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LANDINFO TEMANOTAT

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REGION: Horn of Africa
COUNTRY: Somalia

SUBJECT: Political and security conditions in southern Somalia
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Introduction

This Topical Note supplements and updates the report on LandInfo's fact-finding trip to Nairobi in March of this year.¹ This note contains no recommendations by LandInfo with regard to asylum or return policy.

The general political situation

The Somali reconciliation conference in Mogadishu was concluded in August. It produced a number of resolutions and gave the country's transitional authorities, the TFG, a mandate to carry forward the transitional period to 2009. The TFG is to submit an action plan that will result in a new constitution, multi-party politics and free, democratic elections. In the meantime, regional institutions are to be developed and regional administrative bodies established. In light of today's challenges in Somalia, these are formidable tasks.

The Somali people obviously want to establish representative government that is capable of securing law and order and helping the country onto its feet again. To be successful, many interests will have to be balanced, including powerful economic interests. The TFG is already meeting resistance and will inevitably encounter more of it. Some opposition groups will continue using military means. According to diplomatic sources, the strength of the opposition will depend on how well the TFG manages to persuade average citizens and their clans that the TFG is the right organization to do the job. For now, the TFG seems to have trouble moving forward. Its leaders have not been good at engaging the population in dialogue. They have the

¹ See www.landinfo.no

media against them, and the picture being presented is largely negative. An operation against the Shabelle media concern in Mogadishu in mid-September reflected poorly on the TFG, and has provoked strong reactions domestically and internationally.²

Another important development is the conflict between the TFG's president, Abdullahi Yusuf, and the prime minister, Mohammed Gedi. For a long while the two have had a strained relationship. In July 2007 Yusuf tried to remove Gedi, claiming that he had not performed the tasks expected of him as prime minister. In the past week the dispute has grown yet sharper, and Yusuf has asked the Abgal clan to find a new prime ministerial candidate.³ Gedi, for his part, appears unwilling to give up the prime ministerial post and has made several efforts to strengthen his position within the Hawiye clan. If the conflict is not resolved quickly, it is obvious that it will handicap the TFG and could even lead to its break-up. According to PINR (October 2007), the TFG is too weak and divided to push forward the transition process and construct the necessary institutions before elections in 2009. The transitional authorities retain the support of the international community (ibid.), but signs have emerged that international actors may be in the process of losing their patience with the TFG, according to PINR (ibid.). In a media interview, the American special envoy to Somalia, John Yates, said the following with regard to the Somali population's confidence in the TFG: *"Honestly, I couldn't say that confidence is on a deep up-slope. There is some evidence and, frequently, the evidence is brought about by the international community insisting on lifting roadblocks and things like that. But, in fact, if you talk about things like taxation or the delivery of medical services to the people, the big issue is one of security."* (HornAfrik, 22 September 2007).

The situation as a whole, according to diplomatic sources, is very unclear and unpredictable. There could be a quick return to chaos if the TFG does not quickly take the offensive and show that it can defeat the armed opposition and establish institutions capable of improving security both in Mogadishu and in the rest of southern Somalia.

Security conditions in Mogadishu and other parts of southern Somalia

² According to news reports, government forces fired toward the office of Shabelle Radio on 15 September. Soldiers searched the office, and employees were jailed for a short period in connection with complaints that a hand grenade had been thrown toward police. The radio station was reopened 2 October (Shabelle.net, 15 September 2007).

³ On 20 September, the Somali Supreme Court Justice Yusuf Alil Harun and another judge were arrested and charged with corruption. Harun was accused of misappropriating \$800,000 that was supposed to have been used to reconstruct the court system. The arrests divided the parliament, with backers of President Yusuf supporting the arrests and members of parliament who favour Prime Minister Gedi calling them illegal (PINR, October 2007). On 23 September, public prosecutor Abdullahi Dahir Barre was relieved of his duties, but he refused to resign. The deputy speaker of the transitional parliament, Mohamed Omar Dalha, said there was "hopeless disagreement between the top government officials," with Prime Minister Gedi supporting Harun and President Yusuf supporting Barre.

According to local observers this episode is just a symptom of a far deeper conflict between the president and the prime minister. In his attempt to replace Gedi, President Yusuf apparently cited a provision of an agreement made during the reconciliation conference enabling non-members of parliament to serve as government ministers.

The situation in Somalia is highly complex and must be judged in light of the continuing fact that no functioning authority is in place to maintain security for the population. The security situation in southern Somalia changes quickly and has grown more complicated since the TFG seized power in Mogadishu. No longer are conflicts purely local in nature; now they often parallel the larger political fault lines. Areas that seem relatively stable and calm can suddenly alter character because of conflicts nearby. The unstable situation in southern Somalia, according to several local and international sources, will most likely last through the transitional period extending to 2009 (LandInfo 2007).

