
ETHIOPIA'S INTERVENTION IN SOMALIA, 2006-2009

Braden Civins

University of Texas

This analysis attempts to address the negative effects of Ethiopian military intervention on Somali civilians from late 2006 to early 2009. In order to gauge the effect of the Islamic Courts Union (ICU)'s governance on the humanitarian situation in Somalia, it is necessary to thoroughly examine and compare the number of civilian displacements, casualties and deaths caused by the military conflict and other factors (e.g. famine and flood) that occurred before and during the ICU's brief reign. To determine the immediate effects of Ethiopia's military intervention, this analysis examines statistical data regarding the rates of internal displacement, emigration and civilian deaths. The analysis also considers firsthand accounts provided by Somali civilians in determining the role of intervention-related violence in driving displacement and casualty trends. In many instances, the number of civilian casualties and displacements also reflect the nature of the combat tactics employed by all sides of the conflict; these tactics are examined through civilian accounts, NGO reports and UN documentation to determine the extent to which the combative parties either intentionally or recklessly inflicted suffering upon the Somali populace. Finally, comparing the humanitarian situation in Somali in the period immediately following the Ethiopian National Defense Force's withdrawal to conditions that existed

Introduction

In 2006, Ethiopian National Defense Forces (ENDF), with political support and military assistance from the United States, entered the sovereign state of Somalia to bolster the Transitional Federal Government (TFG) against the increasingly powerful Islamic Courts Union (ICU).¹ Although the allied forces easily

¹ Chris Albin-Lackey, *So Much to Fear: War Crimes and the Devastation of Somalia* (New York: Human Rights Watch, 2008), 3.

routed the ICU by January 2007, the struggle for control of Somalia had only just begun. Immediately after the dissolution of the ICU, an eclectic mix of former ICU loyalists, al-Shabaab Islamists and various Somali militias launched an insurgency campaign against the ENDF-TFG. The ensuing violence would last for over two years, inflict significant losses on all parties to the conflict and result in a catastrophic deterioration of humanitarian conditions for the Somali populace.

The purpose of this analysis is to determine the effects of Ethiopia's military intervention on the civilian population of Somalia. An examination of civilian casualties, displacements and emigration prior to, during and after the ENDF-TFG campaign provides an estimate of the immediate costs of the conflict. A study of the tactics employed by all parties involved in the conflict is also relevant in determining the severity of the conflict's effects on Somali civilians. This analysis also poses a counterfactual: had the ENDF intervention not occurred, could the ICU have provided the stability necessary to improve humanitarian conditions? Finally, this analysis examines the impact of the Ethiopian intervention on the humanitarian situation in Somalia in the immediate wake of the ENDF's withdrawal.

Background

Established in 1960, the Somali Republic was composed of the former Italian colonies of South Central Somalia and Puntland, and the former British Protectorate of Somaliland. In less than a decade, the republic, founded as a democracy, buckled under the weight of a corrupt government and a populace divided by sectarian conflict based on tribal affiliations.

In 1969, as the result of a military coup, former Vice Commander of the Somali army Siad Barre was installed as President. Barre initially experienced a measure of success in consolidating authority in the central government and limiting the divisiveness of inter-clan tensions through comprehensive political reforms. However, the ill-fated 1977 military campaign to liberate the Ogaden, a region of Ethiopia inhabited largely by Somalis, marked the beginning of the slow unraveling of Barre's regime. The Somali Republic's decisive defeat in the Ogaden War of 1977-1978 by the Soviet-backed Ethiopians undermined Barre's domestic authority, and Barre's inability to address the subsequent political fallout from the debacle paved the way for the reintroduction of "clannism, while the return of Western aid and assistance (to counter the Soviet presence in Ethi-

opia) renewed and fueled corruption.”² Domestic opposition to the Barre regime sprang up among clans, and a series of challenges to Barre’s authority were met with harsh repression. This violent cycle contributed to the gradual erosion of Barre’s power until his ultimate fall in 1991.

Chaos and violence swept Somalia upon Barre’s abdication—Somaliland’s declaration of independence, the fragmentation of the population along clan and sub-clan lines, the ensuing civil war and the rise of warlords such as Mohammed Farah Aidid all contributed to the displacement of three million Somalis.³ The efforts of the international community to provide humanitarian relief to the Somali population have been well-documented: UNOSOM in 1992, a UN Ceasefire Observer Force operation that “failed to make any impact” during the civil war;⁴ the US-led UNITAF task force in 1992, which made progress in “securing the main relief centres in the starvation area but did not attempt to disarm the Somali clan militias or warlords;”⁵ and UNOSOM II in 1993, which resulted in the deaths of eighteen US soldiers, prompting the withdrawal of US forces in 1994 and all remaining troops in “March 1995 after the loss of thousands of Somalis and 70 UN peacekeepers.”⁶

