The Effective Governance Gap in EU Counter-Terrorism and Stabilisation Policy for Somalia

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For more than two decades, the EU and other donors have spent billions of euros to rebuild the Somali state and, more recently, to counter the rise of the violent Islamist group Al Shabaab. But Somalia remains a weak, if not “failed state”, and progress is nowhere near commensurate with international support. This is because donors failed to generate enough Somali political will to reform dysfunctional and corrupt administrations that undermine their programmes, as well as counter-terrorism and stabilisation goals. To be more effective, the EU needs to become more adept at understanding local political dynamics as well as better at employing carrots and sticks to nudge Somali leaders to support governance reform and better administration. Otherwise, its expensive technical assistance and training programmes may have only temporary and limited impact.
For more than two decades, the European Union (EU) and other donors have spent billions of euros in Somalia, and they plan to spend billions more. But that country remains a weak, if not ‘failed state’. The Federal Government of Somalia (FGS) controls the capital, exerts only limited influence over federal member states and has almost no sway over large swathes of territory controlled by the violent extremist group, Al-Shabaab. It is defended by the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM) and supported by numerous external donors, one of the largest of which is the EU. Since 2007, the EU has given some 1.3 billion euro to the African peace enforcement mission. It also allocated 212 million euro in development support from 2008-2013 and pledged more than 486 million for 2014-2020, supplemented by additional bilateral aid from many European member states.

Progress in rebuilding the Somali state is nowhere near commensurate with that support. Most observers assess that, were AMISOM to withdraw, Al-Shabaab would quickly retake much of the territory it has lost. The problem is that donors failed to generate enough Somali political will to reform dysfunctional and corrupt administrations that undermine their programmes, as well as counter-terrorism (CT) and stabilisation goals. The EU needs to become more adept at understanding local political dynamics, as well as better employing carrots and sticks to nudge Somali leaders to support governance reform and better administration; otherwise, its expensive technical assistance and training programmes may have only temporary and limited impact.

Ten Years of Stymied State-Building

The EU has been involved in efforts to rebuild the Somali state since its inception in 1993. Assistance increased substantially in 2007, when the EU was asked by the African Union (AU), and member states, to financially aid an anticipated six-month AMISOM mission to support the then-Somalia Transitional Federal Government (TFG). Riven by differences between the president and prime minister, greatly exacerbated by unclear divisions of authority, the TFG was unable to gain significant support and controlled only a small portion of Mogadishu. Unwilling to see the government collapse completely, AMISOM was forced to stay and the EU to continue to pay for much of the mission. The security situation only began to change in 2010, when the AU decided to change the mission’s mandate to peace enforcement. The United Nations (UN), thinking security a

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2 In early 2006, the Union of Islamic Courts (UIC) gained control of Mogadishu and then rapidly of large parts of South Central Somalia. Ethiopia intervened and the TFG reentered Mogadishu in January 2007. Many saw the Ethiopian military as occupiers and AMISOM, with troops from Uganda and Burundi, was an attempt to stabilise the situation and diffuse public resentment. It did not succeed and an uprising of ex-UIC forces, of which Al-Shabaab was an increasingly prominent part, fought the TFG and its Ethiopian allies until they withdrew in 2009.

3 On 22 July 2010, AU ministers agreed to expand the mission's mandate from peacekeeping to peace enforcement, see Charles Kazooba, “AU ministers agree to ‘take on’ Al Shabaab,”*The East African*, July 26,
prerequisite for rebuilding the state, supported this move by authorising several troop increases over the next four years. The now 22,000 troops slowly, and with many casualties, pushed Al-Shabaab out of Mogadishu and other urban areas. The plan was then for the Somali government and its security forces to secure and stabilise liberated areas. However, despite much direct bilateral support and multiple military training missions, including a total of 5,000 troops trained by European Union Training Mission (EUTM) established in 2010, it has not been up to the task—most observers fear Al-Shabaab would take back most, if not all, the territory it lost, were AMISOM to leave abruptly in the near future.  

Support for AMISOM, now costing the EU approximately 250 million euro a year, as well as resources for three Common Security and Defense Policy (CSPD) missions, the EU Naval Force (EU NAVFOR), fighting piracy; the EU Capacity Building Mission in Somalia (EUCAP Somalia), supporting maritime security; and the EUTM, are taking up most of the money member states are willing to spend on Somalia. The EU budgeted 246 million euro (approximately 35 million per year) for the period 2014-2020 for development cooperation, including state-building, food security, education and support to civil society. It pledged an additional 200 million euro to support the government at the London Conference on Somalia in April 2017. This is ostensibly coordinated with member states’ direct bilateral support.

