

On the Broader Implications Of The Latest Developments In Somalia

I. Introduction

Permit me to begin by saying how pleased and honored I am to be here at this prestigious institution – The Japan Institute of International Affairs. I am particularly grateful to the Institute and its officials for their wisdom and their farsightedness in deciding that the latest developments in the Horn of Africa deserve a hearing at this forum. I am also grateful to each and every one of you for being here and for your generous decision to devote your time to this event. I am hopeful you would find it worthwhile.

Let me start out with some general remarks about the latest developments in the Horn of Africa and in Somalia which I hope to look at in greater detail as I proceed.

It is very easy to be misled by the fact that the Horn of Africa has always been a trouble spot and Somalia a place seemingly always mired in a quagmire of a never-ending conflict that their would not be anything qualitatively different in the latest flare up in that country. But that is not only wrong, but it might also end up being a dangerous line of thought.

The Horn of Africa has always been affected by developments in the Middle East, and developments in the Horn have had some limited consequences on event in the Middle East, as well. For our purpose, what is relevant now is the type of new context – political, security and psychological – that has been created in the Horn of Africa, and perhaps in Islamic world in general, because of the constellation of factors associated with the Iraq phenomenon. On one hand, the sense of grievances which appears to grow out of the conviction that Islam has been targeted has contributed to the creation of a psychological state of mind in many muslim societies at the grassroots level which has been

abused and utilized by forces that have always had extremist agenda, and have had a history of close association with terrorist activities. The Horn of Africa is being affected by this newly created psychological phenomenon far beyond what has been thought would be possible by many.

This psychological state of mind operating at the grassroots level is reinforced by the confidence at the level of leaders of extremist groups that their agenda is the wave of the future. Again, they seem to see their confidence being validated by the Iraq phenomenon and by what they see as a major setback suffered by their adversaries. Thus one sees a growing trend of hubristic behavior by Jihadists in the Horn of Africa and preparedness on their part to defy principles of international law governing interstate relations and emboldenment in terms of being unwilling to consider peaceful methods of resolving disputes. This is the new context that we have to deal with in the Horn of Africa and which has made the situation in Somalia much more formidable and potentially very dangerous than hitherto.

The second general remark that I wish to make has to do with the fact that regrettably there is no sufficient realization at the international level concerning this radically changed situation and commensurate with the potential danger that the new political context has brought about. No where is this more vividly evident than in the kind of massive support – from diverse sources – that the Islamic Courts Union in Somalia has been receiving compared to the meager level of support that the Transitional Federal Government is receiving from very limited sources. This has been made abundantly clear by the Monitoring Group of the Committee of the Security Council on the arms embargo on Somalia in its report submitted this past November. Though the Transitional Federal Government is recognized as a legitimate government by the sub-regional organization of the Horn of Africa, IGAD, by the African Continental Organization, the AU, and by the world body, the UN, according to the report of the Monitoring Group, the Islamic Court Union which is guided and led by extremist personalities, is being supported allegedly by seven countries, while the legitimate government is supported only by

three. In terms of the quality of support provided, the Monitoring Group makes it clear that there is no comparison between the two, the Islamic Courts Union being the beneficiary of assistance involving very sophisticated weapons hitherto unavailable for fighters in Somalia.

The third general remark that I wish to make relates to the fact that – despite developments in the Middle East and the Iraq phenomenon – what we are seeing in the Horn of Africa with respect to the ascendancy of Jihadists was far from inevitable if it had not been for certain mistakes that were committed from which we have to draw some lessons. In fact, if we draw the proper lessons from our past mistakes, it is possible that we might be able to save the day in the Horn of Africa.

It is this last general remark that I would like to take up first and show how we shot ourselves in the foot and prepared the ground for the emergence of the situation we face in Somalia now.

II. The Lost Opportunity in Somalia

The circumstances that surrounded the creation of the Transitional Federal Government highlight the value of international co-operation as much as the emergence of the Islamic Courts Union underline the negative consequences of the deficit in the good will to co-operate with regional countries and organization by those that are in a position to make a difference.

