

POLITICAL CRISIS AND TERRORISM IN SOMALIA: FROM “DISINTEGRATION” TO “INSTITUTIONALIZATION”

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Introduction

One of the most widely discussed topics in African studies has been the debate on ethnic identities, clans, sub-clans and their relationship to political power and armed conflicts. Most approaches in this regard refer to the tribal question or tribalism in the region, referring to ethnic groups as tribes and conflicts as tribal conflicts, which is a conceptual error because it is not correct to refer to African peoples as tribes. This was a tendency in much of the work developed by anthropologists in the first half of the twentieth century, as well as in the decades following African independence.

With regard to the studies carried out on the ethnic question in Africa, two tendencies within anthropology can be highlighted: the “primordialist” and the “instrumentalist” currents that tried to explain the forms of organization of African societies. The first approach focuses on the fact that ethnicity originates from the similarities or differences between individuals and that it does not arise naturally and therefore focuses on “tribal” studies.

On the other hand, instrumentalists consider that groups create their own ethnic identities based on economic and political interests (From Tribe to Ethnicity: Kinship and Social Organization, 68-69). Both approaches are reductionist because they do not take into account the socio-historical complexities involved in the processes of differentiation of ethnic identities and the fact that these identities emerged long before the arrival of Europeans in

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the region. These tendencies stem from the need of anthropologists of the time to understand the emergence of the identities of these peoples.

The researcher Evans-Pritchard (2010) was an example of these anthropological currents, whose analyses were based on field studies for the observation of different African communities, trying to understand their social structure and political organization. According to Evans-Pritchard (2010), with the clan structure, individuals try to demonstrate that they descend from a common ancestor. The lineage segmenting into clan groups acts as a balance of power without a defined center. The system of opposition and alliances can change according to the social context, hence the importance of space and time in social organization (Evans-Pritchard 2010, 71-82).

Therefore, he addresses the relationship between kinship structures in this type of society and political organization, but in terms of the role played by lineage and descendants, i.e. membership in a particular lineage. These lineage relationships acted as a balance of power structure and these relationships could be modified in terms of space and time. With this theoretical approach, it is possible to approach the way in which Somali society is organized, from an ethnic point of view, but with its particularities based on clan and sub-clan alliances.

The studies of the anthropologist Aidan Southall (1970), allow us to dismantle the approaches that could refer to Somali society as tribal problems or tribalism. In this sense it would be important to rescue some of his ideas expressed in his essay “The illusion of tribe”. Here Southall (1970) opposes the use of the term “tribe” as a category that distinguishes societies on the basis of authority structures and does not agree with the idea of hierarchizing them. He argues that this vision of the tribe was a creation of colonialism to divide spaces according to supposed local ethnic, language or territorial differences. In this regard, he states that a unidimensional classification is not possible because kinship relations, religion, identity systems, political and economic systems always carry a plurality of analysis according to contexts (Southall 1970, 28). This was the basis of colonial territorial divisions and in turn of human groups. This phenomenon was also evident in the case of the Somali ethnic group, which was divided among four countries of the African Horn: Djibouti, Somalia, Ethiopia and Kenya.

The Somali ethnic group is divided into several clans, of which four are the most important: the Darood, the Issaqs, the Hawiye and the Rahanween. Each of these in turn is divided into five or six other sub-clans, for example, the dir clan is a minority clan in Somalia. These clans are present both in Djibouti and in some regions of Ethiopia – on the border with Djibouti

– as well as in southern Somalia and on the border with Kenya. These clans are often confused with an ethnic group, hence the need to reaffirm Somali ethnic unity – same culture, language and Islamic religion – but fragmented into clans and sub-clans. Most of them are directly related to a spatial distribution where they exercise political, economic and military control of that territory, so they often adopt antagonistic relationships.