Most international observers believe the security situation in Mogadishu and parts of southern Somalia has worsened since 2005/2006. Several hundred civilians have been killed in a variety of incidents in southern Somalia since January 2007,⁴ and the rebel activity in Mogadishu continues. Attacks on TFG and Ethiopian forces continue with undiminished strength, and there are indications the attackers are becoming bolder. Recently, according to diplomatic sources, groups of 50 or so rebels armed with heavy weapons have attacked Ethiopian positions and sustained those attacks for more than an hour before withdrawing. These attacks take place primarily in the northern parts of the city, where entire blocks have been more or less emptied of people.

Targeted strikes, primarily aimed at people associated with the TFG administration as well as the police and army, claim several lives every week. Human rights activists, members of vigilante groups in Mogadishu and journalists have also been killed (LandInfo 2007).

According to the UNHCR, about 74,000 people have fled Mogadishu since June 2007, and 20,000 of them have left since the beginning of September (IASC Somalia-Protection Cluster Update, 28 September 2007). Many of those who fled the city in September were ordered by TFG officials to leave their homes, especially in the areas of Towfiq, Arafat and Gubta in the Yaqshiid district of the capital.

According to international sources there are signs that TFG forces act brutally and commit plunder during anti-insurgency actions. The Ethiopian forces appear to be more disciplined. In several areas, they have managed to cultivate good relationships with the population surrounding their positions. The AMISOM force has developed a very good reputation by helping people around its bases to acquire food, water and medical treatment.

Regular households are increasingly affected by banditry of various kinds, while mobile roadblocks set up by militia groups make the population feel unsafe and uncertain, especially in the Juba regions.

⁴ According to observers, battles between insurgents and government forces backed by Ethiopian soldiers in Mogadishu at the end of March 2007 were the worst in 15 years. More than 1,000 people lost their lives and more than 4,000 were injured. Many of those killed were civilians. Fierce new battles broke out in the middle of April, and thousands of people fled the capital. More than 200 people were killed in these battles, most of them civilians.

The crime rate is said to have declined but is still higher than it was before the battles began (and certainly higher than it was during the rule of the Union of Islamic Courts, or UIC). The danger to civilians comes first and foremost from random acts of crime. It is very difficult to gain an overview of criminality in the capital, but local sources claim that for a city with practically no court system the crime rate is relatively low. Kidnappings, for example, are said to be rare. Somali police in concert with Ethiopian forces maintain security in the streets of Mogadishu.

The inhabitants of Mogadishu have come under great stress, and some local sources claim everyone in the city risks becoming a random victim of grenade attacks. After a visit to Mogadishu on 20 September 2007, the UN's independent expert on human rights in Somalia, Ghanim Alnajjar, said residents are more afraid than ever of all the fighting and arrests, and that they fear government forces and Ethiopian soldiers no less than the rebels.⁵

Residents enjoy full freedom of motion, however. There are no more roadblocks in the city and no one (except for police and soldiers) carries weapons in the streets (LandInfo 2007). The airport is in operation and traffic flows normally between the airport and the city. But security on the roads leading out of town is poorer than before. The main problem there is criminal activity, which is thought to have increased by 30 percent. Numerous people who have fled the city have been attacked and robbed while on the move. The same danger faces people returning to the city.⁶

Many have lost their homes, and at times they have had trouble getting food and water. The telecommunications system, however, has operated normally most of the time, as have the various systems for transferring money from abroad. Some schools have reopened and others are in the process of opening. People with a regular flow of money from abroad have got by without much trouble, while internal refugees⁷ and others have had difficulty because regular income-producing activities have ceased for long periods.

Humanitarian conditions and human rights problems⁸

The United Nations Security Council asserts in a report dated April 2007⁹ that long-term deprivation of economic social and cultural rights as well as extensive poverty and serious violations of civil and political rights have all caused an alarming human rights situation to develop in Somalia.

⁵ VOA News, 21 September 2007.

⁶ Between April and June 2007, about 125,000 of the people who had fled Mogadishu since February returned to the capital. Nearly 780 returned in September, primarily from the Galgaduud and Mudug regions.

⁷ For a more detailed description of the internal refugee situation, see the 2007 LandInfo fact-finding report.

⁸ See the fact-finding report (LandInfo 2007) for a more detailed description of the human rights situation.

⁹ See UN Security Council, April 2007.