The Transitional Federal Government of Somalia came into being in October 2004 after more than two years of peace making and negotiation among the various Somali factions for which the co-operation between IGAD and the European Union was extremely decisive. Without that support from the EU it would have been impossible for the IGAD countries to raise the funds necessary for facilitating the long and complicated process of peace making that led to the formation of the Transitional Federal Government.

It is to be recalled that this was an achievement that laid

the basis for the rebuilding of the Somali State after thirteen years of lawlessness and anarchy. Those were thirteen years during which the notion of legality, rule of law and the concept of legitimacy were thrown out the window in Somalia. It was therefore, important that the people of Somalia were given the opportunity to create a broad-based government based on the rule of law and free of the forceful methods and gangsterism that was so rampant during the previous thirteen years. Accordingly, the emphasis was put more on the need to create the right conditions for making the new government legitimate in the eyes of the people of Somalia than enabling it to have a monopoly of force within the country. Since the Transitional Government was in any case a transitional institution, it was tacitly assumed that the necessary steps to help the new government develop the requisite capacity in the security area would be undertaken later.

In other words, it was by the deliberate decision of those who helped in the creation of the Transitional Federal Government that the new Somali Government was made weak in the security area so much so that when the need arose it was unable even to protect itself.

It was at the beginning of 2005 that the IGAD countries discovered this weaknesses in the security arrangement for the new Somali Government. The problem surfaced when the need arose to relocate the new government inside Somalia from Nairobi where it had been seated starting from its very creation. The Kenyan Government felt that Nairobi could not continue accommodating two governments - one that of Kenya's and the other that of Somalia's. It was under these circumstances that the IGAD countries felt that some things needed to be done and as speedily as possible.

At an emergency meeting on the fringes of the AU Summit in January 2005 in Abuja, the IGAD Heads of State and government agreed to present a draft resolution to the AU summit providing for the creation of a peace support mission(the future IGASOM) to help in the relocation of new Somali Government inside Somalia. The resolution was subsequently adopted by the

AU summit which also called for a meeting, first, of the IGAD Chiefs of Defense Staff, to draw up the plan, and following that, for a meeting of the IGAD Foreign Ministers, to approve the plan and finalize the preparation for the relocation of the new Somali government inside Somalia.

This is where the tragedy of Somalia started to be repeated, and this time manifesting itself in the attempt made to scuttle the effort that was being made by IGAD. The Foreign Ministers of IGAD met in Nairobi in March 2005 and approved the deployment plan for IGASOM which was submitted to them by IGAD Chiefs of Defense Staff. It was by consensus – all IGAD member states being in favor of the plan despite difficult bilateral relation among some of them – that the plan was approved. But IGAD run into a brick wall immediately. Washington was opposed to the idea. At about the same time, the International Crisis Group (ICG), embarked on a major campaign branding the plan as a dangerous move that would be likely to exacerbate the problem in Somalia.

It was impossible, under those circumstances, for IGAD – no matter how much unified its position might have been at the time – to proceed with the deployment of IGASOM. Given the formidable opposition we faced it was felt unrealistic for us to go it alone – both for political as well as financial reasons. The effort needed the support of the international community in both areas. Even if the financial means were to be found, the whole enterprise would not have been viable in light of the opposition it faced from powerful countries.

It is still not clear why the ICG was so vehemently opposed to the IGAD plan, but as far as why Washington was not keen about the project became clear almost a year later when it was revealed that Washington was allegedly supporting those few individuals in Mogadishu who, though part of the Transitional Government, were nonetheless opposed to the efforts IGAD was making to help in the creation the Somali state and who at the same time were also at loggerheads with Islamic Courts Union. In other words, the efforts of IGAD was frustrated and the

Transitional Government could not be assisted. The opportunity was lost for the attempt to control both the warlords in Mogadishu and to deny a chance to the Islamic Court Union to ride the wave of popular anger against the warlords and achieve victory. In the battle between those selfish gangsters hated by Mogadishu residents and the extremists, the choice of the people – in light of their day-to-day humiliation in the hands of the warlords – could not have been doubted. The extremists won with their hands down and thus began the confrontation in our region between those who stand for legality and those committed to transforming the entire Horn of Africa into an Islamic Emirate. In effect, the lack of cooperation and coordination between the countries of the region and international partners made it possible for the Islamic Courts Union to emerge. Their emergence and the formidable challenge they now represent to peace and stability in our region and beyond was far from inevitable. No doubt, this is an experience that we have to draw lessons from.