Between 1991 and 2006, there were over a dozen unsuccessful attempts by Somali warlords and clan leaders to establish a central government in Somalia. In 2006 the Transitional Federal Government, an Ethiopia-backed assembly of former warlords, was unified in the city of Baidoa. However, what little authority the TFG had was challenged almost immediately. The Union of Islamic Courts, a group of Sharia courts supported by the prominent Hawiye clans, defeated various warlords constituting the Alliance for the Restoration of Peace and Counter-Terrorism (ARPCT) in 2006, and thus seized control of much of southern and central Somalia, including the capital city of Mogadishu. Ethiopia, at the request of the TFG, deployed an unspecified number of ENDF soldiers to Baidoa in July 2006 following the capture of a nearby city by militias loyal to the ICU.⁷

With the ostensible purpose of facilitating dialogue between the TFG

2 Carolyn Nordstrom and Antonius C. G. M. Robben (eds.), *Fieldwork Under Fire: Contemporary Studies of Violence and Culture* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 44.

3 “Somalia Situation: Supplementary Appeal,” *UNHCR* (July 2007), 1, accessed November 1, 2010, <http://www.unhcr.org/partners/PARTNERS/46a4a1b82.pdf>.

4 “Country of Origin Information Report: Somalia,” *UK Border Agency* (July 2008), 5, accessed November 1, 2010, http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/country_reports.html.

5 *Ibid.*

6 *Ibid.*

7 “Ethiopia, Somalia: Stalemate at Baidoa,” *STRATFOR* (July 21, 2006), accessed November 1, 2010, http://www.stratfor.com/ethiopia_somalia_stalemate_baidoa.

and the ICU, the United Nations Security Council passed Resolution 1725 (UNSCR 1725) in December 2006. The Resolution called for the deployment of a multinational peacekeeping force made up of Intergovernmental Authority on Development and African Union personnel to facilitate peace talks between the TFG and ICU, maintain security in TFG-controlled Baidoa, protect TFG government officials and train TFG security personnel.⁸ Immediately after its passage, the ICU, adamantly opposed to the measure, began attacking TFG-held territories in and around Baidoa. These attacks catalyzed the offensive deployment of the ENDF-TFG forces towards Mogadishu and marked the beginning of the end for the ICU. The result was that “[b]y the end of December the ICU had folded under an Ethiopian-led TFG advance, with some ICU leaders and troops retreating south from Mogadishu, and others melting back into the city’s population.”⁹

Despite the defeat of the ICU, violence persisted largely unabated for the next two years as former ICU loyalists, Islamist militias such as al Shabaab and elements of the newly formed Alliance for the Re-Liberation of Somali (ARS) waged an insurgent campaign against the ENDF-TFG. The power vacuum left by the ICU’s collapse turned Somalia into a proxy battlefield of sorts, as a host of combatants sought to achieve a diverse set of aims in the resulting chaos: (1) the US targeted suspected al Qaeda members;¹⁰ (2) Eritreans armed and trained Somali militias to inflict losses upon their chief rival, Ethiopia; (3) Islamist militias and foreign jihadists waged war to dislodge the US-supported ENDF and establish a foothold in the Horn of Africa; and (4) Somali warlords sought to aggrandize their power. Many of the belligerent parties committed flagrant violations of international humanitarian law, and the effects of the violence upon the civilian population were catastrophic.

Methodology

This analysis addresses a series of related questions. Prior to the intervention, did the ICU establish a level of stability in its areas of governance that improved humanitarian conditions? If so, could it have continued to do so? What was the effect of Ethiopia’s intervention on the Somali population from late 2006 to early 2009? What role did each party play in exacerbating an already dire hu-

8 United Nations Security Council, UNSCR 1725, December 2006.

9 “Routinely Targeted: Attacks on Somali Civilians,” *Amnesty International* (May 2008), 3, accessed November 1, 2010, <http://www.amnesty.org/en/news-and-updates/report/routine-killings-civilians-somalia-20080506>.

10 *Ibid.*, 3.

manitarian situation (i.e. how did the tactics employed by the combatants exacerbate civilian casualties, displacement, emigration, etc.)? Finally, in the wake of the ENDF's withdrawal, what else can be learned regarding the net effect of Ethiopia's military intervention on humanitarian conditions?

In order to gauge the effect of ICU governance on the humanitarian situation in Somalia, it is necessary to thoroughly examine and compare the number of civilian displacements, casualties and deaths caused by the military conflict and other factors (e.g. famine, flood) that occurred before and during the ICU's brief reign from July-December 2006. Determining the amount of access the ICU allowed humanitarian organizations to Somali civilians is also relevant in gauging how ICU governance impacted humanitarian conditions.

To determine the immediate effects of Ethiopia's military intervention, this analysis examines statistical data regarding the rates of internal displacement, emigration and civilian deaths from December 2006-January 2009. The analysis also considers firsthand accounts provided by Somali civilians in determining the role of intervention-related violence in driving displacement and casualty trends. Both the statistical data and interviews are of importance, since frequent droughts, seasonal flooding, famine, extreme poverty and overcrowding are common causes of death and displacement in Somalia. Such factors must be taken into account when trying to determine what additional displacement, emigration and deaths were caused by the intervention.