There is an extensive bibliography on the causes and origins of African conflicts, with adjectives such as ethnic conflicts, tribal, savage, barbaric etc. The origin of these conflicts – separatist wars, coups d'état, political crises etc. – has been marked by dissimilar motives. According to the Cuban Africanist Armando Entralgo (2005), the first visible cause is the factor of *ethnicity*; but there can be ethnicity and not necessarily war or conflict, that is to say that, in general, ethnic problems are used for economic or political purposes by the elites in alliance with regional and/or international foreign powers. In other words, since independence, ethnic issues began to be manipulated both by local and regional elites and by international actors for economic, political and geopolitical purposes.

Another factor related to the ethnic issue was the *border* issue, which has generated border wars that have their origin in the arbitrariness of colonialism and the subsequent formation of such “independent” administrative entities, in addition to the fact that several groups were divided into different countries (Entralgo 2005, 9-10), as evidenced in the Somali case. These points can be taken up again to analyze the situation in Somalia, but instead of a confrontation of an ethnic nature, this would be tinged by inter-clan contradictions, in addition to border problems and the distribution of power quotas, further complicated by the rise of Islamic fundamentalism turned into terrorism.

With regard to terrorism, it should be recalled that in the East African subregion, the attacks on the US embassies in Nairobi (Kenya) and Dar es Salaam (Tanzania) took place in 1998. A year after these events, the then Organization of African Unity (OAU) adopted the Convention on Preventing and Combating Terrorism at its 35th Summit (Algiers, July 1999). This document was a milestone, as it was the first legislative instrument drawn up to combat terrorism. The 1999 Convention was followed by the OAU Protocol to Prevent and Combat Terrorism (2014).

These steps demonstrate Africa's commitment to the fight against terrorism: Dakar Summit (Senegal, October 2001) at which the Dakar Declaration against terrorism was adopted. Then the Plan of Action for the Prevention and Combating of Terrorism was adopted at an Intergovernmental

Summit held in Algeria in September 2002 (*Protocol of the OAU Convention on the prevention and combating terrorism* 2014, 2). All these instruments demonstrate how the African Union (AU) was a pioneer in the implementation of legal mechanisms to combat terrorism.

For the purposes of this article, it was decided to subscribe to the concept defended by the OAU/AU in the aforementioned 1999 Convention on Preventing and Combating Terrorism, whose main contributions were, first, a broad definition of terrorism without the label Islamic and, second, the differentiation between terrorist acts and the struggle for self-determination. Here it was established as terrorism:

[...] any act that [...] may endanger the life or physical integrity and cause serious injury or death of any person or group of persons. It is also defined as any act which may damage private or public property, natural resources, cultural heritage and which is intended to intimidate, spread fear, put pressure on a government and affect public services (OAU Convention on the Prevention and Combating Terrorism 1999, 3-4, our translation)².

All these elements allow us to approach the analysis of the internal political dynamics in Somalia, taking into account the relationship between the clans, their spatial distribution, their relationship with the parties that make up the political system and the dynamics of terrorism in the country. In this way, we intend to conclude whether in Somalia we can speak of a return to a certain level of stabilization after decades of internal conflict, governance crisis and the continuity of terrorist actions.

Al Shabaab: from “nationalist” to terrorist movement

The 1990s marked the beginning of the long period of instability in Somalia. From the internal point of view, the fall of Siad Barre generated the outbreak of a strong civil war of inter-clanic character for political power that caused the disarticulation of the state and the emergence of several armed groups. Another element to take into account is the Islamic character of its

² In the original: “cualquier acto que [...] pueda hacer peligrar la vida o la integridad física y causar heridas serias o la muerte, de cualquier persona o grupo de personas. Se define también como cualquier acto que pueda dañar la propiedad privada o pública, los recursos naturales, el patrimonio cultural y que tengan premeditadamente la intención de intimidar, sembrar el miedo, presionar a un gobierno y afectar los servicios públicos” (OAU Convention on the Prevention and Combating Terrorism 1999, 3-4.)

population, since Islam will become a factor of homogenization in a given context. The influence of the radical variants of Islam was very strong in the region and took hold in Somalia, since the religious factor was thus an element used to “unify” in a context of total crisis of the state. It was in this context that the Union of Islamic Courts (UIC) emerged in 2004. Its main leader was Hassan Dahir Aweys. The UIC became the most important actor as opposed to the so-called Transitional Federal Government (TFG), a body that became the “defender” of Somali institutionalism backed by regional actors.

