



## Somalia: a hotbed of uncertainty

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**Somalia has found itself in the headlines again over the last few weeks. Abductions of western citizens, the retreat of Shabaab Islamists and the signature of a road map all suggest a turnaround in Somali power struggles and strategies. However, huge uncertainty remains about the future of the territory, which has been in crisis ever since 1991, forcing Europeans and the European Union to remain committed to searching for a political solution. The coming year may prove decisive in breaking the vicious circle of failed reconciliation attempts between the parties in Somalia, and could represent a step towards improved security in the region, despite unresolved issues concerning the consequences of Kenyan involvement.**

Somalia has held a special place on the African continent since 1991. As early as 2003, this was the opening statement of Jean-Christophe Mabire's article published in the review *Hérodote* (1). Ever since Dictator Siad Barre, who came to power in 1969, fled the country on 27<sup>th</sup> January 1991, Somalia has been a huge grey area that has been spreading violence and unrest beyond its borders. The international community has been forced to take action several times to deal with regional threats, right at the heart of the arc of crisis stretching from the Atlantic Ocean to the Indian Ocean, and has come up against considerable difficulties and crushing failures in the process.

Over the last few years however, the European Union has arrived on the scene. Despite being a new player on the Somali stage, it is playing an increasing role. Yet given the context of growing terrorist principles at regional level and of the allegiance shown by Kenyan soldiers on Somali soil, it is vital for the European Union to continue its commitment in order to reduce the risks and threats weighing on the Horn of Africa.

## European commitment in Somalia

The form taken by European commitment in Somalia, i.e. seeking preferably to contain the issue and to find a practical political solution, cannot be dissociated from the history of international involvement in the country since 1992. Current international involvement is haunted by ghosts of the past, resulting in a preference for indirect action. And although pirate attacks continue, the European operations being carried out in the region portray European states that are capable, from an institutional point of view, of acting in concert when it comes to security.

### Ghosts of the past

The commitment made by the international community in Somalia today cannot be dissociated from the history of failure and traumatism suffered in the first half of the 1990s.

On 3<sup>rd</sup> December 1992, whilst the war chiefs of the time and their fighters were busy monopolizing humanitarian aid, the UN voted Resolution 794 which authorised military forces to be sent in to establish the security conditions necessary for humanitarian operations in Somalia. On 9<sup>th</sup> December, UNITAF soldiers (*United Allied Forces*) arrived as part of the *Restore Hope* operation. The landing of American soldiers on Somali beaches was filmed by cameras from all the major international media channels, convincing everyone that the mission would be an easy one. As far as newly elected President Bill Clinton and his teams at the Whitehouse and the Pentagon were concerned, the task appeared technically simple – or in any case much simpler than attempting a mission in ex-Yugoslavia, one of the aims of getting involved in Somalia being precisely to avoid having to intervene in ex-Yugoslavia – because they thought that Somali armed groups would never dare oppose a well-organised, well-equipped force. What is more, the American administration thought that the flat, somewhat thorny geographical landscape would make it very difficult for the war chiefs to set up ambushes against American units as they escorted supply convoys from one part of the country to another (2).

At first, the international mission seemed to correspond to the expectations of the American administration but the task of the armed forces soon turned into an attempt to remove the war chiefs from a hypothetical peace process combined with an unsuccessful campaign against General Muhammad Farah Aidid, member of the Hawiye clan and head of the United Somali Congress since July 1991 (3). Given these circumstances, the situation in the field became tense. On 5<sup>th</sup> June 1993, 24 Pakistani soldiers were killed and twelve days later, a French detachment was called in to assist Moroccan troops who found themselves surrounded. The confrontations culminated in the events on 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> October 1993, during which two American UH-60 helicopters and 18 special forces soldiers were killed. Despite the withdrawal of the American units, the UN troops, which had since become UNOSOM II according to Resolution 814 dated 26<sup>th</sup> March 1993, remained in place until 6<sup>th</sup> March 1995. At this point however, the situation was far from resolved. During the two years of UN involvement, the Americans and the international community showed a complete lack of understanding of the situation and the way things worked in Somalia. Although international mediators envisaged using the clans to obtain a ceasefire, they put the representatives from all the different factions on equal footing instead of taking into account local customs and traditions, representativeness or power struggles between different clans. Worse still, the international force did not understand – or did not want to understand – that the war chiefs were also clan chiefs (4).