III. The Challenge Faced By Countries Such As Ethiopia

What are the various challenges faced by countries such as Ethiopia under these circumstances? The first challenges of course relates to the international context within which the struggle is taking place. This I have already alluded to in my introduction when I referred to what I characterized as the Iraq phenomenon and the psychological state of mind which has been spawned by that phenomenon. The extremists are using this to the hilt and have found it convenient to label countries such as Ethiopia as Christian crusaders determined to violate the rights of Muslim Somalis. The moderates among the Islamic Courts Union – who in fact might constitute the majority – are forced to keep quiet because of the prevailing psychological state of mind as well as the seeming momentum enjoyed by the extremists thanks to the support they enjoy from various sources. The extremists lack neither money nor war material.

Most paradoxically, even a few within the international media – either because of naivety or owing to the usual condescending attitude toward the developing world, including

Africa, or for reasons not very easy to figure out – have given them the opportunity both to be lionized and also, when it is found convenient, to play the role of the under dog, thus simultaneously drawing admiration and sympathy.

Even more ironic has been the difficulty – until two days ago - that has been encountered by those parties who have been trying to get the Security Council to partially lift the arms embargo on Somalia so that it would be possible to help the Transitional Federal Government in the security area, including in providing training to its security personnel. That problem has now been overcome and hopefully it may now be more possible for countries in our region to be in a better position to ensure that Transitional Federal Government would be strong enough to conduct serious negotiation with the Islamic Courts Union being taken serious by the latter which has not been the case so far.

IV. The Broader Implications of the Failure in Somalia

The Iraq phenomenon might have provided to Jihadists in the Horn of Africa an opportunity for the mobilization of bias against countries such as Ethiopia in which they might have made some progress but the situation is not irreversible. One thing that they can not easily succeed in, is in convincing a lot of people that the situation in Iraq is comparable to the one prevailing in the Horn of Africa. In the Horn, no one can overlook the fact that it is the Jihadists that have repeatedly proclaimed that they are committed to disregarding existing borders and insisting that their project is to unify all Somali speaking people in the Horn of Africa.

Despite the protestation to the contrary - by the extremists and their supporters, among whom paradoxically are some countries that are by all measures moderate - those who have been arrogant and who have rejected dialogue and have been flexing their muscle have been the extremists. They have been the once who have defied principles of international law and have been demonstrating a wish to dominate others.

What has been tragic is that this fact is not being brought out so that the true reality in the Horn of Africa would be appreciated. Here again, one of the major difficulties is the wide-spread assumption that one could draw a parallel between the underlying factors in the crisis in Iraq and those taking place in the Horn of Africa. The extremists in the Horn have no doubt benefited from the sentiments that have been aroused by the Iraq phenomenon in the Islamic world. However, while those in Iraq could plausibly argue that they face the reality of occupation – no matter how the genesis of that reality may be interpreted – those in the Horn of Africa have absolutely no reason at all for claiming that they have been targeted or their right has been violated. As such, if they succeed in their wild ambition – which includes claims on Ethiopia and Kenya and even more, apart from the objective they have over Somaliland and Puntland – the consequences would be more devastating than anything that the region and Africa has ever experienced. The example that it would set for emulation in other parts of the world near and far would also be incalculable in the damage it would cause for peace and stability and harmony within societies where different religious communities have lived in harmony.

I would indeed have been less optimistic about the situation in Somalia if I had delivered this statement a few days ago - specifically prior to the adoption by the Security Council of a resolution two days ago authorizing the deployment of IGASOM with the mandate, among other things,

(a) To monitor progress by the Transitional Federal Institutions and the Union of Islamic Courts in implementing agreements reached in their dialogue,

(b) To ensure free movement and safe passage of all those involved with the dialogue process,

(c) To maintain and monitor security in Baidoa- the seat of the Transitional Federal Government,

(d) To protect members of the Transitional Federal

Institutions and Government as well as their key infrastructure,

(e) To train the Transitional Federal Institutions' security forces to enable them to provide their own security and to help facilitate the reestablishment of the national security forces in Somalia.