According to the UN, the civilian population is subjected to random violence. Civilians also find themselves in the crossfire between hostile parties, especially in the southern and central parts of the country. Many are forced to leave their homes. Unresolved property and land-rights disputes often lead to clan conflicts, and freedom of expression is under pressure. Discrimination continues to plague minority and other marginalized groups. Other worrisome aspects of the situation include sexual assault against women and the recruitment of children into militia groups.¹⁰

The poor security in Mogadishu exacerbates humanitarian conditions there. The United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) reported in June that the security situation in Mogadishu has also complicated humanitarian efforts in other parts of the country.¹¹

The many roadblocks have hindered access to the southern and central areas of Somalia, while nightly curfews in Mogadishu and Kismayo have slowed offloading work in the harbours. International aid organizations are consistently prevented from transporting supplies, and in some cases they come under attack. On 26 September, for example, a lorry bearing the symbol of the Somali Red Crescent came under fire, and the driver was seriously injured.

According to Doctors without Borders/Médecins Sans Frontières, there are now only 250 available hospital beds in Mogadishu compared with almost 800 in January 2007. Nearly 75 percent of health-care personnel at these hospitals have left the city (MSF, 20 August 2007).

The Shebelle regions

Security-wise, conditions in the Lower Shebelle and Middle Shebelle regions are quite different. Much of the difference can be explained by clan composition.

The Middle Shebelle has long been populated primarily by Hawiye Abgal clans and the Jareer (Bantu). This population pattern has not been significantly altered since the civil war. The population of Lower Shebelle has traditionally been dominated by Digil clans who practiced agriculture along the Shebelle. Since the civil war the Hawiye Haber-Gedir clan – the Ayr in particular – have pushed into the area, driving out the local clans and appropriating many of their agricultural properties.

Middle Shebelle

The situation in Middle Shebelle, which was one of the most stable areas in southern Somalia even before the Union of Islamic Courts (UIC) took control in the summer of 2006, was unstable

¹⁰ See the fact-finding report (LandInfo 2007) for a more detailed description of conditions affecting minorities and others.

¹¹ Humanitarian Situation in Somalia, Monthly Analysis, June 2007.

in the spring of 2007 (LandInfo 2007). But according to diplomatic sources, the TFG today exercises control of Jowhar and most of the rest of the region. The security situation by and large is described as good. But it is worth noting that areas along the Shebelle River, especially near the city of Balcad, have been hard hit by flooding. Several hundred people have had to leave their homes, and agricultural areas have been destroyed. The situation is therefore described as a humanitarian crisis (OCHA, September 2007).

Lower Shebelle

The security situation across most of Lower Shebelle was unstable in the spring of 2007 (LandInfo 2007), with roadblocks between Merka and Mogadishu and elsewhere causing problems for the residents.

Ayr militia forces still operate in the region and control certain areas. But the TFG now controls Afgoye and Merka, where Ethiopian forces are stationed. Illegal roadblocks have been removed from the road between Afgoye and Brava, but in Brava city the TFG is having problems maintaining full control, according to international sources. The Ayr militia has been mounting scattered attacks on TFG and Ethiopian forces, but not on the scale of what is happening in Mogadishu.

The Ayr militia's resistance to the TFG must be seen in light of the Ayr clan's interest in maintaining control of the highly productive agricultural areas they have seized along the Shebelle River.

Bay and Bakool

According to international sources the TFG, with help from Ethiopian sources, has full control in these regions. Local governors have been appointed, and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) has helped initiate a process for integrating local leaders – which in practice means elder councils – into local government. (This effort has the same goal as activities conducted successfully several places in Puntland by the international organization Interpeace.)¹²

Hiraan

In the Hiraan region, the TFG has appointed an administrative body in which all local clans are represented. With assistance from Ethiopian forces, the transitional authorities seem to have further strengthened their position over the spring and summer of 2007. The local administration is said to have control over the region, and the situation is deemed calm.

¹² Formerly called the War-torn Societies Project (WSP).

Mudug and Galgadud

The Haber Gedir Saad and Suleiman groups of the Hawiye clan signed a peace agreement on 27 February 2007 that may represent a lasting solution to the years-long conflict between them.¹³

In Galgadud, meanwhile, the Hawiye Haber Gedir Ayr clan remains strong, and the TFG therefore has been having trouble establishing full control, according to diplomatic sources. But progress has been made with help from Ethiopian forces. In Mudug, the TFG enjoys more or less full control.

Galkayo remains very tense, and according to an international source two or three killings occur every month (LandInfo 2007). Violence has been reduced in recent years, but the decline is not attributed to increasing respect for the law but to economic reasons: Violence and conflict, it has been noted, are bad for local business. Nevertheless, freedom of motion among the population has been limited by the presence of armed bandits, and the potential for conflict remains alive even in areas where there have been no battles for several years. Conflicts also erupt frequently between local inhabitants and internal refugees (LandInfo 2007).