When Somalia found itself back in the headlines after the attacks of 11<sup>th</sup> September 2001, the United States decided to adopt an indirect approach, initially by sea and subsequently by land. In 2002, it set up *Combined Task Force 150* (5) as part of the *Enduring Freedom* operation in Afghanistan, one of the missions of which was to carry out maritime operations in the Gulf of Aden and on the east coast of Somalia. A few years later, the USA also gave Ethiopia its backing within

the UN, supporting Ethiopian plans to re-establish the authority of the transition federal government. However, the arrival of Ethiopian soldiers in Mogadishu on 28<sup>th</sup> December 2006 did not put an end to the fighting and by the time they left the country on 26<sup>th</sup> January 2009, the 8 000 AMISOM soldiers sent in by the African Union to take over only controlled a small part of the capital.

## Success in grey

The United States returned to the Horn of Africa following the attacks of 11<sup>th</sup> September, but so did Europeans and the European Union as part of their fight against terrorism under the auspices of the United States. Several European countries even took part in maritime operations in the Gulf of Aden and on the east coast of Somalia as part of the *Combined Task Force 150*.

The European Union as such is also directly committed to the Somali issue within the framework of the EUNAVFOR Somalia ATALANTA operation launched in December 2008 and extended by the Council of the European Union for a further two years on 7<sup>th</sup> December 2010. The aims of Atalante, which is the European Union's first naval operation, are to give protection to ships chartered by the World Food Programme, to protect merchant ships and to fight against piracy. On 14<sup>th</sup> April 2011, over twenty ships and aircraft were taking part in the operation, i.e. over 1 800 soldiers from Holland, Spain, Germany, France, Greece, Sweden, Italy, Belgium, Luxembourg and Estonia. Other countries followed suit, i.e. Norway, Croatia, Montenegro and the Ukraine, together with European countries whose commitment was restricted to supplying administrative staff.

Within the greyness of the Europe of Defence, Europeans regard the commitment in Somalia as a success in terms of their ability to work out a response to a common crisis, but the EUNAVFOR-ATALANTA operation is just a small part of the action taken by the European Union in the Horn of Africa. The EU also supports the Djibouti process for peace and reconciliation in Somalia (6), under the auspices of the United Nations, provides financial assistance to AMISOM soldiers (*African Union Mission in Somalia*), particularly in the fields of support and planning, as well as supplying the resources needed to protect the ships that supply them. It is the leading backer of development aid for Somalia. Lastly, on 7<sup>th</sup> April 2010, the EU Council launched the military mission EUTM Somalia designed to train the Somali transition government forces in Uganda and comprising 150 soldiers from around fifteen member countries. The mission should originally have been completed in August 2011, but has since been extended by a year, in particular in order to train local specialists and instructors.

With this in mind, the commitment made by the European Union and Europeans appears to be a success. Joint action in the security field is possible in support of developmental actions, with complementary initiatives being carried out by an external service and voluntary partners. However, at the same time, the European approach needs to be put into perspective given the recent changes which have taken place locally. The principle of protecting ships, training Somali soldiers, supporting AMISOM and backing a political process may well prove insufficient if there is no consistency.

## The processes behind Somali chaos

In the course of September and October 2011, terrorist incidents in Mogadishu and in neighbouring countries increased, including kidnappings of western nationals and bombings in Kenya. To cope with these threats of destabilisation, it is important for the European Union and the international community to continue to implement the measures currently being taken and to keep up the pressure on all those involved in the region in order to limit the risks of contagion and violence.

### Terrorist logic

On 10<sup>th</sup> October, AMISOM published a statement announcing that after 48 hours of joint operations with the forces of the transition government, they had taken the remaining strongholds still held by Shabaab militia (7) in the far north of Mogadishu. The statement went on to say that operations would now "focus on the environs of the city and policing within the liberated areas (8).

