

## PINR and the Realities of Somali Politics

Events in Somalia have continued to attract a great deal of attention, comment and analysis. This is hardly surprising given the intensity of the fighting in March and the numbers of civilians killed. Nevertheless, it is of concern that so much of this comment continues to draw on information from highly partial, frequently inaccurate and misleading sources. Even worse, in some cases, these inaccuracies seem to reach the level of informing policy. The European Union's lukewarm response to Transitional Federal Government of Somalia (TFG) appeals for funding for the proposed National Reconciliation conference appears to be based on an entirely inaccurate understanding of the role and importance of the former Speaker of Parliament and of the former chairman of the executive committee of the Union of Islamic Courts (UIC), \*<sup>1</sup> as well highly partial views of the TFG.

One of the problem with attempting to analyze Somali politics and events is that any interpretations or comments are immediately identified with particular political viewpoints. This piece will be seen as taking a pro-TFG and pro-Ethiopian stance, all the more so since I write from Addis Ababa. \*<sup>2</sup> This will be reinforced by my identification of extremist jihadist elements as bearing the main responsibility for the fighting in March, and as having implemented a wide range of atrocities and human rights abuses in Mogadishu after the UIC was forced out of the city by the population of Mogadishu, in late December. These activities have included random shelling and mortaring of civilians and non-military targets, assassinations of government and police officials, destruction of houses, and the shooting down of planes. In fact, none of this is in dispute, and if anyone is going to look at possible war crimes following the government's attempts to impose security on the areas of Mogadishu from which these activities originated, then they should certainly start here.

The most important element in any attempt to comment or discuss the problems of Somalia is the need for accuracy, the necessity to look at the available evidence from both, indeed all, sides of the political equation. It is also critically important to evaluate the evidence available and distinguish between fact and fiction. It is naïve to accept any reports at face value. Even the BBC Somali Service, once regarded as the most accurate source for Somali politics, has become highly controversial, and is now, quite rightly, heavily criticized, following the clear bias it has displayed in favor of the UIC and the strong, often unjustified, criticisms of the TFG. The BBC is now widely identified as taking a specific clan position. It is not alone in this. Virtually all of the many Somali websites take overtly partisan positions, to the extent that one Somali even described them, accurately enough, as “tabloids of tribal malevolence”. Any use of these sources should be made with extreme care.<sup>3</sup>

It would help if journalists, and commentators, stopped repeating inaccurate information. As so often, once one version of events gets into print, it is repeated ad nauseam, irrespective of accuracy. It takes a long time to remove errors even when they are demonstrably wrong, as it is usually in someone's

---

1 The Courts went through a number of name changes. Originally designated the Islamic Courts Union (ICU), after June 2006 it was designated the Council of Somali Islamic Courts (CSIC), the Supreme Council of Islamic Courts (SCIC) or the Supreme Islamic Council of Somalia (SICS). Subsequently it has been more usual to refer to it as either the Union of Islamic Courts (UIC), which I have used here, or the Islamic Courts Council (ICC), a designation used by Dr. Michael Weinstein in his most recent PINR article *Somalia Seized with Stasis* (12.4.2007), PINR, to which I will frequently refer.

2 .In fact, I do not think I have any particularly pro-Ethiopian position over Somalia. I think Ethiopia has made several major mistakes in Somalia and certainly should have been able to avoid the kind of intervention that took place last December. Equally, to describe the intervention as an invasion is purely polemical, with seriously inaccurate implications for the TFG and its role. What is important is that information should be accurate, and accuracy has been, and remains, in very short supply in almost all discussions on Somalia.

