

International Engagement in Somalia: The day after the New Deal

On 16 September 2013, Brussels is hosting the New Deal for Somalia Conference sponsored by the European Union (EU). Somalia will likely be the same on 17 September, the day after the New Deal Compact for Somalia is endorsed. The pact seeks to establish new rules of engagement between the donor community and Somalia. Most importantly, it offers a rare opportunity for both sides to chart a new collaborative framework anchored in mutual respect, transparency, and accountability.

To maximize impact, donors must develop a common vision for Somalia, coordinate efforts, and, most importantly, align their support with Somalia's national priorities. Realistic objectives must be agreed. Template solutions must be avoided. Somalia's challenges are as diverse as they are complex. Ultimately, the success of the Compact will be measured by the impact felt by ordinary Somalis throughout the country.

The Federal Government of Somalia (FGS) has an obligation to ensure international support corresponds with growing domestic legitimacy, through inclusive politics, concerted efforts to rebuild and strengthen government institutions, and the laying of foundations for a democratic political system. To regain and retain the confidence of its partners, the FGS must adopt a zero tolerance approach to corruption and nepotism.

Checked past

Since the collapse of the central government in 1991, the international community has repeatedly misread Somalia. In 1993, Somalia altered the convention of international interventions irrevocably. Following the end of the Cold War and the proxy war between Somalia and Ethiopia, the country slid rapidly into chaos prompting the launch of a United Nations peacekeeping operation. With the small UN force failing to secure a ceasefire among warring factions, U.S. President George H. W. Bush made the bold decision to lead a UN-sanctioned task force of 37,000 troops (almost 20,000 more than the current AMISOM force), introducing a new era of 'peace enforcement'.

Having miscalculated the complexity of the Somalia quagmire, and following the events of the now infamous 'Black Hawk Down' incident where 18 elite U.S. commandos were killed in Mogadishu, both the U.S. and UN were forced to abandon the country leaving it to sink further into anarchy. President Clinton's subsequent 'containment' approach focused on preventing chaos from spreading beyond the confines of the country. The events of 9/11 once again altered the agenda of international engagement in countries, such as Somalia, thought to be providing a safe haven for terrorists.

In 2006 when a popular uprising led by the Islamic Courts Union (ICU) introduced a degree of stability in south-central Somalia

for the first time since 1991, Ethiopia grew fearful of an Islamist-led government. By forcibly removing the ICU from power with the backing of the U.S., Ethiopia inadvertently emboldened a new breed of extremist Islamists under the banner of al-Shabaab, who would, within a few years, seize control of large swathes of territory and all major cities of southern Somalia. Al-Shabaab secured support from local populations by exploiting communal grievances and nationalist tendencies against foreign meddling that had, in many people's eyes, only exacerbated the suffering of the Somali people.

Competing external interests has also resulted in fragmented aid delivery. 'Traditional donors'—mostly western countries—have been suspicious of the rise and new influence of so-called 'non-traditional donors' in the developing world. Interactions between these two camps has often been difficult and at times demonstrated an unhealthy rivalry. The Somali people find such donor rivalry to be an unnecessary distraction to the largely common goals. Neighbouring countries continue to conflate legitimate security concerns with illegitimate security agendas resulting in attempts to balkanize the country in the process of establishing 'spheres of influence'. These attempts serve to further divide Somalia's already fractured society, adding to the challenge of national reconciliation.

Invaluable support

The international community has undoubtedly also saved many Somali lives. Humanitarian assistance during food shortages, particularly during the famines of 1991 and 2011, has prevented hundreds of thousands of people from dying of starvation and disease. International NGOs have in many instances replaced the national government and provided essential public services during prolonged periods when even the semblance of state institutions has been absent.

Countries as close as Kenya and as far as Australia have hosted Somali refugees for more than twenty years. Those that were able to rebuild their lives in their host countries have provided a lifeline to their remaining families through remittances, estimated to inject more than \$1 billion into the Somali economy each year. A UN sanctioned African Union peacekeeping force (AMISOM) pushed al-Shabaab out of Mogadishu in 2011 ushering in a period of relative stability that the national capital has not experienced since the short rule of the ICU. AMISOM currently remains the only shield standing between the fledgling SFG and the violence that enveloped the capital prior to its arrival.

