SOMALIA | Trends in Conflict and Cooperation

POLITICAL

On 15 July, the Transitional Federal Government (TFG) organized the long-awaited National Reconciliation Conference (NRC) in Mogadishu. External actors described the NRC as the last best chance for Somalia’s troubled TFG to bring national consolidation and broaden its public support. But so far the progress of the NRC, both in terms of establishing political front and gaining external support, has not been promising.

The first phase of the NRC, the so-called social phase, officially ended although the crucial representation of all clan segments and conflict parties had never been achieved. Important representatives especially from the Habr Gedir as well as of the Islamic Courts (IC) remained absent. Some of the boycotters seemed to change their preference for a full Ethiopian withdrawal before the NRC to the prospect (and plan) of an Ethiopian withdrawal after the NRC. Meanwhile, the rather directive leadership of the National Governance and Reconciliation Committee (NGRC) and the closing of the first phase of the conference did not give cause for optimism that the conference would come up with constructive and meaningful results. It had lost all credentials of being a “process”, and was merely considered, especially by the international community, as a potential “framework” for unforeseen initiatives to break Somalia’s political deadlock.

Wrangling behind the scenes as to when to finish the congress had been going on for a while. Both the chairman, Ali Mahdi and PM Gedi, are believed to have sought a quick closure of the NRC. The PM was allegedly afraid of losing power due to the growing influence of Ali Mahdi as a political competitor, who encouraged the closure in order to better position himself as a potential successor to Gedi. The president of the TFG had indicated his interest of using the conference to further develop the Transitional Charter with regard to the development of a multi-party democracy. However, this only translated into a fairly abstract announcement of elections for 2009. The conference eventually closed on 30 August with no measurable impact on the conflict in the country.

The progress in regional consolidation remains ambivalent. The TFG focuses its energies on broadening and strengthening the TFG army as the main backbone of its power. Reports indicate that 4,500 new soldiers were trained and as a result of talks between the TFG and Puntland, the regional “police” militia (Darawishtay) has been placed under the command of the army. These developments are accompanied by indications that a new offensive against centers of the armed opposition could be imminent, targeting hideouts among IDP populations in particular.

Politically, Puntland has become increasingly more fragile during the reporting period. This has been caused by strong inflation resulting from uncontrolled distribution of fresh currency imports, weakened public security, and the kidnapping of and threats against aid workers. Somaliland also continued to be caught in a political stalemate primarily between the executive branch and the House of Representatives. At the end of July, three leaders of Qaran party and some of a non-registered political opposition group were imprisoned, which seriously deteriorated the political climate. At the beginning of August, a civil society mediation committee initiated dialog, which led to a breakthrough on 22 August.

SECURITY

As depicted on the risk map, there were no measurable improvements in security in Mogadishu. On 2 August, the hard-line militia of the former IC groups fired rockets and mortar bombs at Somali security forces in the capital Mogadishu, killing at least 10 people. On 9 August, insurgents carried out attacks on five police stations in the capital, including Howlwadag police station (a former military base) and three other compounds. Two police officers were wounded in the fighting. On 15 August, in Afgoye, near Mogadishu, government soldiers were assaulted by unknown people who threw a grenade at a livestock market. Since 8 August fighting occurred on a daily basis between government troops and insurgents around the SOS Children’s Village in Mogadishu where insurgents are believed to be hiding. On 20 August, the fighting lasted over an hour including a mortar attack on the road between the SOS Children’s Village and the SOS Hospital that left three people wounded.

On 11 August, four men gunned down HornAfrik journalist Mahad Ahmed Elmi. On the same day, Ali Imran Sharmarke, founder and chairman of the very same radio station, was killed in his car by a remotely detonated device. Two other journalists traveling in Sharmarke’s car escaped with injuries. A third journalist, Abdihamik Omar Jimale from Radio Mogadishu, was also the victim of an assassination. On 19 August, the shooting of the chief negotiator of PM Gedi’s sub-clan (the Abgal) by unknown gunmen at a reconciliation conference reportedly sparked heavy fighting in the neighboring Huriwa district of Mogadishu.

In response to the insurgents’ raid on police stations and multiple attacks, the Ethiopian and TFG forces launched a crackdown of suspected anti-government elements. Dozens of suspected insurgents were arrested in an intensified police operation over the past two weeks. The TFG also created a Baghdad-style safe “Green Zone” in
Insurgency and counterinsurgency also drove thousands of civilians out of Mogadishu, forcing them to live in squalid camps on the outskirts of the capital, where they have limited access to food and water, lack shelter, medical and sanitation facilities. It is estimated that 30,000 additional IDPs have fled Mogadishu from July to 17 August. On 20 August, Médecins sans Frontières reported that violence in Mogadishu alarmingly decreased access to medical care and assistance for civilians and displaced persons in and around the Somali capital. In addition to IDPs, population movement tracking indicates that violence evicted 5,300 people from their homes from June to 15 August. Some are forced to live on the street and others are undertaking the risky and illegal trip to the Gulf States.