3 . Dr. Weinstein apparently monitors “local, regional and international media, and official documents on a daily basis to get a sense of the concrete flow of events...”. He does not indicate how, if at all, he evaluates these sources, or whether he is troubled by any doubts about their accuracy. Given that many of these sites have a record of considerable partiality in their reporting, this appears both dangerous and rash. *Somalia Reverts to Political Fragmentation*, Dr. M. Weinstein, PINR. 21.2.2007. I have commented briefly on other articles by Dr. Weinstein previously in *Somalia's Islamic Courts Union and the International Media: A Comment*, Antony. Shaw, 26.2.2007; *Ethiopia in Somalia: Perceptions, Comments and Realities*. Antony. Shaw, 4.12.2006. For additional comments on the Islamic Courts see also *The Supreme Islamic Council of Somalia (SICS)*. Antony Shaw, 3.9.2006.

interest to keep them alive. Two such errors, elevated by repetition to the status of alleged fact, are the idea that the UIC produced six months of peace in Somalia after June 2006 and that it offered a national political formula as an alternative to the clan sectarianism of the warlords or the TFG. Both of these could hardly be further from the truth, as is the claim that the UIC welcomed political reconciliation with the TFG. The evidence is overwhelming and is quite clear to anyone prepared to make an examination of what has been happening on the ground in Somalia and in Mogadishu in particular. Equally, any serious study of Ethiopian policy towards Somalia would certainly note that Ethiopia does not, and cannot control the TFG, that it finds it an exasperating and difficult ally, that it actually wants a stable and quiescent, but not a divided, Somalia, and finally, that it has no intention of keeping troops any longer than absolutely necessary in Somalia.<sup>4</sup>

I have concentrated here on PINR, and Dr. Weinstein, because he has produced a regular monthly analysis on Somalia over the last fifteen months, and has probably been the most prolific and extensive commentator on events in Somalia. Only David Shinn the former US ambassador to Ethiopia has come near his level of output, and it must be said, has produced overall a far more measured level of comment and criticism. Dr. Weinstein's analyses have been marked, indeed marred, by a consistent failure fully to understand Somali politics (though it does appear that he has now finally begun to appreciate the importance of the clan). He does not seem to appreciate that the TFG is the legally constituted and internationally recognized government in Somalia and has been since November 2004, and that it has a seat in the AU, IGAD and the UN. He has consistently neglected the clan make-up of the UIC or ICC as he refers to it, and ignored the fact that it failed to break away from its Haber Gidir/Hawiye roots, continuing to make the fundamentally erroneous assumption that the "the Courts were a genuine attempt at Somali national unification". The reality could hardly have been more different. \*5 Dr. Weinstein confuses the ICC/UIC leadership whose roots lie in al-Itihaad and external radical Islamic movements with those who controlled the pre-June Islamic Courts, who make up the non-political social structures of Islam in Somalia and who have remained remote from the political and jihadist machinations of the ICC/UIC.

More widely, Dr. Weinstein demonstrates consistent ignorance over the politics of the wider Horn of Africa. His analysis of Eritrean policy suggests he has entirely failed to understand its aims and intentions, the relevance of the Eritrea-Ethiopia border issue or the vaulting regional ambitions of President Issayas. He scarcely bothers to try and evaluate Ethiopia's aims and intentions in Somalia, or in the region. He continues to try and analyze regional politics in the abstract from his own perspective as a political scientist/theorist in the US. \*6

His latest piece *Somalia seized with Stasis* (April 12.4.2007) is exaggerated, highly inaccurate and seriously dependent upon Somali opposition sources in the US and Nairobi sources which are clearly aiming to try and bring down the TFG in Somalia. The TFG has major flaws but it is the legal, legitimate and internationally recognized government of Somalia, a fact that Dr. Weinstein seems reluctant to accept. It is also the only political player in Somalia which has at least some reason to be called representative of all Somali clans. There are problems with the 4.5 formula agreed at the Mbagathi conference, but it does provide equal representation for the four main clan families (Dir, Darod, Hawiye, Rahenweyne). \*7 One can certainly criticize the formula and its implementation, but there is nothing more representative anywhere on the Somali political scene, certainly not a few Hawiye ex-UIC leaders, and a dozen of two parliamentarians, all now refugees.

Indeed, the contrast with the UIC/ICC could hardly be more obvious. The ICC never had any such representational legitimacy as the TFG achieved at Mbagathi. It began as an organization of the Islamic Courts of Mogadishu and of the original 11 courts in the umbrella organization, ten were

---

4 See: *The Supreme Islamic Council of Somalia (SICS)*. Antony Shaw op..cit

5 *Somalia Reverts to Political Fragmentation*. Dr. M. Weinstein PINR 21.2.2007.