In many instances, the number of civilian casualties and displacements will also reflect the nature of the combat tactics employed by all sides of the conflict. These tactics will be examined through civilian accounts, NGO reports and UN documentation to determine the extent to which the combative parties either intentionally or recklessly inflicted suffering upon the Somali populace. Finally, comparing the humanitarian situation in Somalia in the period immediately following the ENDF's withdrawal to conditions that existed immediately prior to the invasion will provide evidence as to the net effect of Ethiopia's intervention.

Findings

Rise of the Islamic Courts Union

The first half of 2006 was characterized by intense fighting between the ICU and the ARPCT, a group of allied warlords who enjoyed a degree of support from the US. While sporadic inter-clan violence was not uncommon in Somalia

between the collapse of the Barre regime in 1991 and 2006, the ICU-ARPCT struggle was particularly consequential, as the ARPCT represented the last barrier to the ICU's rise to power. By July the ICU had routed ARPCT forces and effectively established control over Mogadishu and parts of central and southern Somalia.

Upon securing the capital city, the ICU removed freelance militia checkpoints and improved freedom of movement throughout the city.¹¹ The ICU's ascendancy ushered in a brief period of relative calm that allowed the "opportunity to enhance already existing and on-going humanitarian activities, in particular in favour of around a quarter of a million [internally displaced persons] IDPs residing in the capital who ha[d] been receiving very limited assistance over the years."¹² Furthermore, in mid-July the ICU actively encouraged UN agencies to reinforce their support to IDPs that were residing in overcrowded settlements in Mogadishu.¹³

By reactivating sixteen police stations, issuing a ban on arms possession in the streets and advising foreigners to provide notice before coming to the capital city, the ICU had made tangible improvements to the security situation in Mogadishu by August 2006.¹⁴ This stability paved the way for an unprecedented increase in humanitarian aid, as evidenced by the successful polio vaccinations administered to 337,366 Mogadishu children by September, the highest number of vaccinations administered since 1991.¹⁵

Stability, however, did not come without cost. As a result of the fighting that erupted between the ICU and the ARPCT in February 2006, the greater part of 19,196 Somalis fled Mogadishu to the Kenyan Dadaab refugee camps by July.¹⁶ In the first six months of the year, 100,000 IDPs, "cit[ed] violent clashes, discrimination and tensions as the key reason for their flight."¹⁷ To put the numbers in perspective, the United Nations Office for Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs Somalia estimated that 400,000 protracted IDPs had been living in Somalia for at least a decade prior to 2006.¹⁸ One episode of violence in July between the ICU and the last remnant of the ARPCT resulted in the death of

11 Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, *Humanitarian Situation in Somalia: Monthly Analysis* (June 2006), 1, accessed November 1, 2010, <http://ochaonline.un.org/somalia>.

12 Ibid.

13 OCHA, *Humanitarian Situation* (July 2006).

14 OCHA, *Humanitarian Situation* (August 2006).

15 OCHA, *Humanitarian Situation* (September 2006).

16 OCHA, *Humanitarian Situation* (July 2006).

17 Ibid.

18 OCHA, *Internally Displaced People* (December 2006), accessed November 1, 2010, <http://www.somali-jna.org/downloads/IDPs%20Fact%20Sheet.pdf>.

140 people and the temporary displacement of 1,000 families.¹⁹ Displacements increased as the ICU expanded its influence in September and October to southern and central Somalia. More than 6,000 Somalis arrived in the Dadaab camps in September and nearly 7,000 in October, most citing fear of conflict as their primary reason for relocation.²⁰

ENDF Intervention

This study analyzes the impact of Ethiopia's intervention as it began with the ENDF-TFG's offensive campaign targeting Mogadishu and central and southern Somalia, but excludes to the greatest extent possible analysis of the impact of ENDF's defensive activities in Baidoa activities prior to December 2006. Analysis of the effects of the African Union Mission's (AMISOM) presence in Somalia is also omitted due to the force's inconsequential size and limited mandate restricting its function to peacekeeping.

The Ethiopian government never publicly acknowledged the size of the forces deployed in Somalia during the intervention, but it is estimated that 30,000-40,000 Ethiopian soldiers took part in operations in 2007 and 2008.²¹ By comparison, TFG soldiers involved in offensive operations and the defense of Mogadishu numbered approximately 5,000.²² In late 2006 TFG forces, with ENDF ground and air support, engaged and effectively dispersed the ICU, which had previously "gained control of 8 of the country's 18 administrative regions" by early January 2007.²³ At the peak of this brief period of fighting, an "estimated 65,000-70,000 people were displaced, some of them having already been displaced by the flooding," but most cited conflict as the primary motivation for their flight.²⁴

Although the ENDF-TFG alliance had soundly defeated the ICU, establishing order proved a more complicated task, especially in Mogadishu. The obvious reason was that: "[A]fter the fall of the ICU [sic], the semblance and order and security that the ICU had created in Mogadishu began to deteriorate."²⁵ Banditry, violence and assassination of TFG-loyalists by insurgents became

19 OCHA, *Humanitarian Situation* (July 2006).

20 OCHA, *Humanitarian Situation* (September 2006).

21 While Human Rights Watch asserts that 30,000 ENDF soldiers took part in the early 2007 campaign, STRATFOR estimates the number to be approximately 40,000.