This essentially means that, at least belatedly, the international community has taken the vital step for peace in Somalia which IGAD had tried to take in early 2005 but which was scuttled for reasons explained earlier. Though a lot of damage has been caused in the meantime, the fact that now this resolution has been adopted would mean that the Transitional Federal Government would have a real possibility for engaging the Islamic Courts Union in good faith dialogue for national reconciliation and for the setting up of a broad-based government on the basis of the Federal Charter.

This resolution which was co-sponsored by the United States and all three members of the African Union on the Security Council - Congo, Ghana and the United Republic of Tanzania - was unambiguous in underlying the principle that the Transitional Charter and Institutions provide the framework for the dialogue between the Transitional Federal Government and the Islamic Courts Union. The following is what in this regard the resolution says in its first operative paragraph:

[The Security Council] Reiterates that the Transitional Federal Charter and Institutions after the only route to achieving peace and stability in Somalia...

Equally important is what the resolution says in its operative paragraph two which goes as follows:

Urges both parties to fulfill commitments made, resume without delay peace - Talks on the basis of the agreement reached in Khartoum, and adhere to agreements reached in their dialogue,

and states its intention to consider taking measures against those that seek to prevent or block a peaceful dialogue process, overthrow the Transitional Federal Institutions by force, or take action that further threatens regional stability.

It should be recalled, as I have already reiterated, this resolution by the Security Council was adopted despite the coordinated effort by a variety of parties - first of all the Islamic Courts Union and the extremists within the group as well as others, some of who have been providing support to the same group - to stop its adoption. It was said the passage of the resolution would worsen the situation in Somalia, and in fact, military activities were speeded up by the Islamic Courts during the debate on the resolution with the view to discouraging those who were for the resolution.

Here it is only fair to commend the United States for having taken the initiative on the resolution and, despite the formidable opposition it has faced, for standing its ground - along with the Africa members of Council - to ensure the passage of the resolution, which was supported by all fifteen members of the Council voting in favor.

Let me reiterate why the adoption of the resolution is critical. As has been already explained, the Transitional Federal Government was created without an arrangement for its security - the focus having been on the creation of a broad-based government which would gradually secure legitimacy in the eyes of the people of Somalia. But the hoped-for peaceful evolution of the political situation in Somalia toward legality and legitimate governance was aborted, first, because the belated effort by IGAD to support the Transitional Federal Government in the Security domain was aborted for reasons already explained and, secondly, because the emergence of the Islamic Courts Union brought force to the fore as a basis for establishing one's right to rule.

But it should be emphasized that the Islamic Courts Union is not a group of fools who advocate the use of force openly. Stealth has been the tactic they used for advancing their agenda.

This was made obvious starting from their first encounter with the delegation of the Transitional Federal Government for the first peace dialogue between the two on June 22, 2006 in Khartoum. That encounter resulted in an agreement between the two, not only to stop hostilities but also to conduct their relations on the basis of two key principles. The first principle, which was in fact mentioned as the first point in the agreement, involved acceptance by the Islamic Courts Union of the Transitional Federal Government as the legal and legitimate government of Somalia. The second principle had the Transitional Federal Government accept the Islamic Courts Union as a political reality in Somalia.

Obviously, the expectation was that on the basis of these principles, among others, the two would proceed during their second meeting towards mutual accommodation with the view to establishing a broad-based government. What happened in the following days however was something which became in subsequent weeks and months the hallmark of the Islamic Courts Union - verbal profession of commitment to dialogue but the expansion of its presence on the ground, in practice. No sooner had the delegation of the Islamic Courts Union returned to Mogadishu from the Khartoum meeting where it had accepted the legality and the legitimacy of the Transitional Federal Government than it started to march on Baidoa for an onslaught on the seat of the Transitional Government.

Those of you who have been following these developments would recall how that aggressive move by the Islamic Courts Union militia was halted. It was not through prayers. This also explains why the Islamic Courts Union has been so preoccupied with Ethiopia and why it has decided to allow Ethiopia's enemies to open in Somalia another front against Ethiopia.