6 Dr. Weinstein is a Professor of Political Science at Purdue University. According to his online c.v. he is interested in political science, psychoanalytic theory, existential phenomenology, the sociology of knowledge, structuralism and post structuralism. He appears to specialize in various aspects of post-modernist theory. His published works include studies in deconstruction, metatheory and culture critique.

7 The .5 of the formula provides, if inadequately, for the minority clans.

Hawiye.<sup>8</sup> A similar imbalance pertained in the *shura* set up in late June when Sheikh Hassan Dahir Aweys and the radical extremists seized control of the organization. Members of other clans were involved but Sheikh Aweys' Ayr/Haber Gidir clan remained firmly in control of policy and of the executive. This is one of the factors which led to disputes with Sheikh Sharif, chairman of the ICC executive committee, over the Khartoum talks. The UIC delegation at the first meeting in Khartoum accepted the legitimacy of the TFG and agreed to place all armed forces under the government, subject to further meetings. This was the spur that pushed the hardline elements in the UIC to take control of the organization. Five days after the Khartoum meeting, Sheikh Aweys announced the creation of the *shura* to control all UIC activity. He himself took the position of chairman, relegating Sheikh Sherif to the position of chairman of the executive committee, which was made responsible for implementing the decisions of the *shura*. Over the next five months the *shura* met twice, though some of its carefully chosen sub-committees did meet more often. Decisions were made largely on the authority of Sheikh Aweys (Ayr/Haber Gidir) alone. Sheikh Sherif is from the other main branch of the Hawiye in Mogadishu, the Abgal/Mudalood; and the Abgal seriously resented the assumptions of the Ayr that the courts (and Islam) should be seen as their very own specific road to political power.

Dr. Weinstein appears to have no understanding that this basic division remains central within Hawiye politics, however much Somali intellectuals abroad may try to deny the importance of clans. It is impossible to speak of the Hawiye being opposed to Ethiopia or to the TFG, though the Hawiye as a whole remain suspicious of the TFG, regarding it as a predominately Darod organization. Nor do the Ayr make up a majority of the Hawiye, or even of the Haber Gidir. The latter remain seriously divided by the current situation. The Ayr have had some support from the Duboble and the Salabaan, but little from the Saad, the other main Haber Gidir clan, which resisted the advance of the courts in Mogadishu longer than any other.<sup>9</sup> It was not until mid-July that the Saad elders decided that with little support from other Mogadishu clans it would be wiser to transfer their resistance to the Ayr into Mudug region, where in fact they could also count on considerable Salabaan support. The Salabaan territories divide Saad from Ayr, and although Salabaan and Saad have a long history of disputes over grazing and water rights, so do the Salabaan and the Ayr. The Salabaan in Mudug region have no desire to see the Ayr reach a position of untrammelled supremacy.

These elements, central to any attempt to evaluate Haber Gidir and Hawiye politics, is exactly what Dr. Weinstein misses. Yet this is why the National Reconciliation conference needs to be, and is going to be, a clan conference, indeed why it has to be so. It is equally why the UIC wants to make it a political conference and is doing all it can to get EU support for this. Dr. Weinstein appears to be supporting the UIC. In his latest PINR report, he refers to the TFG finessing demands by international organizations to include conciliatory elements of the UIC/ICC in a reconciliation process by initiating its own clan-based conference. This provides an excellent illustration of Dr. Weinstein's failure to appreciate the detail of the politics of the UIC, the reality of the UIC as an organization, its relationship to the pre-June organization of the Islamic courts in the UIC or indeed the origins of the idea of a clan reconciliation conference. This long pre-dates the collapse of the UIC and any international calls to bring UIC leaders into any post-December reconciliation process.

Dr. Weinstein writes that the TFG was *impelled* to hold a reconciliation conference. It was not. The idea came from President Abdullahi Yusuf almost immediately the TFG moved into Mogadishu. He has carefully picked an independent non-government committee to oversee the project, chaired by former president, Ali Mahdi (Abgal/Hawiye). He has not interfered subsequently in any way with the

---

<sup>8</sup> For details see see: *The Supreme Islamic Council of Somalia (SICS)*. Antony Shaw op..cit.