22 Albin-Lackey, *So Much to Fear*, 3.

23 UK Border Agency, *Origin Information Report*, 19.

24 OCHA, *Humanitarian Situation* (January 2007): 1.

25 UK Border Agency, *Origin Information Report*, 20.

commonplace in the early months of 2007.²⁶ The deterioration of the situation is reflected in statistical data compiled throughout the year.

According to estimates provided by Somali medical institutions, 6,501 Mogadishu civilians were killed and 8,516 wounded in 2007.²⁷ These numbers do not take into account civilian casualties that occurred throughout central and southern Somalia, a figure that is unlikely to be definitively determined. Between February and June 2007, 406,000 Somali civilians were displaced.²⁸ United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) estimates place the total number of displacements from Mogadishu in 2007 as a result of the conflict at over 700,000.²⁹ While droughts and seasonal flooding often cause the highest displacement rates in central and southern Somalia, OCHA's assertion that displacement from Mogadishu during this period of time was primarily conflict-driven is sound, since the capital city served as the primary battleground between insurgents and the ENDF-TFG allies. Given that it "is not clear how many protracted IDPs within Mogadishu may have also fled amongst the 700,000 displaced in 2007," arriving at accurate estimates as to displacements directly attributable to the violence is nearly impossible.³⁰ However, even subtracting the 400,000 protracted IDPs who were in Somalia prior to the outbreak of the conflict from the 2007 total IDP figure leaves 300,000 newly created IDPs. While an estimated 1,000,000 IDPs were living in Somalia by late 2007, the US Agency for International Development also estimates that 335,000 Somali refugees who sought asylum abroad were displaced in 2007.³¹

Even in the absence of conflict, displacement in Somalia is common. It is driven by a variety of factors including natural disasters, economic conditions and threats to public health. While it must be acknowledged that a portion of the 2007 displacement is likely attributable to drought brought upon by weak spring rains in 2007, there is ample evidence to suggest that the majority of displacement was driven by conflict.³² This conclusion is shared by the UN, which categorically claimed that "the main cause of displacement was the conflict

26 OCHA, *Humanitarian Situation* (June 2007): 1.

27 In early December the Elman Human Rights Organization estimated that close to 6,000 civilians had been killed in Somalia due to the conflict in 2007.

28 OCHA, *Humanitarian Situation* (June 2007): 1.

29 United Nations, *Somalia Humanitarian Overview* 1, no. 1 (January 2008).

30 *Ibid.*, 3.

31 USAID, *Somalia Complex Emergency Report #1*, December 2007, accessed November 1, 2010, http://www.usaid.gov/our_work/humanitarian_assistance/disaster_assistance/countries/somalia/template/fs_sr/somalia_ce_sr01_12-20-2007.pdf.

32 OCHA, *Executive Summary: Somalia*, January 2008.

between the TFG/Ethiopian forces and the ICU.”³³ The UN’s claim is supported by the fact that during the height of the conflict between the ENDF-TFG alliance and the ICU, between 65,000-70,000 people were displaced within two months. A subsequent report indicates that 40,000 were displaced in February as a direct result of the unrest.³⁴ Furthermore, OCHA noted that violence in “November 2007 alone was of such intensity that it triggered the movement of more than 240,000 people out of the city [Mogadishu].”³⁵ These individual instances of displacement suggest that a substantial proportion of displacements in 2007 were a direct result of the conflict between the ENDF-TFG and the insurgency.

In June 2008, the TFG and the Djibouti-based wing of the ARS, through UN mediation, signed an accord calling for a cease-fire between the two parties, the eventual withdrawal of the ENDF and the deployment of a UN peacekeeping force.³⁶ However, the Djibouti-based ARS, a more moderate and conciliatory faction of the party than that based in Asmara, Eritrea, did not have control over critical components of the insurgency, including al Shabaab, a radical Islamist group that once formed the military arm of the ICU. The diplomatic breakthrough did little to quell the escalation in violence that took place in 2008. By the end of the year, the ENDF-TFG alliance had relinquished control of much of central and southern Somalia to the insurgency.³⁷ In December 2008, “the situation reached an impasse following dramatic gains by insurgent forces. TFG and Ethiopian forces...lost the ability to exercise even limited influence across most of the country and appear[ed] to have given up trying to recapture territory they have lost.”³⁸ The TFG-ENDF’s area of operations was limited to Baidoa and a handful of districts in Mogadishu, a military situation similar to that of early 2007.³⁹

According to the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre, approximately 300,000 Somalis were displaced in 2008 as a result of the fighting,⁴⁰ including 870,000 or 60 percent of Mogadishu residents.⁴¹ The IDP count in

33 OCHA, *Humanitarian Situation*, December 2006-January 2007, 3.

34 OCHA, *Humanitarian Situation*, February 2007.

35 OCHA, *Humanitarian Situation*, November 2007.

36 Ted Dagne, *Current Conditions and Prospects for a Lasting Peace* (Congressional Research Service), February 18, 2009, 2.