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8 Paul D. Williams and Abdirashid Hashi, “Exit Strategy Challenges for the AU Mission in Somalia.”

7 Money for AMISOM comes from the Africa Peace Facility, which is financed through the European Development Fund. Some member states, particularly France, were unhappy that the bulk of the facility’s allocation went to Somalia, a British priority, rather than their main African peace and security concerns. Interviews, EU officials and diplomats, August-September 2017. CSPD missions are additional EU expenditures, not funded by regular EU budgets. The most recent budgets are: EUNAVFOR 5.5 million for 2017; EUCAP 23 million euro from 1 March 2017 to 28 February 2018; EUTM 23 million from 1 January 2017 to 31 December 2018.


The Problem with Security First

On its face, placing primary emphasis on security makes sense. The intuition is that a government that is constantly concerned about security will not have the bandwidth to build its capacity and expand services. Thus, AMISOM would provide the “space” for the government to stand up and slowly expand its administrative footprint. To build the capacity of the Somali security forces, the EU (through the EUTM), member states, and other donors have made significant assistance and funds available for military and police training and recruitment, but with limited impact. The problem is that most Somali leaders, protected by donor-supported regional forces, have little incentive to spend the funds or political capital to professionalise the security forces, particularly when they cannot be sure these forces will not be used by their rivals to deny them their “share” of the spoils of government. Instead, Somalia has become a rentier state, dependent on external support and exerting limited political control through patronage. Corruption is rife. Even soldiers are rarely, if ever, paid and frequently resort to extortion. Needless to say, this does not endear the security forces, and the government that nominally controls them, to the local population.

Similar dynamics apply to other branches of the Somali government. Short-sighted, corrupt officials are thus hobbling efforts to defeat Al-Shabaab and undermining EU and other donors’ efforts to erode support for the group. The World Bank has measured almost no improvement in governance indicators since 2002, and the country ranks second on the Fragile States Index (after South Sudan and before the Central African Republic). Poor governance, economic mismanagement, widespread corruption and...
marginalisation of particular clans (as well as claims that the government is a puppet of Western states) are some of the grievances cited by Al-Shabaab to justify its insurgency.\textsuperscript{16}

Some European officials recognise this challenge. The first EU Counter-Terrorism Strategy (2005) notes that “we must promote even more vigorously good governance, human rights, democracy as well as education and economic prosperity, and engage in conflict resolution.”\textsuperscript{17} Similar language can be found in all subsequent EU strategies to counter radicalisation, including those on the Horn of Africa. Policies to advance good governance, however, have largely focused on technical projects to improve the democratic process and individual ministries’ capacities, which is important but insufficient. To be truly effective, the EU should use its potentially extensive leverage—it and its member states combined are by far the largest donors to the country—to nudge political leaders to govern well, respect the rules and move toward more inclusive and representative politics. This should be more than high-level dialogue without consequences, but a clear, long-term policy, supported by a keen understanding of the political and economic dynamics of the country, that better governance is a key priority of the EU, and of its member states. Europe should condition additional support on concrete improvements (be establishing benchmarks like it does with pro-accession countries), and it should be prepared to significantly reduce aid to the government if it fails to deliver. Furthermore, funding can, and should be, directed to local governments, and their political leaders, who do govern well (the EU and the United Kingdom are already doing this on a small scale).

\section*{Lack of a Political Settlement}

As early as 2008, the EU identified the adoption of a permanent constitution as a critical political goal for the Somali government to establish peace and stability.\textsuperscript{18} The lack of a political settlement, demonstrated most fundamentally by the inability of the government to draft and pass a permanent constitution, has led to government dysfunction and regular political infighting between Somalia’s leaders that has taken the focus away from fighting Al-Shabaab.\textsuperscript{19} The numerous rounds of political infighting among Somalia’s political elites, among other issues, undermined attempts to build an effective government as well as a genuinely national army and police force, and to consolidate gains made by AMISOM and its militia allies. Political tensions debilitated the past president’s four-year administration; MPs twice attempted to impeach the

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president and regularly changed prime ministers. In the regions, conflict, sometimes violent, erupted with the federal government and among different actors struggling to control local administrations. The international community, particularly AMISOM as well as the EUTM, were left without effective local security partners, while also dealing with increasingly complicated local political dynamics, as the Somali federal government grew and interim regional administrations were created. These political rivalries undermined almost all efforts to build government capacity and counter radicalisation.  