<sup>9</sup> One leading Saad figure, Hussein Aideed has recently surfaced in Asmara. He appears to have withdrawn from the TFG in February, apparently piqued by his demotion from deputy prime minister and minister of interior to minister of housing. But Hussein Aideed owes his reputation to his father, General Mohamed Farah Aideed (Haber Gidir/Hawiye), one of the two men who split the Hawiye and was largely responsible for the civil war between the Haber Gidir and the Abgal which devastated Mogadishu in 1991/1992; the other was former president, Ali Mahdi (Abgal/Hawiye). General Aideed's attempts to establish Saad control over all of southern Somalia also led to major conflicts with the Rahenweyne and the Darod clans. The effects of his disastrous legacy remain. Hussein Aideed retains some Saad support simply because his father he played the leading role in Mogadishu politics up his death in 1996, and raised the Saad to a political pinnacle between 1991 and 1996. Hussein himself is no more than a pale shadow of his father; few Saad are prepared to follow him now.

committee's efforts. Incidentally, the recent postponement of the conference to mid-May was not in any way due to security problems (even if these do remain difficult). It is due to the difficulties that the organizing committee is having in trying to raise the necessary funds from the EU and the US in Nairobi. As so often, indeed on almost every possible occasions, Dr. Weinstein's interpretation follows the line of pro-UIC reporting out of Nairobi or the Somali Diaspora in the US . It is worth adding that the TFG has agreed that anyone can attend the conference, providing they are sent as representatives of their clan. Former UIC leaders would now be largely unacceptable as clan representatives, and this is why they have been pushing for political representation, despite the obvious collapse of the UIC as a political organization and, in the case of Sheikh Sharif, his own resignation from it in December last year.

Dr. Weinstein fails to notice that while some Hawiye leadership, certainly not all, backed the UIC between June and December, it was a majority of the Hawiye elders who demanded the withdrawal of the UIC from Mogadishu in late December. The UIC was not driven out of the city by Ethiopian troops or the TFG militias. They were ordered out by the Hawiye elders on December 27. Kismayo elders did the same a couple of days later. The Ethiopian troops originally halted at Balidogle, 70 kilometers from Mogadishu, and only moved into the city at the end of December at the express invitation of the Hawiye elders and civil society groups. These did not include the Ayr but all the other major clans in Mogadishu, including other Haber Gidir clans, were associated with the request. Similarly, Dr. Weinstein shows no awareness of the responses of Ayr and Hawiye elders to the security operations carried out by the TFG and Ethiopian forces at the end of March. A significant number of extremists died along with a significant number of Ayr militia were killed. Following these losses, the Ayr elders asked Aden Hashi Ayro, the former Al-Shabaab commander, to leave Mogadishu once again.

Dr. Weinstein appears unable to appreciate that there is actually very significant support for the TFG within the Hawiye, particularly among the Abgal/Mudalood, and even among the Haber Gidir. Prime Minister Mohamed Gedi (Abgal/Hawiye) may not be particularly popular himself but he does represent a significant power base for the Abgal within the TFG; the Abgal as a whole are very determined to take advantage of it. There have been indications that President Abdullahi Yusuf (Majerteen/Darod) and other Darod members of the council of ministers are concerned about PM Gedi, but he would certainly have to be replaced by another Abgal if he was removed, probably from the Harti Abgal, Daud or possibly the Waesli, all Abgal/Mudalood sub-clans. Any such move would cause significant ripples within the Hawiye.

