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Report

The London Conference on Somalia: Opportunities of Reconstruction & Indications of Internationalisation

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After nearly five months of international diplomatic work and effort, the London Conference on Somalia was held on 23rd February 2012, and lasted for half a day. It consisted primarily of pompous speeches typical of such conferences, followed by a final communiqué (1) that was revised to appear less focused on security, piracy and counterterrorism, and shorter than the draft that was leaked eight days before the conference. (2) This communiqué was almost identical to the version that was leaked the day before the conference. (3)

Somalis are still debating the conclusions of the conference and the consequences it will have on their cause and country. However, there is a general feeling that this conference will actually resonate although no one is able predict how and whether it will be positive or negative.

Listening to the diplomatic speeches delivered by the participants of the conference, one could be optimistic, and though it contains negative aspects, the final communiqué is largely positive. Nonetheless, with the participants' implicit conflicting interests (which British diplomacy worked hard to portray as uniform and homogeneous), the trials the Somali issue went through, and the impatience and lack of commitment of the international community to sorting out differences in complex and dynamic long-term issues make one less optimistic and rather aware of the lack of implementation of what was said in the speeches delivered in the conference.

In this paper, the results of the conference are reviewed in light of the conference's final communiqué, the positive points it included, and the gaps that could result in failure of implementation.

A Conference Different from Any Other

Certainly, the London conference cannot be considered from among the reconciliation conferences that were held for Somalia in the past. It is very different in terms of both nature and approach, and thus gives observers some hope for change of upcoming results. Some consider this one of the pluses of the conference.

The efforts put into the conference by the government of the United Kingdom is unprecedented as the UK had never showed interested in Somalia. In UN Operation Restore Hope (1992-1995), for example, the United Kingdom only provided logistical support, in addition to diplomatic activity with different countries, the government was particularly focused on communicating with the Somali community in Britain, holding many different discussions with them.

Some of the differences between this conference and previous conferences on the Somali issue are as follows:

1. While the previous conferences were held for the Somalis, and Somali factions led by warlords were brought to resolve the clashes existing between the parties of the conflict in Somalia, this conference was held for countries with interests in Somalia or countries that are involved in the Somali issue (both historically and contemporarily), and aimed for coordination among these countries and the unity of their political, military, and relief efforts to avoid disagreement.
2. Unlike its previous counterparts, this conference focused on practical actions for progression and maintenance of progress achieved in the political and security domains based on what has actually come into effect as opposed to futile attempts of reconciliation attempts that used to consume time and effort.
3. The level of international interest and participation in this conference was substantially more than those in previous conferences; nearly 50 countries and organizations interested or involved in Somalia participated.

4. Also unlike other conferences, this conference focused on security, eradicating piracy, and developing paths for the future political process, leaving details for the future.

The final communiqué itself states that "the conference focused on the underlying causes of instability, as well as the symptoms (famine, refugees, piracy and terrorism). We, the international community, agreed to inject new momentum into the political process, strengthen AMISOM, and help Somalia develop its own security forces, help build local stability, and enhance action to tackle pirates and terrorists," (found in the fourth paragraph of the communiqué). This represents the conclusion reached by the conference, and the rest of the communiqué elaborates on it.

The Domination of Security and Military Approach in the Conference

The downfall of the conference is that it adopted a security-military approach and made it the key to resolving Somali crises, although it has been well established that the problems of security, military, piracy, refugees, and famine are just symptoms of the political crisis that generates forces and challenges as it persists and prevents the finding of a radical solution.

Security and Justice

In the communiqué, security and justice were oddly linked. While the communiqué discussed security extensively, it pointed out that Somalis themselves have to decide on the security and justice arrangements required in the future. There was no mention of any mechanism for achieving justice in a conflict in which grievances between different groups of society.

Accordingly, the AMISOM troops were commended for their sacrifices (with no mention of Somali government forces, and the indiscriminate AMISOM bombing of civilians during its confrontation of rebels, which was recognised by international human rights organisations). On the eve of the conference, the UN Security Council passed Resolution No. 2036 to establish expanded presence and increase their troops to 17,000, incorporating Kenyan forces that invaded Somalia in October 2011 into AMISOM. The draft resolution also addressed financing the AMISOM on a permanent basis, for which the UN would provide a greater share of the funding.