37 Ibid.

38 Albin-Lackey, *So Much to Fear*, 19.

39 Ibid.

40 Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre, *Somalia: Massive Displacement and Humanitarian Need*, July 2008, accessed November 1, 2010, [www.internal-displacement.org/8025708F004BE3B1/\(httpInfoFiles\)/.../\\$file/Somalia_Overview_Jul08.pdf](http://www.internal-displacement.org/8025708F004BE3B1/(httpInfoFiles)/.../$file/Somalia_Overview_Jul08.pdf).

41 Oxfam America, *Statement by 52 NGOs working in Somalia on rapidly deteriorating humanitarian crisis*, October 6, 2008, accessed November 25, 2010, es.oxfamamerica.org/workspaces/press_releases/

Somalia totaled 1.3 million by the year's end. A joint statement released by 52 NGOs in October 2008 describes how conflict, drought and escalated food prices led to a situation in which "[n]early half of Somalia's population, or 3.25 million people, are now in need of emergency aid," a 77 percent increase since the beginning of the year.⁴²

Although estimates vary as to the number of civilian casualties caused by conflict in 2008, the Elman Peace and Human Rights Organization report that, as of December 2008, 16,210 civilians had been killed and 29,000 wounded since the beginning of the insurgency in 2007.⁴³ This puts the number of civilian casualties in 2008 alone at roughly 10,000.

Ethiopia's military presence in Somalia effectively came to an end in January 2009 as the TFG and the Djibouti-based wing of the ARS formed a government of national unity. Upon Ethiopia's withdrawal, ARS and TFG troops, along with limited support from AMISOM, were tasked with bringing security back to the country.⁴⁴ Incidents of violence, while fewer in number and intensity than in the past two years, continued nonetheless. In the first few months of 2009, for example, opposition groups including more radical elements of the ARS, clans hostile to the new government and al Shabaab launched a series of attacks on AMISOM forces,⁴⁵ government officials and humanitarian workers.⁴⁶ Although tangible progress was made in providing a measure of security largely absent in the previous two years, the situation continues to remain volatile.⁴⁷

Conflict and resultant civilian casualties, displacement and emigration have been commonplace in Somalia throughout the last twenty years. However, since the last major Somali Civil War following Barre's fall, humanitarian crises in Somalia had not reached the level of severity that occurred during Ethiopia's intervention.

Combat Tactics

statement-by-52-ngos-working-in-somalia-on-rapidly-deteriorating-humanitarian-crisis.

42 Ibid.

43 Elman Peace Center, *2008 Human Rights Report: Somalia*, accessed November 23, 2010, http://www.elmanpeace.org/news-2009-Sept-8/4/2008_human_rights_reports_somalia.aspx

44 AMISOM forces are estimated to stand at 4,000 troops, which represents half of its original mandate set forth in UNSCR 1725.

45 OCHA reports that a suicide bomber took the lives of eleven AMISOM soldiers in February 2008. OCHA, *Humanitarian Situation*, February 2008.

46 Two WFP workers were killed in January. Ibid.

47 OCHA monthly analyses from December 2008 and January 2009 state that 17,000 IDPs had started returning to Mogadishu, the highest number of returns in two years; OCHA March – 20,000 IDPs returning, 'security situations' down by 51 percent.

An analysis of the combat tactics employed by all parties is relevant to determining the conflict's relationship to the data cited in this report. While establishing a causal relationship between the intervention and displacement is a daunting task, an examination of the tactics employed by the various combatant parties of the 2006-2009 conflict explains how many civilian casualties occurred, and suggests likely causes for the high displacement rates that occurred in Mogadishu and throughout central and southern Somalia during the fighting. This section will discuss the combat tactics of the insurgent forces, transitional federal government forces and the Ethiopian National Defense Forces.

Somali insurgents opposed to the ENDF-TFG used the civilian populace to their tactical advantage. A common method of attack against ENDF-TFG forces involved firing mortars from positions deep within residential areas, effectively "using populated neighborhoods as unwilling shields."⁴⁸ The insurgents, having launched their initial barrage from concealed positions in populated areas, immediately fled the scene, leaving the local populace to face the inevitable reprisal from ENDF-TFG artillery. The insurgents also added to civilian casualties by failing to "regularly use spotters to guide their mortar fire, so frequently attacks fl[e]w on civilians caught in the general vicinity of their targets."⁴⁹ However, residential neighborhoods were not the only means of providing cover to launch attacks. Insurgents also used IDP camps as staging points for offensive operations, drawing ENDF-TFG attention to densely populated areas largely comprised of legitimate IDPs.⁵⁰

According to extensive research by Human Rights Watch, another troubling practice commonly employed by al Shabaab was the forced recruitment of child soldiers. Al Shabaab reportedly used schools as recruiting grounds, promising financial reward in return for service or otherwise coercing the children to enlist through threats.⁵¹ Many families fled Mogadishu as a result of this practice.