Let me reiterate here that the international community cannot indeed allow the Jihadists to prevail in Somalia. As is becoming more and more apparent, the situation in Iraq is probably getting to be worse before it gets better. The broader implication of this is yet to be determined, and in fact, even the broad outline of what might be expected is far from clear. Under

these circumstances, victory in the Horn of Africa by a group of extremists would be, as already indicated, a matter of incalculable consequences.

Of course Ethiopia has a direct stake in all this, all the more so because, not only have the Jihadists made it clear that they have irredentist claims over Ethiopia, but they have also been harbouring anti-Ethiopian forces, including Eritrean forces, and they have also declared Jihad against Ethiopia.

But, on the other hand, Ethiopia has no ill - will toward the Islamic Courts Union as a group. The disinformation about how Ethiopia --- a Christian country --- has had a difficulty dealing with the Islamic Courts Union is sheer fabrication meant to mislead the Islamic world, the people of Somalia included. Otherwise, Ethiopia is neither a Christian nor an Islamic country. Its government and constitution is secular; and in terms of population, it has more Moslems than the number of Moslems in all the states of the Horn of Africa combined.

This is what I tried to convey to the representative of the Islamic Courts Union that I met in Djibouti last Friday. Ethiopia, I told the Islamic Courts representative, is perfectly willing to be a good partner for the Islamic Courts Union as long as they are prepared to abide by principles of international law governing inter-state relations and as long as they refrain from engaging in hostile activities against Ethiopia. We are still awaiting their concrete response in this regard.

We have to wait and see how the Islamic Courts Union and their supporters would react in earnest to the adoption by the Security Council of the resolution that I have already referred to. But their preliminary reaction has been violently negative.

V. Conclusion

What the resolution does, among other things, is to highlight and confirm the support of the international community for the

Transitional Government as well as the dialogue between it and the Islamic Courts Union. It is hoped that the political message conveyed might produce results. After all, this was what states of region such as Ethiopia have been calling for.

Now what is the lesson in all this? The first important issue to be taken seriously is the fact that the present situation in the Middle East and in that general area meaning in Iraq, Afghanistan, Lebanon, etc, has a way of affecting in a very serious way developments in other places such as the Horn of Africa. It is becoming more and more clear that events and developments are inter connected. The interconnection obtains not because of developments in these areas are comparable or similar but because at the psychological level there is somehow a sense on the part of a growing number of muslims that they are being the targets of unfair treatment or those who belong them are being subjected to that kind of treatment. These sentiments have a way of resonating rapidly more and more affecting societies that have been known for ages for having admirable degree of tolerance between their religious communities. This reality has provided a field day for those who have developed skill in the manipulation of symbols in the interest of their extremist agenda. This is one of the problems that we are facing in the Horn of Africa at present.

This is compounded by the second difficulty that we all face with respect to the lack of effective co-operation and coordination among those within the international community who have interest in maintaining stability and in peace and harmony among peoples, countries and religions. It is critical that there is effective consultation between entities at various levels concerning developments in various regions whereby the views of regional countries and organizations are taken seriously. We have paid the price in the Horn of Africa because of the known deficits in this regard. We are indeed hopeful that the latest resolution by the Security Council would help rectify the damage caused by courses of action opted for earlier. What has been most disturbing in this regard has been the fact that there is greater coordination among those who are committed to overturning the geopolitical status quo through whatever means available, than among those

committed to preserving the peace on the basis of principles of international law and legality. Equally disturbing is the fact that as the experience in our sub-region would show those some groups are extremely savvy and adept at manipulating the international media outlets. By comparison, those who are committed to legality and maintaining stability have been the most disorganized and poor at public relation and public diplomacy.

But at the end of the day, nothing is inevitable. It all depends up on what we do. If we sit idly by we lose, and if we are proactive we have a fair chance of saving the day. This is the experience we have had in the Horn of Africa over the last two years or so. I suppose this contains valuable lesson for others as well.

Let me conclude by emphasizing how useful and critical it would be for Japan and other friends to chip in for making the IGASOM deployment possible. This is a very important peace support mission indeed whose success would have enormously positive implications for the peace and stability in the Horn of Africa and beyond.

I thank you.