Terrorism

There was only one paragraph regarding so-called counter-terrorism and it fell under security and military – a diplomatic way to avoid highlighting the fact that the conference was held to address this phenomenon for this very reason. Furthermore, there was only a rhetoric statement expressing what had already been known before the conference, namely that "terrorism poses a serious threat to security in Somalia, the region, and the world as a whole", and that they thus "agreed to work together with greater determination to build the capacity to disrupt terrorism in the region and address its root causes," as well as to "disrupt terrorists' travel to and from Somalia, disrupt terrorists' finances, and have an effective gathering of intelligence and investigation."

Piracy

Piracy was stated to be the main reason behind the efforts of the United Kingdom in this conference because of the large losses that cost the world nearly seven billion dollars a year and this issue was therefore the subject of many decisions. It was not, however, outside the framework of what had already existed, especially since piracy has experienced a decline in operations in last months. More importantly, the communiqué pointed out that, "the problem requires a comprehensive approach on land as well as at sea." It also stressed that, "that piracy cannot be solved by military means alone," and reiterated the importance of supporting communities to tackle the underlying causes of piracy, and improving the effective use of Somali coastal waters through regional

maritime capacity-building measures. Furthermore, it stated that "there will be no impunity for piracy. We called for greater development of judicial capacity to prosecute and detain those behind piracy both in Somalia and in the greater region."

There is nothing different in this regard except that it attempts to limit the investment of piracy money by "enhancing coordination on illegal financial flows and coordinating intelligence gatherings and investigations" and reiterates "the importance of supporting communities to tackle the underlying causes of piracy, and improving the effective use of Somali coastal waters through regional maritime capacity-building measures." This is a good approach to tackling the problem of piracy but it is not new, as it has been adopted in the Djibouti conference on piracy.

Deficiencies in Security Treatment

This method or approach of dealing with symptoms rather than addressing the core of the problem may allow militants to exploit young people and bring in more supporters and fighters into their ranks. Somalis are very sensitive towards the ambitions of neighbouring countries, particularly Kenya and Ethiopia; and instead of rejecting foreign military intervention, which has failed and backfired, the conference incorporated Kenyan forces into AMISOM, thus, legitimizing their intervention in the South, from which the goals that Kenya seeks all Somalis know. Moreover, there was no mention of Ethiopia's recent intervention, and Ethiopia was commended implicitly, for what was called "pushing Al Shabaab out of Mogadishu and other areas." Al-Shabaab had emerged and strengthened in the wake of the Ethiopian occupation of Somalia in 2006, which aimed mainly to defeat the Islamic Courts Union (ICU).

The final communiqué did not demonstrate any clear strategic way out for the African Union Mission (AMISOM) in the foreseeable future. Moreover, there is no project to convert it into a hybrid force of Muslim and non-Muslim countries under Muslim leadership to legitimize it for the average Somali citizen and refute Al-Shabaab's argument that AMISOM is a continuation of the Ethiopian occupation and a crusade occupation force.

Observers interested in Somali affairs agree that Al-Shabaab is now declining and retreating, and no longer appeals to Somalis, particularly in light of the movement's implementation of its strict interpretations of Islam and adoption of al-Qaeda's approach. However, it is rather easy for the movement to recruit more and more people who have legitimate national aspirations if they are convinced that their country is under the occupation of Kenyan, Ethiopian and Ugandan forces. Indeed, Al-Shabaab now seems defeated, but it, or similar movements, may rise once again if the issues that created, fuelled and enabled them to achieve domination are not addressed correctly.

During the conference, it was clear that there are differences in dealing with Al-Shabab. In his speech, Dr. Khalid bin Mohammed Al-Attiyah, the Qatari Foreign Minister, called for Al-Shabaab to be part of the process of boosting confidence and inclusion among all Somali parties. He stressed that, "the exclusion of any party at this stage will disrupt these effort, and render any talk about security and stability unrealistic and inconsistent with the reality in Somalia." Ekmeleddin İhsanoğlu, the Secretary-General of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), revealed in his speech that he had some positive contact with the Somali opposition (i.e. Al-Shabaab) for the exploration of ways to reach a peaceful solution in Somalia. Meanwhile, United States Secretary of State Hilary Clinton adamantly opposed any engagement with Al-Shabaab. However, there were signs that not all America's European partners would not be as firm in this regard. Italian Foreign Minister Giuliomaria Terzi pointed out that the insurgents still controlled more than a third of Somalia, adding that "their capacity to control that territory does not lie solely in coercion." The speech of the UK Prime Minister was in between the two stances as he said that the United Kingdom would welcome casting weapons, referring to the willingness to cooperate with defectors from Al-Shabaab.