In fact, the core of the problem in Mogadishu, as it has been for over 16 years, is the total failure of the Hawiye to unite even when it is in their own best interests, even when they are faced by external forces, whether Darod or Ethiopia. Interestingly, Ethiopian involvement, perhaps surprisingly, has not generated anything like the Somali nationalist response predicted by so many commentators, except among the Ayr, in Nairobi and among a few intellectuals in the Somali Diaspora. Not in Somalia itself, and certainly not in Mogadishu as a whole. Ethiopia's intervention was hardly popular, but then nor was the UIC either, despite the claims of outside commentators. The reason for this lack of any real nationalist response appears to have been an appreciation that Ethiopia could actually put an end to the constant attacks by extremists remnants of the UIC that followed the collapse of the UIC at the end of December. Within a matter of weeks these jihadists had launched a series of attacks ostensibly on the TFG and Ethiopians forces. In fact, a majority of these consisted of random shelling and mortar fire, little of which was aimed accurately and much of which hit civilians. Dozens of houses, as well as restaurants, schools and offices were hit, causing hundreds of civilian casualties. These attacks included attempts to mortar the Presidential Palace, killing and wounding a number of civilians in the neighborhood, an attack on AMISOM headquarters, the shooting down of two planes, with in one case the loss of all eleven crew, and numerous other actions that can only be classified as terrorist activity. Inevitably, security force responses to these attacks also caused civilians casualties.

In addition to the military response, the TFG has organized a string of meetings with Hawiye elders, business, religious and civic leaders, to discuss aspects of reconciliation, and to encourage the setting up of vigilante groups in most of the city's neighborhoods. The TFG disarmed the warlords in January and February, but it left the Haber Gidir clans their weaponry, quite deliberately in an attempt to build up confidence. A perennial Ayr/Haber Gidir complaint has been that the TFG has been planning to

disarm the Haber Gidir and leave it at the mercy of all the other clans in the city. The Haber Gidir/Hawiye remain deeply concerned that the TFG will implement a policy to restore properties taken from the Darod and others by the Hawiye in 1991. Elements in the Haber Gidir, and particularly the Ayr, took this failure to disarm them as weakness, and quickly demonstrated they were prepared to support the more militant jihadists within the UIC. These were formerly associated with Al-Shabaab, but now appear to designate themselves the Popular Resistance Movement of the Land of the Two Migrations (PRMLTM, or PRM for short). In both cases the leading figure appears to be Sheikh Aden Hashi Ayro who was trained in Afghanistan and has a well-deserved reputation for violence.<sup>10</sup> Killings and assassinations of government officials, notably police, and sympathizers of the TFG, have continued since January in Mogadishu.

Despite Dr. Weinstein's claims, neither Al-Shabaab nor the PRMLTM have demonstrated any real popular support in Mogadishu, and certainly none at all outside the city. The violence in Mogadishu has largely originated from three districts only, around the Stadium and along October 21 Road, Ali Kamin and Towfik. When the joint security forces finally moved against the jihadists in these areas in late March they had considerable, but by no means complete success. Several hundred fighters were killed, as well as a number of Ayr militia who had been supporting the Al-Shabaab and PRMLTM. As noted above this allowed the Ayr elders to disassociate themselves from Sheikh Aden Hashi Ayro. All the evidence available indicates that the security operations have allowed the Hawiye elders to resume control in significant areas of previously extremist-controlled territory.. Vigilante groups have begun to extend their authority into formerly no-go areas. Certainly, the security forces are still facing considerable opposition from dissident sub-clan militia elements as well as some jihadists, but this is coming from less than a fifth of the city, and only two or three areas.

On the wider regional basis, Dr. Weinstein, not for the first time, also fails to look at the reality of the situation on the ground. It certainly appears very different when seen from Purdoo and the US than it does in the Horn of Africa . Indeed, it is simply not possible to recognize his description of the region, nor, to use his terminology, of the major regional actors which he sees as “trapped” by their earlier decisions, leading to the alleged *Somalia seized with Stasis*, a nicely alliterative but scarcely a scrupulous nor a suitably significant statement.

Neighbors in IGAD are not compromised by the Ethiopia operations, and, to repeat, this was not and is not seen as something that Dr. Weinstein persists in calling an invasion. It was a response to a request by the legal and legitimate (and internationally recognized) government of Somalia. It is also clear that Ethiopia will withdraw as soon as sufficient AMISOM troops are deployed. Indeed this is always been the case and assertions by Somalis in Nairobi to the contrary remain incredible. If, as Dr., Weinstein claims, everybody wants Ethiopia out as soon as possible, the way to achieve this is very obvious. In fact, other AMISOM contingents are going to deploy within a matter of weeks, and despite Dr. Weinstein's strictures, Uganda is not being left alone.