Neighbouring countries have hosted a number of peace conferences for Somalis, mostly bankrolled by western donors. In the past 18 months alone, the United Kingdom and Turkey have also each hosted two international Somalia conferences; Japan hosted another. Ethiopia recently brokered an agreement between the leaders of the Jubba regions and the federal government, ending a prolonged stalemate between the two sides. Ethiopia has also offered to mediate between the SFG and Puntland. Turkey is mediating between the SFG and Somaliland.

The EU is hosting the next international Somalia conference on 16 September aimed exclusively at introducing the New Deal Compact – a new aid framework intended to support an “inclusive country-led and country-owned transition out of fragility.”

What is new about the New Deal?

The New Deal is designed to offer a “new beginning in the joint partnership between the Somali people and international community.” According to its advocates, under the New Deal Somalia’s development agenda will no longer be set by the donor community but will instead be agreed between the FGS, civil society, and the international community. Consultations with Somalis throughout the country, it is claimed, formed the basis of a ‘fragility assessment’ which, in turn, fed into a Compact that all international donors are asked to adhere to.

Conceived in partnership with the G7+, a “voluntary

association of countries that are or have been affected by conflict and are now in transition to the next stage of development,” the New Deal has been endorsed by international organizations including the UN, the World Bank, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), the EU, and the African Development Bank (AfDB), as well as number of major donors such as the UK, the U.S., France, Sweden, Norway, and Japan.

The principles of the New Deal—to work closely with Somalis in the provision of support—are certainly commendable. Historically, when assistance has been pledged, Somalis have been relegated to the muted role of desperate and dependent aid recipients. That this new arrangement emphasizes real ownership of aid and development priorities is an important departure from the status quo.

Whether the drafting of the forthcoming Compact has adhered to the principles of aid effectiveness as outlined in the New Deal preamble is, however, questionable. The Compact, apparently drafted by the UN, OECD, and the FGS, raises some concerns. The Compact claims to present “specific priorities drawn from the Six Pillar Programme of the FGS, and further defined through consultative processes.”

To what extent the participants of these consultative processes can be said to represent Somalia is unclear. And to what extent the outcomes of the consultative processes were incorporated into the Compact is also unclear. There is a risk that the Compact, despite being a ‘living document’ open to adaptation as the situation in Somalia evolves, will remain bound by the priorities of the international community and a select few federal politicians paying only lip service to the engagement of the third partner and ultimate beneficiaries of the Deal – the Somali people.

The Compact consists of a common set of Peacebuilding and Statebuilding Goals (PSGs), namely: Legitimate Politics; Security; Justice; Economic Foundations; and Revenues and Services. The suggested budget allocation to each PSG, as currently listed in a draft of the Compact, also calls into question the priorities of its drafters.

Of an estimated \$5.1 billion required to achieve all five peace-building and state-building objectives over three years (2014-2016) according to a recent draft of the Compact seen by HIPS prior to its release, less than 15 percent has been allocated to security, less than 10 percent to legitimate politics, and less than 2 percent to justice. That economic development, the provision of social services, and the collection of revenue are necessary for the prosperity of Somalia is not in dispute. All three national priorities, however, require a stable and secure environment, which the

current draft Compact's allocation of resources will struggle to support.

The consolidation of a national army, the demobilization of Somalia's myriad armed groups, and the dissolution of al-Shabaab are necessary yet daunting challenges. The campaign against al-Shabaab has stagnated with AMISOM spread thin, giving the militants time and space to regroup. Al-Shabaab attacks in Mogadishu have reached their highest levels since the group withdrew from the city in 2011.

The investment of substantial resources in economic development and social services while al-Shabaab remains in control of significant territories and continues to pose a severe threat to Mogadishu is premature and potentially wasteful. The importance of finalizing the Constitution and preparing for national elections also cannot be underestimated. It is hoped that the allocation of resources listed in the final Compact endorsed in Brussels will more accurately reflect the current priorities of Somalia.

Constructive engagement

The FGS is dependent on AMISOM for its survival, and international financial and diplomatic backing for its ability to function. This dependence leaves the FGS with limited room for maneuverability. The security situation in southern Somalia ensures that the 'going it alone' route is not an option for the FGS. Donors help set the agenda and pay or the FGS sets its agenda alone and crumbles. Following years in the unenviable position at the bottom of the Freedom House and Transparency International indexes, the international community is understandably reluctant to provide funding to the FGS without stringent oversight.