And yet six days earlier, on 4<sup>th</sup> October, a suicide attack involving a lorry bomb, for which the Shabaab claimed responsibility resulted in 70 deaths in the capital, Mogadishu. (The kamikaze justified the attack in his will as an act against Christians who "wanted to wear their crosses everywhere.") The bombing was perceived as an echo of the double attack in Kampala on 11<sup>th</sup> July 2010, the aim of which was to force the Ugandan government – the main AMISOM contributor – to withdraw its troops from Somalia. The lorry bomb also followed on from the abduction of humanitarian workers and British, French and Spanish citizens in the east of Kenya believed to be the work of the Shabaab. For several years, Somalia has been regarded as a grey area that is the home to criminals and various terrorist groups more or less related to Al Qaeda. Consequently, in June 2011, Comorian Fazul Abdullah Mohammed, *alias* Haroun al-Kamari, described by the American government as the head of Al Qaeda in Africa, was shot down during a police check in the Somali capital. His predecessor, Saleh Ali Saleh Nabhan, *alias* Abu Youssef al-Kini, was killed by an American air attack on 14<sup>th</sup> September 2009 in the village of Borow in southern Somalia.

At a time when the international terrorist organisation wishes to regain control of Africa under cover of Arab revolutions, the possibility of mutual reinforcement of terrorist processes in the Horn of Africa must not be ignored. It is true that diplomatic telegrams revealed by *Wikileaks* show that in 2010, American services were still expressing reservations about there being any significant links in terms of direct financial or military support for Al Qaeda from Iraq or Afghanistan (9). In their opinion, the sources supplying weapons and money to the Shabaab were mainly regional, i.e. from the Yemen and Eritrea. However, Al Qaeda's preoccupation with revolts and revolutions in North Africa and the recent multiplication of attacks and kidnappings in the Horn of Africa are trends that lead to fears of a growing relationship between the Shabaab and Al Qaeda focussing on the worst possible politics to substitute or complement other types of struggle in Somalia and neighbouring countries, or even of Al Qaeda's ideas influencing the local population, in Somalia or even in Kenya.

### Balancing act

The arrival of Kenyan troops in southern Somalia in mid-October to hunt down those responsible for the recent kidnappings of foreign nationals, a tactic which had in fact been discussed for two years (10), is not an appropriate long-term solution, and may even lead to an increase in violence and radicalisation. External political and military involvement, especially in a pre-modern society like Somalia, is bound to bring about a reaction of rejection locally, as the population are likely to perceive soldiers as invaders. The phenomenon of "accidental guerrilla" joining in attacks against foreign troops is not systematic and the relationships formed between Kenyans and Somali (part of the Kenyan population is in fact Somali) can counterbalance any feelings of confrontation. However,

we must not lose sight of the fact that it was the Ethiopian intervention between 2006 and 2009 which gave Osama Bin Laden's followers a window of opportunity to set up a base in Somalia and cooperate with local rebels, which fuelled the expansion of the Shabaab in two ways, through the contagion of their ideas and the rejection of the Ethiopian soldiers (11). In other words, a new foreign intervention could breathe new life into a movement which seems to be losing ground due to its politics in the regions under its control and because of its handling of famine (12).

The uncertainty weighing on Somalia leads us on to the issue of AMISOM capacities. Although the UN voted in favour of increasing numbers from 8 000 to 12 000 in December 2010, nine months later, there are still only 9 000 soldiers, almost all of whom are from the Uganda and Burundi. This is a vital point, as admitted at the same time by the spokesman of the African Union mission, given that 4 000 additional men would be enough to make Mogadishu secure (13). AMISOM is merely an emergency response, and the solution to the problem does not lie in the hands of an armed force, African or otherwise.

The meeting organised by the UN from 4<sup>th</sup> to 6<sup>th</sup> September 2011 to adopt a road map which was then signed by the transition federal government, the representatives of Puntland (14), of the Galmudug region (15) and of the Ahlus Sunnah wal Jamaah militia (16), is the main reason for hope that a political peace process can be established in Somalia. However, the fragile nature of the situation means that the international community, including the European Union and Europeans, must ensure that such a process is properly implemented by all those concerned, in accordance with the stages set out in the road map. In the same way, there are extensive regional ambitions at work in the Horn of Africa. Consequently, the game being played by regional players, starting with Eritrea, needs to be observed and analysed carefully. There is a huge challenge facing Somalia and its neighbours, not forgetting the million Somali refugees living beyond the country's borders.