From even the most superficial visit to Mogadishu, it is also clear that Somalis in Mogadishu do not regard Ugandans as an occupying force whatever the international media may claim. Nor do they identify Ugandans with Ethiopians. The Ugandan troops have in fact managed to achieve excellent relations with the local population and local elders. It is, of course true that they have also been attacked by jihadists elements, but that is to be expected from a group that wants AMISOM forces as little as it wants the Ethiopians.

Similarly, Somalis in Somalia do not regard Kenya as having destroyed its credibility as an honest broker. Kenya's position has always been affected by the treatment of its own Somali and Muslim communities, and the history of relations over Somali irredentism in the 1960s and 1970s, but the idea that it “has been pushed into a corner where it is constrained to deal with the collateral political damage that has occurred” is simply rubbish.

---

<sup>10</sup> Dr. Weinstein, and other commentators, largely ignore Sheikh Aden Hashi Ayro's record as commander of Al-Shabaab when he appears to have been responsible for around 300 assassinations and killings, largely of moderate Hawiye politicians and supporters of the TFG in Mogadishu prior to June 2006, as well as the deaths of several foreigners including an Italian nun and the desecration of an Italian cemetery in Mogadishu.

Eritrea is another case. President Issayas is actively trying to resurrect the UIC, even going so far as to suggest that the UIC should be recognized as the legitimate government of Somalia. This is clearly part of Eritrea's overall effort to oppose and to destabilize Ethiopia. The relationship is now rather more than merely hostile, as Dr. Weinstein classifies it. Eritrea is now supporting, indeed playing a major role in organizing the forthcoming meeting of ex-UIC leaders and supporters, in Qatar. It is believed that it will announce an alternative government for Somalia, but on a regional level, it is clear from the last IGAD conference in Nairobi, last weekend, that Eritrea is now entirely isolated within IGAD.

Despite Diaspora rhetoric or indeed Dr. Weinstein's own claims, Somalia has not "dissolved into contentious fragmentation" since January. Almost the whole of southern Somalia, with the exception of a small part of Mogadishu, is actually peaceful, and indeed significantly more peaceful than it was during the six months when the UIC was expanding militarily through Lower and Middle Shebelle, and Lower Juba, and threatening the TFG in Bay region, and the Puntland government in Mudug. Of course, there have been one or two inter-clan conflicts outside Mogadishu in the last three months. There have also been some clashes with former UIC fighters. The TFG efforts to establish an administration have been nearly minimal, in part because of the situation in Mogadishu, on which the government has concentrated, and on which the international media remains fixated despite their essential failure to report from there. The other main reason has, of course, been the failure of the international community to assist in providing the necessary resources, without which the TFG can make no progress in creating an administration and implementing the additional procedures of the TF Institutions called for by the Mbagathi process.

Almost all of Dr. Weinstein's conclusions simply ignore the realities of Somali and regional politics, despite the fact that the current configuration of power and interest exactly demonstrate political realities. In December, Ethiopia and the TFG defeated the UIC, an organization which had been taken over by jihadist Salafi extremists in June last year. Dr. Weinstein still appears reluctant to acknowledge this despite all the available evidence. Many of these jihadists came from the Ayr/Haber Gidir, but this was, and is, an aberration. The main division in Somali politics remains that between the Darod and the Hawiye, and Hawiye concern with the TFG has nothing to do with the UIC, but everything to do with the Hawiye view of the TFG as a Darod organization. In fact, it is not, if only because the TFG institutions, including the Parliament, are dependent upon the 4.5 clan formula division, unsatisfactory though it may be.

It is certainly true that President Abdullahi Yusuf has, at times, been unnecessarily provocative in his numerous appointments of Darod, and usually Majerteen, to the majority of the senior positions in the army and security. Nevertheless, the TFG has also been rather more careful than its critics, like Dr. Weinstein, are prepared to acknowledge, as for example in the re-appointment of all their former TNG governors to the districts of Mogadishu.