The election in February 2017 of Somalia’s new President Mohamed Abdullahi “Farmajo” offers international partners a new opportunity. But without a clearer and more institutionalised division of power, resources and security responsibilities between the FGS and federal states, as well as among federal state administrations, current security gains against Al-Shabaab will be difficult to sustain.

The Importance of Governance to Counter Extremism

As noted in the UN Development Programme report, Journey to Extremism in Africa, “disaffection with government is highest by significant margins among [respondents] who were recruited by violent extremist groups across several key indicators. These include: belief that government only looks after the interests of a few; low level of trust in government authorities; and experience, or willingness to report experience, of bribe-paying. Grievances against security actors, as well as politicians, are particularly marked, with an average of 78 per cent rating low levels of trust in the police, politicians and military.” This was recognised intuitively by the EU.

As early as 2003, the EU noted “bad governance – corruption, abuse of power, weak institutions and lack of accountability – and civil conflict erode states from within. [...] Collapse of the state can be associated with obvious threats, such as organised crime or terrorism. State failure is an alarming phenomenon that undermines global governance, and adds to regional instability.” The 2011 EU Strategic Framework for the Horn of Africa asserted it would “1) Assist all countries in the region to build robust and accountable political structures, including civil and civic institutions, allowing the people of the Horn to express their legitimate political aspirations and ensure that their basic

22 Furthermore, “positive experience of effective service provision is confirmed as a source of resilience: respondents who believed that governments’ provision of education was either ‘excellent’ or ‘improving’ were less likely to be a member of a violent extremist group, within the sample,” see UNDP, Journey to Extremism in Africa, 2017, 5, http://journey-to-extremism.undp.org/content/downloads/UNDP-JourneyToExtremism-report-2017-english.pdf. The report also notes the importance of careful security sector reform. “A striking 71 percent [of extremist respondents] pointed to ‘government action’, including ‘killing of a family member or friend’ or ‘arrest of a family member or friend’, as the incident that prompted them to join. These findings throw into stark relief the question of how counter-terrorism and wider security functions of governments in at-risk environments conduct themselves with regard to human rights and due process. State security-actor conduct is revealed as a prominent accelerator of recruitment, rather than the reverse.”
human rights and freedoms are respected.” 24 This sentiment was reiterated in the 2012 EU Counter-Terrorism Action Plan for the Horn of Africa and Yemen and focused on five key areas, the first being “building robust and accountable political structures.” 25 Specifically, “as the major destabilising factor in the Horn of Africa, Somalia is at the centre of the EU CT efforts in the region. Putting Somalia on a sustainable recovery path, while establishing security and effective governance at all levels is, therefore, essential to tackle the terrorist threat emanating from the crisis situation in Somalia.” 26 However, the EU has been unable to effectively nudge Somalia’s political elite to govern better. For example, repeated attempts to push Somali leaders to finish drafting the constitution were ignored and the government continues to operate under a “provisional” document. Repeated costly attempts to reform and professionalise the security services were undermined by political infighting and corruption, which senior leaders were unwilling to address. 27

Strategy by Consensus?

EU strategy development is complicated by the interests of a host of internal and member states’ interests. 28 While the European External Action Service (EEAS) usually takes the lead in developing the strategy for external engagement, it must coordinate with a host of other EU bodies and interested member states. By the time the Council adopts a strategy, it has undergone numerous informal and formal consultations. Disagreements are “negotiated”, and senior EU officials have little incentive to oppose forcefully the wishes of important colleagues or member states. The result often is a “Christmas tree” strategy that has a little for everyone, but gives implementing officials little guidance—or, more important, bureaucratic cover—on what should be their priorities. Unsurprisingly, EU delegations then frequently spread their projects among the different identified priorities and implementing partners (often linked explicitly or implicitly to particular member states).

Thus, for example, the 2012 EU Counter-Terrorism Action Plan for the Horn of Africa and Yemen (implementing the EU Horn of Africa Strategic Framework, adopted in November 2011), noted that in Somalia, special attention could be given to:

25 The key areas are: (1) building robust and accountable political structures; (2) contributing to conflict resolution and prevention; (3) mitigating security threats emanating from the region; (4) promoting economic growth; and (5) supporting regional economic cooperation, see European Commission and High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, Joint Communication to the Council: EU Counter-Terrorism Action Plan for the Horn of Africa and Yemen, (Brussels: August 31, 2012), http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:52012JC0024&from=en.
28 While this is normal for any large organisation, authority and chains of command are particularly diffuse in the EU and member states, through the council and secondee, continue to push their national interests.
• efforts to build stable and accountable administrations and relevant institutions in Somalia, in close cooperation with relevant efforts done under CSFP [Common Security and Foreign Policy];
• focus on direct and indirect reach-out efforts by Somali counterparts to radical groups in Somalia;
• prevent terrorist travel to Somalia;
• support counter-radicalisation efforts in Somalia and promote reconciliation efforts and peace building;
• strengthen local administrations’ capacities in providing rule of law and justice;
• support to the Somali security sector;
• focus on de-radicalisation, disengagement and education, including vocational training for job creation while paying special attention to diasporas;
• helping to rebuild basic financial infrastructure in Somalia;
• harnessing the social and financial capital held in the Somali informal financial sector;
• conducting outreach to and engagement of a range of non-traditional partners, such as Somali remittance organisations and informal foreign exchange agents.

EU CT and other efforts in Africa and the Middle East have been complicated even more by the migration crisis that has dominated Europe’s external policy agenda for the last two years. Already by October 2015, the Council Conclusions on the EU Horn of Africa Action Plan 2015-2020, noted the “EU should give priority to the following five groups of actions in the period 2015-2020, namely: regional security and stability, migration and forced displacement, counter-radicalisation and violent extremism, youth and employment, and human rights, rule of law and democratic governance.” The May 2017 annual report on the implementation of the action plan was even more explicit, when it dedicated the bulk of the introduction to “migration management.”

Without a clear prioritisation of policy goals and sustained programming, the EU’s efforts will be diffuse and have much less impact. This is of course difficult, given EU officials’ constraints and incentives.

Bureaucratic Constraints and Incentives

Most EU officials are well-intentioned and sophisticated, but they are constrained by the multiple and shifting demands of member states and busy and overstretched senior officials. Given political and budget cycles, they are often expected to deliver short-term results. The faulty assumption is that more money will deliver quicker impact.

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32 Spending can also have its own political logic. For example senior officials and politicians can point to increased spending as a response, rather than much harder to demonstrate impact.
Furthermore, EU staffs often manage large budgets and lack the time, autonomy, resources and detailed local knowledge to ensure money is spent effectively.  

Bureaucratic incentives work against coordinated, sustained and long-term programming necessary to reform institutions and address the root causes of conflict and radicalisation.  

While the EU frequently speaks about coordination and has appointed an EU Special Representative for the Horn of Africa and another for Counter-Terrorism, to harmonise policies, the allocation of budgets, authority and reporting lines greatly complicate efforts to achieve policy coherence. So, for example, while the EEAS develops policy (again in coordination with other EU bodies and member states), the bulk of the budget for external programmes is controlled by the Directorate-General for International Cooperation and Development (DEVCO). Even within the EU delegations in country, DEVCO staff have twin reporting lines and more incentive to keep supervisors in Brussels happy than the resident head of delegation.  

Other money managed by DEVCO units is used to implement thematic programmes budgeted to specific “instruments”, budget lines, such as the Instrument contributing to Peace and Stability (IcSP), the EU Emergency Trust Fund for Africa (with separate “baskets” for the Horn of Africa, North Africa and the Sahel and Lake Chad Basin), and The European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights. Thus, funding is spread among disparate sectors, in short-term projects, with insufficient concern for the appropriate sequencing of assistance to have the most impact. For example, the seven-year National Indicative Programme for Somalia spreads funding among state building and peace building (100 million euro), food security and building resilience (86 million), education (60 million) and civil society (14 million); all worthy sectors, but not necessarily key to building the legitimacy of the state.

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34 This problem is well documented in development literature. For example, staff, especially at the country level, may face perverse incentives to working in a more strategic or innovative manner and taking risks. This is compounded by staff fluctuation and turnover, especially in the field, which poses considerable challenges to building and sustaining long-term relationships with in-country partners and the maintenance of institutional memory, see Elinor Ostrom, Clark Gibson Suja Shivakumar and Krister Andersson, *Aid, Incentives, and Sustainability: An Institutional Analysis of Development Cooperation*, SIDA Studies in Evaluation, (December 2001), http://www.sida.se/contentassets/5de008322cad48e9b0d48b3a72a42327/aid-incentives-and-sustainability—an-institutional-analysis-of-development-cooperation—main-report_1845.pdf. Related to this, staff in-country are under constant pressure to disburse aid, see Claudia R. Williamson, “Exploring the failure of foreign aid: The role of incentives and information,” *The Review of Austrian Economics* 23, no. 1, (March 2010), doi: 10.1007/s11138-009-0091-7.