From this point of view, the solution to the crisis in Somalia is only just starting to take shape. Finding a way out is above all a matter of maintaining international commitment, showing firmness to all the Somali players involved in the peace process, sticking to the calendar that has been adopted and coordinating closely with neighbouring states.

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(1) Jean-Christophe Mabire, "Somalie, l'interminable crise", *Hérodote*, 2003/4, N°111, pp. 57-80, p. 57.

(2) Jean-Christophe Mabire, *art. cit.*, p. 66.

(3) During the reign of Siad Barre, Aidid held the position of ambassador in India and was also head of the Somali secret service, before being arrested and put in prison for six years for treachery. The United Somali Congress was formed in 1989 with the aim of removing Siad Barre from power.

(4) Jean-Christophe Mabire, *art. cit.*, p. 68.

(5) *Combined Task Force 150* is a multinational naval operational force whose headquarters are found in Bahrain. It is responsible for monitoring the Indian Ocean in order to dissuade and prevent movements of terrorist groups and to fight against the trafficking that finances them. In January 2009, another international force, the *Combined Task Force 151*, was established especially to fight against piracy off the Somali coast.

(6) The basis for the Djibouti peace process is a peace treaty signed in 2008 by the transition federal government and the Alliance for the Re-liberation of Somalia (ARS), a movement founded after the defeat of the Islamic Courts Union (ICU) in 2006. The first stage in negotiations resulted in an agreement on the formation of a new government in early 2009, on the increase of Parliament numbers from 275 to 550 members, on the admission of MPs from the ARS and on the expansion of the government.

(7) The Shabaab militia, whose name means youth in Arabic, is based in southern and central Somalia. Its ideology is based on the creation of an Islamic State and the fight against the "unfaithful" in the Horn of Africa. Territories under its control must observe the Sharia.

(8) AMISOM press release dated 10<sup>th</sup> October 2011, available on <http://amisom-au.org/tfg-amisom-secure-remaining-al-shabaab-strongholds-in-mogadishu>.

(9) Jean-Philippe Rémy, "Wikileaks : les États-Unis minimisent l'influence d'Al-Qaida en Somalie", *Le Monde*, 8<sup>th</sup> December 2010.

- (10) Jean-Philippe Rémy, "Le Kenya entre dans la guerre en Somalie", *Le Monde*, 9<sup>th</sup> October 2011.
- (11) David Kilcullen, *The Accidental Guerrilla*, New York, Oxford University Press, 2009, p. 35 and pp. 204-208. In Eastern Timor in 1999, the international force in charge of putting an end to unrest on the island was regarded by the inhabitants as a reaction to the Indonesian "intervention".
- (12) Muhyadin Ahmed Roble, "Somalia's Famine Contributes to Popular Revolt against al-Shabaab Militants", *Terrorism Monitor*, Vol. 9, n°32, 12<sup>th</sup> August 2011, pp. 3-5, available on : [http://www.jamestown.org/uploads/media/TM\\_009\\_Issue32\\_01.pdf](http://www.jamestown.org/uploads/media/TM_009_Issue32_01.pdf).
- (13) Lieutenant-colonel Paddy Ankunda, "World must act fast on Somalia", *Hiiraan Online*, 30<sup>th</sup> September 2011, available on [http://www.hiiraan.com/op2/2011/sept/world\\_must\\_act\\_fast\\_on\\_somalia.aspx](http://www.hiiraan.com/op2/2011/sept/world_must_act_fast_on_somalia.aspx). We must add that AMISOM is not equipped and trained to carry out intense fighting, and this is not the aim of Uganda and Burundi.
- (14) Puntland is a region in north-eastern Somalia which declared its independence in 1998. The territory has an awkward relationship with the federal government. Therefore, on 16<sup>th</sup> January 2011, the Puntland authorities announced that they were officially breaking off all links with the transition government. In their statement announcing their decision, the Puntland authorities pointed a finger at the fact that they were under-represented within the transition government and that financial resources received from abroad had failed to be redistributed.
- (15) This is a semi-independent region located in south Puntland.
- (16) This religious militia took up arms against the Shabaab in June 2009.
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