A central point for Dr. Weinstein, for the Nairobi-based international media, and for Somalis in the Diaspora, to remember is that Mogadishu is not all of Somalia, anything but. The view from, and the extensive destruction. There are numerous discussions going on at several levels, between Darod and Hawiye, between the TFG and various poles of authority in Mogadishu. The TFG, with Ethiopian help, has expanded its authority outside the city, and is now doing so within. Negotiations are taking place over representation and attendance at the National Reconciliation conference. All the indications are that this will go ahead as soon as the international community provide the funding.

The chief danger to peace in Somalia today does not lie in the actions of a small remnant of jihadists in Mogadishu, destructive and dangerous though these may continue to be, or the response of the security forces; there is likely to be another round of fighting soon. It is rather that the international community may prevent the National Reconciliation conference from going ahead by failing to provide the necessary funding, or, even more damagingly, by trying to insist that certain specific elements participate without demonstrating any evidence that it understands what the TFG is trying to do. The EU is particularly at fault in this context. The TFG needs resources for the conference as well as to establish effective administrative structures; more is also needed for the deployment of an effective AMISOM force. There ought to be no hesitation at all from the EU if it really does want a successful

settlement in Somalia.

The TFG has made it clear that anyone can attend as representative of his/her clan: the conference will be inclusive. Political structures are not involved, and it would be fatal to try and insist that they attend, particularly if those suggested do not in fact have the kind of political credibility that the EU claims. In fact, these political claims are essentially imaginary. To continue to suggest that the UIC might participate, demonstrates such a fundamental ignorance of recent Somali politics as to suggest those responsible are actively trying to destroy the last chance for a realistic Somali state. The conference will be a clan conference, and this is exactly what is needed to try and heal the divisions between the Darod and the Hawiye which so clearly underpin nearly all the current dissensions between the TFG and Hawiye elders. It will provide for the much vaunted Somali solution, but only if outsiders keep well away.

It is true, and this is about the only real point made by Dr. Weinstein, that if reconciliation and the deployment of AMISOM fail, Somalia may then fragment. This is a real danger, and this is why it is so important for the international community to get it right. It is therefore a pity that so much of Dr. Weinstein's writing appears dedicated to encouraging fragmentation, dissolution and dissension in Somalia. It is critically important that international media and international analysts look at both sides of the debates, and refrain from confining their information and input to pro-UIC and anti-TFG or anti-Ethiopian views. Ethiopia's intervention, of course, bears no resemblance to the US and UK invasion of Iraq except in the broadest way. It really isn't a plausible stick with which to beat President Bush or UK Prime Minister, Tony Blair.

Dr. Weinstein appears to misunderstand almost every single aspect of events in Somalia as well as the aims and intentions of both Somali political actors, whether pro or anti the TFG, as well as Somalia's neighbors. Most significant, in spite of writing over a dozen or more analyses, he completely fails to understand the reality, membership or dynamics of the UIC, the relationship between the jihadist elements and the UIC, or those between Darod and Hawiye and within Hawiye sub-clans. None of these can be described as "seized with a tense stasis", whatever that means, or with participants "trapped in the consequence of [past] decisions." This is rubbish except in the most general philosophic sense that all actions depend upon past activity. If anything, the situation in Somalia can be regarded as moving forward, with all the indications that the government is managing to achieve its immediate aim of restoring security to Mogadishu (though it may require more fighting), and that plans for the National Reconciliation conference are on track. In Mogadishu, Hawiye elders are taking back their responsibilities of control in almost all areas of the city. IGAD is pushing hard for the necessary support for more AMISOM troops; these will appear soon. These "twin pillars of the western powers' policy"- AMISOM and the conference - are far from crumbling as Dr. Weinstein would have it. Nor are they the pillars of policy of the western powers, but rather of the TFG. The role of the western powers should be to support both with everything possible. It is that which provide real prospects for success in Somalia.

**Antony Shaw**

**Addis Ababa, 16.4.2007**