elders were now the only truly representative authorities for Somalis. Involving clan elders from southern Somalia in discussions could enable the inclusion of views of people from those areas without direct engagement with Al Shabaab.

2. SECURITY

2.1 An enhanced AMISOM mandate

Some participants criticised the international community's position of attempting to reinforce Somalia's security through AMISOM. For some, AMISOM's presence was seen as a continuation of the Ethiopian occupation. The 'Christian' nature of AMISOM troops added to distrust of the force. This might be eased by the inclusion of soldiers from countries such as Turkey. An Islamic presence within AMISOM would also undermine Al Shabaab propaganda. The introduction of a central authority to supervise all foreign troops, co-ordinate fighting and ensure that salaries were paid regularly - particularly to soldiers in peripheral regions - was suggested. AMISOM's remit should also be reconsidered: although it now had the mandate to use force, it lacked sufficient troop capacity to do so. Some participants recognised that small but significant security improvements had been made in the past year, primarily by AMISOM troops, allowing some space within Mogadishu for the political transition to gain some traction.

2.2 An indigenous security presence

Participants argued for urgent action to be taken to build Somalia's own security institutions. Internationally, support for AMISOM was prioritised over the Somali army, which currently lacked training and discipline. One participant highlighted the challenges facing Somali troops, who lack barracks in Mogadishu and are paid less than their AMISOM counterparts. A future Somali army should have sufficient and coordinated training: currently soldiers receive a variety of training in different countries. The Somali military and police forces should coordinate better.

2.3 Incursions by foreign forces

Participants argued that tacit acceptance by the international community of Kenyan and Ethiopian interventions was damaging and could strengthen Al Shabaab. The formulation of a timetable to withdraw these operations, as well as that of AMISOM, may bring some reassurance.

A participant argued that Somalia's neighbours had a responsibility to abide by international humanitarian and refugee law when dealing with refugees and internally-displaced people (IDPs), including not returning people to southern Somalia as the security situation remains volatile.

2.4 Al Shabaab

Civilians who have supported Al Shabaab need to be convinced that its motives and actions are not in Somalia's interests. Participants pointed out that young Al Shabaab fighters were motivated by greed rather than ideology, and so could be rehabilitated. Al Shabaab's poor response to last year's famine weakened its legitimacy.

Some Somalis expressed the view that negotiating with Al Shabaab would destabilise the political transition. Others argued that some elements had legitimate grievances and should be included in the political debate. It was suggested that before regions in southern Somalia could be integrated into the national political process, Al Shabaab needed to be eliminated from certain areas.

2.5 The role of Somalia's justice sector

Participants pointed out that the process of moving from the TFG to new governance arrangements should be used as an opportunity to filter out those who had used violence for their own ends and acted with impunity. Somalis want to be assured that those who had been implicated in piracy, terrorism and alleged war crimes were not permitted to participate in any future political settlement. Questions were asked as to whether those who had committed crimes in the course of Somalia's conflict would be held accountable. There were calls for the involvement of the International Criminal Court or the establishment of a commission of enquiry with the authority to investigate war crimes and prosecute.

2. 6 A land-based solution for piracy

Participants explained that piracy was not seen as a pressing problem for ordinary Somalis. It was suggested that piracy could be dealt with in a cost-effective way through better state institutions and development within fishing communities.

3. THE ROLE OF THE REGIONS

3.1 Somaliland and Puntland as 'best practice' examples for achieving stability

Some participants argued that it was very obvious that Somaliland and Puntland's bottom-up, community-owned approaches should provide lessons for the rest of the country, but others maintained that the challenges of south-central Somalia were much more complex than those of these more tribally homogenous areas. For example, the experience of agro-pastoralists in south-central Somalia has received little attention.

It was also pointed out that the more stable regions of Somaliland and Puntland had not been subject to external interventions as south-central Somalia had. Some argued that the presence of

competing forces in south-central prevented stabilisation. Somalilanders expressed concern that the ongoing political process in Somalia could dilute their campaign for independence.

3.2 Possible risks in supporting regional entities and risk mitigation

Participants argued that the international community risked adding to fragmentation within Somalia by supporting clan-based interests. Fears were expressed about the break-up of Somalia into an increasing number of sub-national entities, many based on clan interests. One attendee maintained that federalism should take a regional approach and not a clan-based approach, which could risk violence.

Participants warned against a simplistic portrayal of Somaliland, as it has claimed authority over the contested areas of Sool, Sanaag and Cayn (SSC), where fighting has occurred. Members of the SSC community maintained that they had a right to self-determination and wanted to be part of a unified Somalia, not Somaliland.

3.3 Working with the diaspora in support of Somalia's regions

Although highly organised, politically engaged and able to channel remittances back to Somalia worth at least US $1bn, some participants argued that the international community needed to take a nuanced approach to its engagement with the Somali diaspora. Not all of the diaspora has relinquished tribal or clan-based interests, and some may not maintain up-to-date knowledge of Somalia.

The creation of an umbrella diaspora organization that understood current issues within Somalia and supported the development of human rights and the rule of law – and related institutions – was suggested. Participants asked the UK to utilise its experience of capacity-building to develop institutions that supported the rule of law, to aid service delivery and to train future leaders in these sectors. The diaspora is uniquely placed to deliver basic skills training and Somalis with particular abilities should be encouraged to stay in Somalia. Their knowledge of the situation on the ground would give them increased legitimacy among local people.

CONCLUSION

Somali diaspora participants in this consultation expressed their main concerns for Somalia ahead of the London Conference on 23 February 2012. These included the need to end the TFG's mandate and replace it with a more representative body; the importance of bolstering a capable indigenous security force to combat Al Shabaab; and the need for the international community to make efforts to improve stability by supporting the involvement of local communities in a bottom-up political process. Many participants welcomed the initiative of the UK in convening the Conference.