Gedo

The situation in the southern part of Gedo is relatively calm, but the absence of officials and institutions able to maintain public safety remains a major problem (LandInfo 2007). In Gedo there are open clan conflicts as well as latent intra-Marehan conflicts, with the latter affecting the northern parts of the region in particular.¹⁴

The TFG has made progress in the developing local government in Gedo. Adan Hirsi of the Marehan clan has been named governor, and efforts are now being instituted – as they also are in Bay and Bakool – to integrate local structures of decision-making and conflict resolution. But the risk of open conflict between Marehan clans remains. The conflicts between Marehan clans in Gedo are a factor not only of local issues but of the unstable situation in Kismayo, where Marehan clans are major players.

¹³ Hostilities between these sub-clans have lasted more than 10 years, and some of the points of conflict date back almost 50 years. The conflict flared up in 2004, and in 2005 the situation took a further turn for the worse when about 200 people were killed in several clashes. Many of those killed were civilians, and destruction was great. The drought in 2005 exacerbated matter because talks between the parties over water and grazing rights had broken down. The conflict also prevented free movement between South and North, which in turn affected both food prices and access to food products (LandInfo 2007).

¹⁴ The intra-clan conflict between the Rer Ahmed and Rer Hassan people of the Marehan clan and between the Hawrsame and Eli Dheere over control of the border town Belet Hawa was settled in December 2004/January 2005, but fierce clashes erupted in April and June of 2005 (among other times) between the Hawiye Garre and the Marehan clans over control of El Waq, with many deaths on both sides. El Waq was originally a Garre-dominated city, but the Marehan clans have gradually pushed the Garre clan out of the city and seized control. The conflict between the two clans began as a traditional one, with control of resources at stake, but it developed into a larger political conflict.

The Juba regions

The Marehan/Haber Gedir-dominated Juba Valley Alliance (JBA) movement, which controlled Kismayo from 1999 to September 2006,¹⁵ is no longer operating. The TFG appointed an administration dominated by the Harti and Absame/Ogaden clans but representative also of the Hawiye Galjaal clan.

In March, however, the 2,000 Ethiopian soldiers who had controlled the city were pulled out. In April powerful clashes erupted between Majerteen and Marehan militias as part of a power struggle between the two clans, both of which were represented in the city administration. The Marehan militia pushed the Maherteen forces out of the city, and on 23 April, 12 people were killed and nine injured in clan violence.¹⁶ The TFG, according to international sources, has made no serious attempt to establish an administrative body in the region since being beaten by the Marehan militia. Nor are any Ethiopian forces in the area. As a result, the region as a whole still suffers from the absence of any official authority that can maintain public security (LandInfo 2007). With many different groups and interests in the mix, events in the region are hard to predict. Contributing to the increased insecurity is a force that the Islamist Hassan Turki (Ogaden clan) is obviously building up far to the south, toward Kenya, according to international sources. The question is how much support Turki is garnering among the Ogaden clans. If he manages to emerge as a unifying figure for the Ogadens in the area, he may become a genuine challenge to the TFG in the region, assuming that the other clans in and around Kismayo remain as divided as they are. The general security situation in the Juba regions must therefore be characterized as poor and unpredictable, according to international sources.

The lack of central authority makes it difficult to conduct humanitarian work in the region. On the main road between Kismayo and Jilib there are a number of roadblocks at which fees are charged on humanitarian supplies. This causes major problems in getting supplies to their destinations.

The northern parts of Middle Juba are relatively peaceful, but the absence of public authorities capable of maintaining security is a significant problem nonetheless. According to an international source, in recent months there have been many killings in the Marere area of lower

¹⁵ At the end of September 2006, the Union of Islamic Courts (UIC) captured the strategically important port city of Kismayo without resort to battle. Abdikader Adan Shire (Barre Hiraale), who also was defence minister in the TFG, left Kismayo with his men and took up residence in the Gedo region.

¹⁶ On 22 June fierce new clashes broke out in the Kismayo district between the Marehan and Galjeel clans, with 52 people killed and many others wounded. Those clashes stemmed originally from disagreements over grazing areas. More than 13,000 people fled because of the conflict. A curfew was imposed in Kismayo to reduce the tensions, but on 27 June in Bardere, in the Gedo region, an attempt was made to assassinate the leader of the JVA, Abdikader Adan Shire (Barre Hiraale), who has clan ties to Kismayo. At the end of June a further 2,000 people fled as a result of new clan conflict between the Marehan and the Majerteen in and around Kismayo.

Juba, and 40 to 50 people per month have been taken to the local hospital with bullet and knife wounds (LandInfo 2007).

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