During the reporting period, insurgency and counterinsurgency resulted in numerous civilian causalities. In August, human right groups and aid agencies claimed that insurgent attacks and the TFG counterinsurgency are the main causes of massive human suffering in Somalia. Aid agencies also reported that the TFG security measures impeded humanitarian activities by restricting the movement of humanitarian supplies and staff. They also claimed that a government-imposed curfew prevented people in urgent need of medical care from reaching health facilities and also put some people’s livelihood at risk.

Overall insecurity created huge impediments on aid delivery and people movement in Somalia. Large numbers of roadblocks (238) have been established all over South Central Somalia in order to impose taxes on humanitarian commodities. The roadblocks on the main road between Kismayo and Jilib (Juba Region) continue to hinder the movement of humanitarian supplies and people. Since early August, some 50,000 IDPs who are in need of humanitarian intervention around Galkayo were left without any support following the evacuation of staff working for aid agencies due to the growing security threats against expatriate staff.

Insurgency and counterinsurgency also drove thousands of civilians out of Mogadishu, forcing them to live in squalid camps on the outskirts of the capital, where they have limited access to food and water, lack shelter, medical and sanitation facilities. It is estimated that 30,000 additional IDPs have fled Mogadishu from July to 17 August. On 20 August, Médecins sans Frontières reported that violence in Mogadishu alarmingly decreased access to medical care and assistance for civilians and displaced persons in and around the Somali capital. In addition to IDPs, population movement tracking indicates that violence evicted 5,300 people from their homes from June to 15 August. Some are forced to live on the street and others are undertaking the risky and illegal trip to the Gulf States.

The failure of the TFG to embark on reconciliation and all-inclusive power-sharing negotiations, as encouraged by external actors, prevented the deployment of the AMISOM stabilization mission. The unpopular Ethiopian forces continue to be a major source of internal and regional instability in Somalia. The planned African Union (AU) deployment of about 8,000 troops is still stalled with only 1,600 Ugandan peacekeepers on the ground and restricted to small enclaves in Mogadishu. However, the launch of the NRC allowed the TFG, particularly PM Gedi, to raise significant financial assistance during recent foreign trips to Saudi Arabia and elsewhere. Exiled leaders of the Islamic Courts stated that US sources provided USD $32 million to Gedi and the TFG.

Although the AU has recently renewed it mandate in Somalia for another six months, the only possible extra deployment consists of 1,000 Burundian troops. Other African states, which have vowed to join the AMISOM stabilization mission, are still reluctant to deploy more troops due to the domestic unpopularity of the mission, inadequate funding from Western powers and the increase of insurgent attacks against the TFG and the Ethiopian occupying forces. The success of AU peacekeeping forces in securing Somalia remains doubtful since the population increasingly rejects them. In April, following the attack on AU forces, the UN considered a contingency plan to replace the AU with UN troops, but its progress was conditional on the TFG’s political progress. African nations pressed the UN to supply more peacekeepers and called on the UN to take over the AU mission, whereas the UN envoy to Somalia stressed that a UN mission will continue to depend on the TFG’s political progress.

In the absence of a workable international peacekeeping mission, external actors (including the US) are increasingly focusing on strengthening Somalia’s army. Thus, Uganda has added some 250 training officers to its mission and Somali officers have undergone training in Rwanda since May.

As long as several key political opposition groups and the larger fraction of the Hawiye clan family continue to boycott the NRC, true reconciliation among the major players in Somalia is unlikely. The TFG will remain in the foreseeable future as a vehicle for particularistic interests, not all of which are in agreement. Clan and political rivalries will continue to play an important role in the battle for Mogadishu between the TFG and insurgents. The failure of this year’s seasonal rains and the growing inflation will further amplify the crisis.

Contact
FAST International
Country Team: Somalia
Sonnenbergstrasse 17
3000 Bern 7
Switzerland
somalia@swisspeace.ch
www.swisspeace.org

FAST International is the early warning program of swisspeace, covering 25 countries/regions in Africa, Asia and Europe. Based in Bern, Switzerland, the program is funded and utilized by an international consortium of development agencies, including the Austrian Development Agency (AD), the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA), the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida) and the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC).

www.swisspeace.org