Insurgent elements frequently threatened and assassinated TFG officials, opposition party members willing to reconcile with the TFG and civilians who "disagreed with or simply failed to express sufficient enthusiasm for insurgent goals and tactics."⁵² Various NGOs have documented several specific

48 Albin-Lackey, *So Much to Fear*, 33.

49 Ibid.

50 IDMC July 2008.

51 Albin-Lackey, *So Much to Fear*, 68.

52 Ibid., 69-73.

instances of insurgency tactics serving as the direct cause for internal displacement and emigration of Somali civilians.⁵³

Although the TFG was comprised of an eclectic mix of the Somali National Army, militias, police, Ethiopian-trained forces and various other elements, this analysis considers the military tactics employed by each component of the TFG in the aggregate.⁵⁴ Given the many constituent parts of the TFG, estimates as to actual TFG force sizes lack precision.

As documented by Human Rights Watch, search and seizure operations conducted by TFG forces with the intent of apprehending insurgents hiding among the local populace often resulted in theft and violence.⁵⁵ NGOs were not the only parties aware of these alleged abuses; the US Department of State described TFG police as “generally ineffective, underpaid, and corrupt,” and acknowledged the existence of “continued allegations that TFG security officials were responsible for extrajudicial killings, indiscriminate firing on civilians, arbitrary arrest and detention, rape, extortion, looting and harassment.”⁵⁶

Despite the historical enmity between Somalia and Ethiopia, the ENDF in Somalia, which numbered between 30,000-40,000 throughout the duration of the conflict, was initially praised by many Somali civilians for being “disciplined in their day-to-day interactions with Somali civilians.”⁵⁷ However, when confronted with attacks from a growing and diffuse insurgency, ENDF frequently responded with bombardment of highly populated urban areas. ENDF relied on the use of Katyusha rockets launched from Grad multiple-rocket-launchers in response to insurgent attacks. Critics of ENDF tactics claimed the Katyusha was an inherently indiscriminate weapon incapable of offering the targeting precision necessary to minimize civilian casualties—assuming that targets were even located to begin with.⁵⁸ Firsthand accounts detail several instances of civilian casualties that occurred as a result of Katyushas.⁵⁹ In one incident, ENDF responded to an insurgent attack launched from the town of Beletweyne by shelling the city for three days in July 2008. Reports estimate “that at the end of July, 74,000 people—more than 75 percent of the town’s population—had been

53 “Routinely Targeted,” 4.

54 Albin-Lackey, *So Much to Fear*, 42.

55 *Ibid.*, 42-57.

56 US State Department, *2007 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Somalia*, accessed March 15, 2008, <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2007/100504.htm>.

57 Albin-Lackey, *So Much to Fear*, 58.

58 *Ibid.*

59 Human Rights Watch, *Shell-Shocked*, August 12, 2007, accessed, November 23, 2010, <http://www.hrw.org/en/node/10783/section/15>.

displaced as a direct result of the bombardment and related fighting.”⁶⁰ Such episodes were reportedly commonplace throughout 2008.⁶¹

ENDF soldiers were also accused of using indiscriminate small arms fire that resulted in further civilian casualties. In an August 2008 incident, ENDF soldiers responded to the detonation of a roadside bomb with wild gunfire that left approximately 40 Somali civilians dead.⁶² In addition to recorded instances of reckless use of force, human rights groups also claimed that search and seizure operations conducted by the ENDF, like those carried out by the TFG, occasionally resulted in assault, rape, looting and killing of Somali civilians.⁶³

Humanitarian Access

A survey of the humanitarian assistance community's access to Somali civilians throughout 2006-2009 also indicates the greater picture of humanitarian conditions in Somalia throughout the period. At the outset of fighting in 2007, the TFG immediately closed the borders and prevented flights carrying humanitarian personnel and goods from entering Somalia. The closure prompted the UN and several NGOs in Somalia to relocate to Nairobi.⁶⁴ Humanitarian assistance to the Somali populace, such as “flood response and other life-saving activities virtually ground to a halt.”⁶⁵ Flights carrying humanitarian personnel and materials were eventually permitted to land in Somalia under limited circumstances.

In January 2008, relief efforts were subjected to unprecedented restrictions; roadblocks, checkpoints, banditry and taxation significantly impeded the transportation of essential goods.⁶⁶ Humanitarian personnel increasingly became “targets of roadblocks, kidnapping threats, harassment and roadside bombs, culminating on 28 January in the killing of three aid workers in an explosion near Kismayo.”⁶⁷ By October 2008, 111 incidents of violence against aid workers had been reported.⁶⁸ Over the course of that year, 34 aid workers were killed; this grim statistic led OCHA to conclude that Somalia was “the most danger-

60 OCHA, *Monthly Cluster Report*, September 2008, accessed November 23, 2010, ochaonline.un.org/OchaLinkClick.aspx?link=ocha&docId=1095324.