How the Conference Addressed the Political Situation in Somalia

As mentioned, the focus was on the issue of security and piracy and the solutions offered were based mostly on this framework. As for the political issue, the conference adopted the current treatment with some improvements. Therefore, the part that dealt with the political issue was translated to Arabic under the title "Political Support."

Political Representation

Although commitment to ending the mandate of transitional institutions by August 2012 was announced, the political measures of creating the future Somali government have not been clarified yet. The communiqué adopted the so-called "Garowe II principles" which were supervised by the United Nations. The politicians that participated in the Garowe II Conference were labelled by the media as "losers" who are now leading Somalia to the abyss and the conference employed the same method that enabled them and their like to dominate Somalia. It also outlined the 4.5 formula of power sharing that determines tribalism –and not efficiency and competency – as the criteria for holding public posts. This formula has failed so far, exacerbating the Somali problem rather than solving it. The power sharing is a "minefield" for the future of Somalia as a whole.

A number of Somali intellectuals discussed the futility of this mechanism and suggested practical alternatives that establish a state of institutions. Still, the organisers of the conference have not paid much heed to these suggestions.

Regional Administrations

Regional administrations were not addressed specifically and comprehensively except with regard to "the need for the international community to support any dialogue that Somaliland and the transitional federal government or its replacement may agree to establish in order to clarify their future relations." During the conference, a meeting was held between the Somali President Sheikh Sharif and Ahmed Mahamoud Silanyo, President of Somaliland, signifying the opening of a new chapter and potentially leading to talks between the two sides with international support. If they do in fact take place, the talks will lead to the start of oil extraction in Somaliland.

Accordingly, the meeting was addressed supporting stability in "local areas of stability," which probably is an indication that the conference overcame the accusation that it mainly aimed to divide Somalia into separate regions, or "cantons." The conference promised to "promote effective and accountable local administrations, increase support for the formation of legitimate and peaceful authorities, and improve services for people living in these areas. This is the current situation that the international community encourages by linking developmental and economic support of local communities to the presence of regional administration in the area. This leads all political aspirants to establish local administrations, or "local governments," even if only on paper. Consequently, there are now tens of local governments.

Development and Countering Corruption

Perhaps the most important aspect is that optimism in the conference lies in the interest in and support for developmental efforts, reconstruction and economic development in the final communiqué. This was agreed to be in a long-term project determined by a vibrant private sector.

The issue of economic development and reconstruction was referred to the upcoming Istanbul conference in June 2012, nearly four months after the London conference. As for confronting corruption, the conference announced the adoption of a "joint financial management board" for Somalia "to increase transparency and accountability in the collection and efficient use of public revenues as well as international development aid that will help strengthen Somali public financial management institutions."

The management board is a result of the demands of the governments of the East African community, IGAD (Intergovernmental Authority on Development), and the

Republic of South Sudan in Nairobi as well as the International Contact Group on Somalia in Copenhagen, both in September 2011. The board currently consists of the Somali transitional government, the United Kingdom, France, the European Union, and the World Bank, and is open to others before official establishment. It aims to control and manage the revenues both generated by Somalia's national assets and received from international donors, and – as the final communiqué states – "provide accountability and transparency on where and how Somali revenues and donor funds are spent," which implies inhibiting the transferal of such funds to other purposes or personal accounts.

Some Somalis have expressed their concern about the board as they believe it detracts from the sovereignty of the Somali state and imposes a financial mandate on Somalia, especially because it is not limited to the management of external funding but encompasses the management of "internal revenue" including "domestic financial flows that are or should be categorized as public resources," as stated in the related annex in the final communiqué. All this is on the pretext that Somalia does not have financial institutions that can be trusted to manage funds!

The conference also announced the establishment of a new stability fund to which Denmark, Netherlands, Norway, and the United Arab Emirates will contribute in support of economic development in safe and stable areas.

Post-London Conference: the Announced and the Unannounced

Adverse reactions to the conference were not expected to come from London per se as they came quickly and were not limited to leftist lobbies known for their orientations toward the government. The backlash came from restrained British media such as *The Weekly Observer* and the global British charity organisation, Oxfam.

Imposed Solutions

Immediately after the end of the conference, Barbara Stocking, the Chief Executive of Oxfam, issued a statement expressing her disappointment with the outcome of the conference. She declared, "while we recognise the huge efforts of the UK Government to make the conference a success, what we had hoped for was a recognition that 20 years of internationally imposed solutions have failed. However, what we've seen once again are externally driven solutions that haven't worked, aren't working and will not work."