35 Many officials and interviewed asserted that DEVCO officials were thematic experts, but often lacked the detailed country knowledge to make project truly effective. Interviews, August-September 2017. “On the ground, EU Delegations are often understaffed to fulfill the role expected of them, especially on the political side,” see Ahmed Sollman, Alex Vines and Jason Mosley, *The EU Strategic Framework for the Horn of Africa: A Critical Assessment of Impact and Opportunities*, European Parliament, (September 2012). This is complicated even more for staff working on Somalia, since for security reasons the delegation remains based in Nairobi.

36 In accordance with the New Deal Compact, these allocations were developed in consultation with the Somali government.
In addition to constraints and restrictions that affect how, where and for how long support is rendered, EU heads of delegation are often unable to forcefully push EU positions, but are expected to coordinate the efforts of the member states’ embassies in the country. Furthermore, while some are politically astute and may know how to exert political influence, they are hampered by the EU’s insistence on “dialogue” without consequences and aversion to aid conditionality.  

### Has Good Governance Been a Real Priority?

Efforts to fund and incentivise effective governance, however, were overshadowed by the need to support AMISOM. While governance was ostensibly the number one development and policy priority, the remaining European Development Fund (EDF) budget for Somalia from 2008-2013 was spread thin among governance (60 million euro); education (55 million); economic development and food security (55 million); and from 2014-2020 among state building and peace building (100 million); food security and building resilience (86 million); education (60 million); and civil society (14 million). This was, of course, complemented by bilateral programmes of European member states and other donors, particularly the UN and United States.

The problem is that while most officials agreed on the importance of governance, bad governance is not only a problem of weak capacities. Developing countries and those in transition do not only lack crucial resources to make good policies. Their political leaders are often not willing to introduce domestic reforms necessary to achieve effective governance.

To be more effective in Somalia, the EU and other donors need to be better aware of the incentives and constraints faced by elites and structure their projects and interventions appropriately. For greater impact, the EU should:

- **Focus more on effective governance**: It is crucial that governments and international organisations invest in laying out clear overarching goals for engaging in crises and communicate these clearly both to the parties involved in a conflict and other international actors with interests in Somalia. Effective governance is critical to sustain progress on security, justice, service delivery, job creation and economic growth. EU delegations and member states should make it a key priority that Somali elites negotiate a durable political settlement and relatively effective and inclusive government. It is crucial that additional funding be made contingent on progress in this area.

- **More detailed local knowledge**: Attempts to reconstruct fragile states need to be grounded in an understanding of the political and economic realities of the countries concerned, in particular the incentives, challenges and opportunities faced by various

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37 Interviews, former Dutch diplomat who worked with a number of EU delegations, August 2017.
39 ODA data indicated that the EU and UK are the largest donors. A number of Western donors also pool money to support UNDP good governance efforts.
actors. Policies that do not take account of the local political economy of fragile states are bound to fail. The EU is trying to do better, but delegations either need more political staff or, alternatively, member states’ embassies need to supply more consistent and sensitive political and economic information.

**Exert more political influence:** Government capacity-building projects are not sustainable unless the overarching political dysfunction is addressed. Developing technical suggestions for institutional reform is easy; managing the political process of reform is more difficult. It is therefore important that institution-building initiatives avoid technocratic approaches alone. Instead, DEVCO and the EEAS should devote considerable attention to the process of decision-making and implementation, and to well-designed participation and widespread communication of reform initiatives. Furthermore, delegations should explicitly support political leaders who support reform and be prepared to work with federal state administrations directly, if the central government is unable or unwilling to reform.

**Longer-term programmes:** Changing the status quo is usually challenging, especially where political culture is involved. Implementing programmes to do so should target at least five- to ten-year terms, and preferably extend across multiple political administrations. Longer-term commitments can allow for experimentation and adaption, and make it worthwhile for local leaders to invest time, effort and reputation.

**Be willing to take risks:** The EU should empower staff to take appropriate risks to make aid smarter, including giving officials political backing, the right incentive structures, sufficient staff capacity, and appropriate institutional processes and control measures.

**Primus inter pares:** To be more effective, the EU needs to speak not only for the organisation but for all member states. While there is generally consensus on strategy, this does not always translate into an alignment along interests. These interests should be more clearly articulated and incorporated into EU policy implementation. Ideally, this should include a public or private understanding among member states that one state (because of its dominant interest in the country) or group of states, leads in the formulation and implementation of EU policy. Furthermore, because this state’s embassy is likely to have better local knowledge and be supported by intelligence agencies and other organisations, it is probably better able to exert influence than the entire delegation. If member states disagree on which state should lead, this should be incorporated into the country strategy and efforts should be made to ensure that those differences do no undermine EU programmes and influence.
Bibliography


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