61 Ibid.

62 Albin-Lackey, *So Much to Fear*, 59.

63 Ibid., 61-3.

64 OCHA, *Monthly Analysis*, December 2006-January 2007, 2.

65 Ibid., 1.

66 UN, *Somalia Humanitarian Overview*, January 2008, 1.

67 Ibid.

68 *Statement by 52 NGOs*.

ous country in the world for aid workers to operate.”⁶⁹ The pervasive insecurity caused by warfare and absence of governance impeded the ability of humanitarian organizations to bring relief to the 3.2 million Somalis, or 43 percent of the population, dependent on foreign aid at the height of the conflict. The security environment with respect to humanitarian aid operations did not improve in the immediate aftermath of the ENDF’s withdrawal in 2009.⁷⁰

Conclusions

In the Absence of Intervention: A Counterfactual

The ICU’s brief period of control came to an abrupt end in December 2006. The timing of the ICU’s attacks on Baidoa in late 2006 suggests that the action was intended to wipe out the TFG before the arrival of the international peacekeeping force authorized by UNSCR 1725. From the perspective of the ICU, the AMISOM force was an attempt by the international community to legitimize and bolster the faltering TFG. The ICU was the de facto authority in Somalia while the TFG, incapable of exerting control beyond Baidoa, appeared to enjoy broad support internationally. The ICU, had it succeeded in eliminating the TFG, would have been the sole authority in Somalia. The issue of whether the ICU could have alleviated the suffering of the Somali populace to any meaningful extent merits consideration.

Admittedly, any estimate as to the probable effect of ICU governance on humanitarian conditions in Somalia is entirely speculative. There is ample reason to be skeptical about the ICU’s ability to provide for the beleaguered Somali people. Even in the absence of intervention, it is far from certain that the ICU could have retained power over the long term, given the existing fragmentation along clan lines within the party (manifested later by the division of the ARS into hard-line and moderate sects). Moreover, ICU leadership had declared its hostile intent towards Ethiopia and “openly threatened war...and talked of annexing the whole of Ethiopia’s eastern Somali region.”⁷¹ While the ICU might have tempered its belligerent posture over time, it seems unlikely that the Ethiopian government would be willing to tolerate the existence of yet another hostile neighboring state. Suffice to say, large-scale conflict between Ethiopia and Somalia would likely exacerbate the myriad humanitarian crises

69 UNHCR, *Somalia: Humanitarian Overview*, December 2008 – January 2009.

70 OCHA, *Monthly Analysis, February 2009* reported two WFP workers were killed in January.

71 Albin-Lackey, *So Much to Fear*, 3.

afflicting the Somali populace. Furthermore, that elements of the ICU had ties to terrorist organizations operating in Somalia, most notably al Qaeda, would have complicated the international community's willingness and ability to offer humanitarian aid.

However, the ICU proved itself uniquely capable of providing a measure of stability to Somalia and facilitating humanitarian organizations' access to the populace. The ICU removed militia checkpoints, actively sought humanitarian assistance and presided over a sizeable return of IDPs to Mogadishu. Moreover, the ICU was able to establish rule of law in Mogadishu by implementing security-oriented regulations aimed at reducing violence. In fact, the ICU was credited "with bringing unprecedented stability to a city plagued by lawlessness and extreme violence."⁷²

In the Wake of ENDF Withdrawal From Somalia

In early 2009, following the withdrawal of the ENDF from Somalia, the TFG, through painstaking negotiations, contentious debates and old-fashioned horse-trading, was able to re-establish itself as a coalition government comprised of an eclectic mix of former rivals under the leadership of President Sheikh Sharif Ahmed, the former Commander in Chief of the ICU and head of the moderate, Djibouti-based ARS. This new coalition government, with the support of a small force of African Union soldiers, waged a renewed offensive campaign in central and southern Somalia against the remaining insurgents, primarily radical Islamists in al Shabaab and Hizbul Islam. Coalition forces achieved initial success against the insurgents, but the reemergence of radical Islamist militias with strength enough to threaten the fragile authority of the coalition-based TFG remains a distinct possibility. In light of the Somali government's ability to reconstitute itself through the incorporation of former rivals, it is worth considering whether the ICU could have formed a unity government with the TFG prior to the outbreak of hostilities in 2006.

The formation of a unity government in 2006 was improbable for two reasons. First, the political power disparity between the ICU and TFG at the time left little incentive for the ICU to share power. Second, the fragmented coalitions that made up both parties were unlikely to reach a consensus favoring reconciliation, particularly given each group's relationship with neighboring Ethiopia. Furthermore, it is uncertain whether improvement in humanitarian conditions would have occurred following reconciliation in 2006 because of

lingering questions regarding the role of militant groups in the new regime.