She added further that, "we anticipated the conference would offer hope to the millions of people hit by drought and conflict, and support to build a peace process that included a wide section of Somali society. What we got was the rhetoric of Somali inclusion but you cannot go forward with a new constitution and elections in such a troubled country without a wide and inclusive political engagement within Somali society."

She called for the donors to ensure that funds for political and security objectives are separated from humanitarian and recovery work. She explained that this is essential for humanitarian work to continue. She also maintained that "humanitarian funding must be guided by principles of impartiality and meet the needs of Somalis whenever and wherever there it exists."

Uncovering the Hidden: the Search for Oil

Two long articles in the 25th February 2012 issue of *The Observer*, one of the most substantial and respectable newspapers in the United Kingdom, revealed Britain's main reasons for organizing the conference: "far from the public focus of last week's summit, talks are taking place between British and Somali officials over exploiting oil reserves that have been discovered in the arid north-eastern region of the country. Abdulkadir Abdi Hashi, Minister of International Cooperation in Puntland, north-east Somalia (where oil is expected to be first extracted next month) stated that, "We have spoken to a

number of UK officials. Some have offered to help us with the future management of oil revenues. They will help us build our capacity to maximise future earnings from the oil industry."

Somali Prime Minister Abdiweli Mohamed Ali said that his government had no choice but to attract western companies to Somalia by offering a slice of the country's natural resources, which include oil, gas, and uranium.

Also, The Observer stressed that "Britain is not the only country looking to develop Somalia's vast natural resources. Last month, oil exploration began in Puntland by the Canadian Africa Oil Company, the first drilling in Somalia in 21 years."

The company estimates that there could be up to four billion barrels (about \$500 billion worth at today's prices) in the two intended oil wells. Other surveys indicate that Puntland alone has the potential to yield ten billion barrels, making it among the top twenty oil-producing countries.

Chinese and U.S. firms are among those interested in the potential possibility of extracting Somali oil now, and for the first time in twenty years, Somalia is safe enough for drilling oil wells.

On Thursday, 23 February 2012, the day on which the London conference was held, oil corporations British Petroleum and Shell revealed a plan to support job creation projects in the coastal areas of Somalia. It is believed that a subsidiary company of Shell had obtained exploration concessions in Puntland before the outbreak of chaos in 1991.

Mark Bradbury, Director of the Rift Valley Institute and author of several reports and books on Somalia, stated that "oil is a big game changer." He added that "the international community has been very quiet on the whole exploitation of minerals and hydrocarbons. There is clear potential for dispute between the relatively stable Puntland and the rest of the country. The positive end would be a federal government put in place with international support; the negative, a Somalia being divided up by international military forces."

There are some significant points resulting from this conference that must be highlighted:

- The participation of Turkey, Qatar, the Organisation for International Cooperation, and other Muslim countries in the conference and consulting them in drafting the final communiqué has softened its tone. This also mitigates future risks that Somalia may encounter. Turkey has established itself in Somalia, not through politicians, but rather by gaining the trust of the Somalis. The Turkish agreement with the Somali government prior to the conference on training Somali forces is a positive element that will reduce the impact of AMISOM as well as the Ethiopian and Kenyan forces that seek to take over the situation.
- The conference will neutralise Ethiopia and Kenya and limit their power in Somalia, after having exclusively conducted their Somali agenda. In the conference, it was disclosed that the Ethiopian Prime Minister was uncomfortable and even furious, stating that he had not been consulted in the drafting of the final communiqué. This, however, was not true as all participating states were consulted, though many of their recommendations were not taken into account.
- The separation of North Somalia was not confirmed or refuted in the conference. Nonetheless, it is good that the international community supports dialogue between the government of Somaliland and the transitional federal government, or its replacement, to expound their future relations. A meeting was held between Sheikh Sharif, the Somali President, and Ahmed Mahamoud Silanyo, the President of Somaliland, signifying the opening of a new chapter and potentially

leading to talks between the two sides with international support. If they do in fact take place, the talks will lead to the start of oil extraction in Somaliland.

- There are signs of a newfound stability and recovery but by way of minimising focus on the transitional government and bringing about political transformation by building governmental institutions in local areas. This approach was theorised considerably by Western analysts. The situation may lead to the international community's pursuit of creating a regime similar to the that of the United Arab Emirates that may be acceptable to Somalis.
- There is willingness to cooperate with Somalis in diaspora and enhance their role in peace-building and economic development, which will benefit Somalia, but only if they organise themselves and represent the interest of Somalia rather than the interest of the tribes they come from.

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