The New Deal framework, however, also emphasizes the importance of building government capacity to develop its own national agenda. Adherents to the Compact will pledge to pass aid through government institutions – local and national. Perhaps cognizant of the limited success of past international efforts, the Compact also puts the onus on the FGS to "ensure that international partners are supportive and constructive for peace, stability and development in Somalia." This acknowledgement of past failures and the commitment to strengthen the country's ability to navigate the path to peace and stability is a positive development.

The international community is not a homogenous entity but a multitude of states, organizations, and actors with divergent interests and priorities. To receive vital support Somalia has been forced to accommodate the often contradictory demands of its benefactors. Constructive engagement cannot be contradictory.

While states should be expected to continue to play

realpolitik in Somalia, a measure of the New Deal success will be its ability to harmonize the efforts of a multitude of actors committed to supporting peace in the region. In adhering to demands for financial accountability and transparency the FGS and Somali people also have the right to demand accountability and transparency of the international community in its commitment to the principles laid out in the New Deal.

The new UN Assistance Mission in Somalia (UNSOM), under the leadership of Nicholas Kay, has made a strong start in streamlining previously disparate UN agencies, and working alongside the FGS and civil society. To regain the trust of the Somali people the UN must continue to adhere to these principles and serve as a role model for other international actors operating in the country under the New Deal.

Conclusion

The FGS' authority does not currently extend beyond a few urban centers. As a result, many Somalis do not consider it to be the sole representative of the people of Somalia. The newly established Jubba Interim Administration recently forced it to acknowledge this reality. Puntland severed ties with the national government and repeatedly refers to it as the 'Mogadishu government'. Somaliland has long enjoyed special status.

These sovereignty constraints underscore the significance of pursuing a genuinely 'country-led' process and the importance of the FGS robustly engaging civil society. Greater consultation with civil society, within and beyond Mogadishu and including diaspora Somalis would likely have underscored the urgency of security and legitimate politics as Somalia's most pressing requirements and the necessary foundations for further development.

Still the New Deal offers the possibility of a new beginning for international engagement in Somalia. The Compact principles are a positive departure from the modus operandi hitherto and the flexibility of the 'living' Compact still makes possible genuine engagement of and input by civil society throughout the country. The commitment to the streamlining of international efforts in Somalia also represents an important departure from previous patterns of engagement.

Ultimately, the success of the New Deal depends on the commitment of the FGS and the international community to adhere its principles.

The way forward

The lessons that should have been learned from 23 years of checkered international involvement in Somalia are too many to count. Four benchmarks will, however, define the success or failure of the New Deal Compact.

First, fair and exploitation-free partnership is vital. Somalis felt helpless as an omnipotent international community prescribed solutions, including unwanted occupation, the backing of warlords, and other misguided policies. The New Deal Compact pledges to address this corrosive problem by calling for a partnership between donors, the government and the people. In this regard, consultations must be widened to effectively solicit 'citizen-driven' needs.

Second, respect for the sovereignty of Somalia is paramount. While it is crucial that Somalis overcome their deeply held differences through ongoing dialogue, the international community must respect the territorial and institutional integrity of Somalia. Self-serving interventions and the empowerment of subnational entities at the expense of national institutions has proven to be counterproductive. Support to regional administrations is crucial but must not undermine efforts to build national institutions.

Third, the international community must commit to mutual transparency and accountability. Concerns about widespread corruption, mismanagement, and fraud are legitimate, and must be effectively addressed by the Somali government. The establishment of the long overdue Anti-Corruption Commission, staffed with credible and competent officials is urgent. Equally legitimate are the concerns of Somalis with international entities that lack faith in the capacity and ingenuity of the Somali people. External partners must be expected to meet the same evidentiary standards as national institutions.

Fourth, there has to be minimum consensus among the international community on the way forward. Competing interests have confused Somalis and deepened their plight. The absence of a broad-based, 'international' vision for Somalia risks continuation of the status quo. The ability of the international community to work together, with the government and with the Somali people, will define the success of the New Deal Compact for Somalia.

Their nation might be broken, but the souls of the Somali people are extraordinarily resilient. The New Deal will only demonstrate a departure from the past by genuinely and constructively engaging with Somalia during this reconstruction phase. That must start the day after the New Deal is formalized in Brussels.

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