Lessons Learned: The Effects of Intervention

Statistical data offers useful lessons in understanding the humanitarian effects of Ethiopia's intervention in Somalia. During ENDF operations in Somalia from 2006-2009, at least "15,000 civilians [were] killed, an estimated 1.1 million people displaced, and 476,000 Somalis fled to neighboring countries."⁷³ For reasons provided above, there is reason to believe that the civilian casualty rates cited are a modest estimate. This analysis does not attempt to lay the blame for the exacerbation in Somalia's humanitarian crises squarely at the feet of any one party. Regarding the effects of ENDF security operations on humanitarian conditions in Somalia, beyond the documented instances of injuries and deaths caused as a result of the ENDF's intentional abuse of the civilian population and use of indiscriminate shelling and gunfire, it is problematic to make any hard assertions regarding the ENDF's causal role in the death and displacement that plagued Somalis for two years. However, statistical data and firsthand accounts offer a starkly contrasting picture of the humanitarian situation in Somalia before December 2006 and during the ENDF's two-year conflict with the insurgency.

The ENDF's involvement in Somalia had the immediate effect of creating a power vacuum in which Islamist militants assumed control and the more moderate elements of the ICU became "marginalized, splintered, and weakened."⁷⁴ As discussed earlier, evidence suggests that the ICU was cultivating an environment of stability and security unprecedented in Somalia since 1991. As the Ethiopian government and the TFG eventually entered into productive diplomatic dialogue with the more moderate ICU elements, it seems plausible that Ethiopia would not have intervened had its government, the TFG and the ICU found a way to neutralize the influence of the more radical ICU elements in 2006. This approach was never attempted, as Ethiopia, the TFG and the US labeled the ICU an extremist organization and made few diplomatic overtures to the new regime in Mogadishu.⁷⁵ Admittedly, the US and Ethiopia were largely justified in viewing the ICU as a potential threat to security interests in the region.

The events that transpired between late 2006 and early 2009 offer

73 Dagne, *Current Conditions*, 2.

74 *Ibid.*

75 *Ibid.*, 3.

poignant lessons regarding: (1) the effects of military intervention in nations already plagued by humanitarian crises; (2) the role of the international community in either mitigating or exacerbating those conditions; and (3) the type of leadership and diplomacy necessary to most effectively improve humanitarian conditions. Ethiopia's most critical strategic mistake during the conflict was its unilateral support of the TFG and its attempt to supplant the ICU with an ineffectual regime. Fragmented, corrupt and unpopular with the local populace, the TFG, ushered into power by force with the aid of a nation considered by many Somalis to be the enemy, had no long-term viability as a governing power. Ethiopia and its allies made the mistake of misunderstanding the full range of players in the ICU and painting a distorted picture of it to the international community. In 2006, "US, TFG, and Ethiopian officials labeled the entire leadership of the ICU as extremist and terrorist," yet invited some of the very same ICU officials to take part in a UN-led peace process a year and a half later.⁷⁶

From a strategic standpoint, Ethiopia should have also been aware of the likelihood that a prolonged insurgency would develop, particularly given the experience of interventionist forces in Somalia in the early 1990s. A force of even 40,000, acting on intelligence provided by reliable sources is, according to common wisdom, logistically incapable of stabilizing a nation of roughly 7,000,000. More importantly, trying to bring stability to an impoverished nation already plagued by droughts, floods, conflict and displacement is impossible without facilitating, rather than limiting, the delivery of humanitarian aid to the populace. By restricting humanitarian access, deploying an undermanned force, failing to develop a coherent counter-insurgency strategy and supporting an ineffective party against one that was demonstrably capable of at least a degree of stabilization, the Ethiopian intervention was bound to fail in its strategic objectives, and as a result, worsen an already dire humanitarian situation.

While the UN did facilitate productive diplomatic dialogue that resulted in the unity government, its initial attempts to bring the ICU and TFG to the negotiating table were imprudent. Rather than deploying to the negotiations a small contingent of peacekeepers tasked with protecting one party, the international community might have made more progress in stabilizing Somalia had it called for a more substantial peacekeeper presence with a broader, more neutral mandate including the facilitation of delivery of humanitarian aid as a primary purpose.⁷⁷ While such a proposition presents a high degree of security risk and political difficulty, it would at least signal the international community's intent

76 Ibid., 4.

77 UNSCR 1725.

to improve the welfare of the Somali population and broker an equitable political resolution.

The humanitarian crisis in Somalia is ongoing. While the Ethiopian military intervention both directly contributed to and exacerbated the humanitarian situation in terms of civilian casualties, displacement, emigration and access to humanitarian aid, there is still a possibility that Ethiopia's actions will yield long-term benefits for the Somali population. The formation of a unity government that enjoys a measure of support in both Ethiopia and Somalia was perhaps a turning point in addressing the humanitarian crisis. The success of the new government hinges on its ability to assert control over central and southern Somalia, a formidable challenge considering the continued violence in those regions caused by inter-clan fighting and militant Islamists. If the unity government proves capable of stabilizing Somalia and reintroducing the rule of law, Ethiopia's intervention, it can be argued, will have played at least some role in paving the way for long-term improvement in humanitarian conditions in Somalia.

PEAR

