Africa Programme Meeting Summary

Somalia after the Conferences

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Using the London and Istanbul II Conferences as a starting point, the speaker assessed the challenges remaining before the end of Somalia’s Transition Roadmap. By setting a date for the end of the transition, the main international backers of the Roadmap – the African Union (AU), United Nations (UN), US and UK - risk ignoring the challenges that lie ahead. These include the forthcoming presidential elections, the selection of parliamentarians and the final drafting of the Constitution. Although the Roadmap will end in August 2012, it is clear that it will not conclude the transitional process. The transition will continue and will be a major challenge for the incoming government.

There is a sense of change in south-central Somalia. There has been an economic shift in Mogadishu and Somalis have an increasing willingness to seek peace. This has been fostered by the military presence of the AU Mission in Somalia (AMISOM) and incursions by Ethiopia and Kenya, enabling civil society organisations and private sector investors to concentrate on the country’s reconstruction. Somalis need to capitalise on this momentum.

Despite clear examples that the situation is shifting in south-central Somalia, serious challenges remain:

Food Security: The country has faced, and will continue to face, massive famines. The local and international response in 2011 was late but eventually bolstered food security in large parts of the region. Approximately two and a half million people in south-central Somalia remain in the ‘Crisis or Emergency’ category of the Famine Early Warning Systems Network’s (FEWSNet) classification system and continued military operations will worsen the situation.

Al Shabaab: The group will remain a threat. It has lost significant amounts of urban territory, which shows that there are signs of a shift in Somalia. However, the group retains an asset base and the capability to conduct a campaign against AMISOM. The international presence in Somalia could create an insurgency similar to the one against the Ethiopian incursion of 2006-09. Combined with clan conflicts and clan militia alliances, the situation could destabilise south-central Somalia, especially in rural areas where al Shabaab retains influence. The main challenge for Somalia’s transition is to define who will take charge of the areas cleared by al Shabaab.

The Constitution: The constitution should be approved in early July. The central question in the constitution-making process remains the role that
religion should play, and this question poses a risk for the incoming administration. The limited space for public debate and the lack of transparency will likely increase the demand for further amendments.

Recent international attention and diplomatic pressure have fed into the achievements (albeit extremely limited) of the Transitional Federal Government (TFG). There have been some suggestions that the international community would better serve the interests of the Somali population by backing a final, one-year extension of the Transitional Federal Charter. During this year, similar levels of pressure to those witnessed during the past six months could be kept up on the TFG and the Transitional Federal Parliament to encourage improvements in service delivery, while a more inclusive consultation could be carried out over the draft constitution.

*The Spoilers:* Dissenters against the Roadmap have been labelled ‘spoilers’. Those who disagree with the signatories of the Roadmap, the Inter-Governmental Authority on Development (IGAD), the AU, UN and important Western backers, are left out of the transition process. The fact that there is no opportunity for these spoilers to discuss the process is a missed opportunity.

A newly elected government will not be able to deliver improvements based simply on a constitution. The security-based focus of the TFG is not broad enough in scope enough to build Somalia’s future. The emphasis must be put on service delivery.

The aim of the London Conference was to improve coordination between international actors and donors, and between groups on the ground. There is momentum to capitalise on Western support, including from Turkey and Iran, and to increase international cooperation and mitigate the perception of an imposed solution by Western backers.
Nuradin Dirie

The discussant assessed the external influences in Somalia and the challenges ahead, arguing that the transition process should not be extended as it is time for Somalia to look ahead and build a new government. Mr Dirie picked out a few points to examine:

More coordinated international action: At the London Conference, there were discussions about the importance of coordinating intervention. Conference participants discussed Turkey’s intervention in Somalia, which is perceived to take a different approach from the Western intervention, delivering many positive results to Somalia’s development. The Turkish government is taking risks to respond to Somalia’s demands and needs by building hospitals, schools and roads, and by bringing Turkish Airlines to reconnect Somalia to the rest of the world.

Neighbouring countries and regional security: If there is no over-arching coordination of the goals of the Ethiopian and Kenyan incursions, the involvement of these two countries will only worsen the current situation, with potential impact on their own territories. The international response to Somalia should be led by an African; that person should be a politician and not a diplomat, someone who relishes arguing and discussing controversial issues.

Despite several challenges, international pressure is starting to influence the process of government building in Somalia. For example, it has been agreed that thirty per cent of representatives in the next government should be women and efforts are being undertaken to achieve this level despite the difficulty. There is also an intense debate over the constitution-making process, as well as over issues such as federalism and religion. The main problem with the constitution-making process is the lack of transparency from the signatories of the Roadmap. However, these debates are positive for Somalia, as in the past debate has centred on clans, guns and domination.
Q&A SESSION

Question:

What is the likelihood of another Roadmap being drawn up?

Jason Mosley:

There is no sign of procedural delay which might hinder the signatories from finalising the process. But a deterioration of the security situation in Somalia could postpone the final date. Once the process is finalised, there will not be elections for the Parliament. 250 members of parliament will be chosen according to the 4.5 formula. The main issue after the Roadmap will be deciding how to deal with a longer transitional phase. A new government will be elected soon, but its ability to deal with the transition phase will determine how long it will stay in power.

Question:

What is the implication of the term ‘spoilers’? Was it legal for the TFG to decide on the new constitution rather than the Parliament? The London Conference should have created the necessary conditions for a Parliament to be responsible for the constitution and not a small number of signatories.

Nuradin Dirie:

The international profile of Somalia has increased since the London Conference. It is unlikely that spoilers will disrupt the Roadmap. Looking at the legal aspect of the constitution-making process, the most important point is that something is done. The next government will have the responsibility of finalising everything, but at least the basis will be laid. Somalia as a whole is responsible through the Roadmap that has been decided upon.

Question:

Do you think that the 4.5 million people who wish to separate Somaliland will remain an issue for the future of Somalia?

Jason Mosley:

A reconciliation process is needed in Somalia for Somaliland to be taken into consideration in the discussion. Somaliland’s trajectory is not altered by what is happening in Mogadishu but it must not be forgotten that not everyone from Somaliland wants recognised separation from Somalia.
An important consequence of the London Conference is the role of Somaliland in the peace process. It is the first time in Somalia’s history that Somaliland has been given the right to get involved. This has increased Somaliland’s confidence and will eventually increase its calls for sovereignty. During the London Conference, Somaliland played a mature role, building confidence without decreasing its demand for recognition.

**Question:**

What can be said about the high number of people competing for presidency?

**Nuradin Dirie:**

Sharif Hassan has a chance of becoming the next President, he is the frontrunner. Whether he wins or not, he will keep playing an important role in Somalia’s future.

**Question:**

Do you have any information about the issue of property restitution for people who wish to return home?

**Nuradin Dirie:**

The issue of property was not mentioned in the last constitution. In the new constitution draft, the right to property is at least mentioned.

**Question:**

There are potentially vast oil reserves in Somalia, how will this affect the political situation in the country?

**Nuradin Dirie:**

If oil is discovered in Somalia it could be both positive and negative for the country. Government security will be a key element in dealing with oil resources. Contracts and negotiations will have to be transparent to prevent conflict; otherwise it will become a curse.