The UIC was able to impose some order and administer justice in the chaotic scenario then prevailing in Somalia. Between June and December 2006, they seized power in Mogadishu and their forces spread rapidly during 2006 to bring large parts of the south of the country under their domination. This raised regional and international alarms, as a strong religious core was “forming” in the country. It was at this point that the military intervention by Ethiopia took place. This action – December 2006 to January 2009 – together with the subsequent signing of an agreement with the TFG, led to the radicalization of the youth wing of the UIC which continued the war now under the name of *Al Shabaab* and the leadership of Aden Hashi Ayro. As a result of the Ethiopian invasion and the flight of those moderate leaders, such as Aweys himself, *Al Shabaab* experienced a rapid radicalization in a double nationalist and religious aspect.

The internal political situation in Somalia after the withdrawal of Ethiopian troops in 2009 remained unstable despite regional support for the TFG led by Sharif Shaykh Ahmed. These would be the years of greatest splendor for the armed opposition represented in the *Al Shabaab* organization. With the change in the correlation of forces within the country and certain “guarantees” in terms of security due to the setback that this group would begin to experience, which would later become a terrorist organization, a positive step was taken in terms of governmental institutionalism.

With the group’s military advance during 2010, *Al Shabaab* came to control almost all of southern Somalia and a significant part of central Somalia, with Kismayo as its first urban enclave. In these territories it established its own governance structures, tax collection and went so far as to provide even social services. These elements were important due to the generalized chaos in Somalia and the lack of management by a central government, by then non-existent. One of the priorities at the time was the final conquest of Mogadishu. Therefore, it was strong in both urban and rural areas. The northern areas – such as Puntland and Somaliland itself – were not within

its geographical areas of operations, although it did not stop trying to reach or influence the north of the country.

At its peak, *Al Shabaab* had a membership of between 7,000 and 9,000 militants, most of them coming from different Somali clans. This is one of its characteristics: it crosses inter-clan lines. Hundreds of foreign militants have also been identified, coming from East Africa (Kenya and other countries of the Swahili coast and Sudan) as well as from the Arabian Peninsula (Yemen and Saudi Arabia). The case of Kenya, a country with a Christian majority, is particularly relevant as it could have contributed up to 25% of the total militancy. A larger number of expatriates would be added, members of the Somali diaspora mainly in the United States (with a high proportion of cases related to the large Somali community based in the State of Minnesota), to a lesser extent in Canada and in several European countries such as the United Kingdom, Denmark or Sweden (Wise 2011, 9). The number of its members declined in 2012 to about 3 thousand to 5 thousand active members and this downward trend has continued.

The nationalist projection that characterized *Al Shabaab* in its initial years began to change as its ideological conceptions became more radical. One of the factors was related to the military defeats they began to suffer at the hands of African Union and UN troops: AMISOM. This led them to resort to less conventional methods of struggle both against the Ugandan, Ethiopian and Kenyan troops present in the country and against the Somali sectors that did not support them. To this was added the progressive loss of their popular support when, following a severe drought and famine that hit the country from 2010 to 2012, they began to prohibit, in the areas under their control, the presence of humanitarian organizations and agencies.

This process also had to do with the change of leadership within the organization. In May 2008, Aden Hashi Ayro was killed by a U.S. missile strike (Sengupta 2008, 1) and was succeeded in the leadership of the group by Ahmed Abdi Godane of the Dir clan. A further reinforcement came at the hands of Hassan Dahir Aweys who returned to Somalia in 2009 to form a group called *Hizbul Islam*, which after clashes with *Al Shabaab*, ended up merging with this group in 2010, reinforcing the Islamist tendency within the country. Aweys was arrested by Somali authorities in 2013 and in 2014 was placed under house arrest (Page 2010).

Godane turned out to be a remarkable leader, with great charisma, fluent in Arabic and Somali and with poetic qualities. His non-membership of the clans in the south of the country enabled him to present himself as a factor of “unity” over inter-clan rivalries with a unifying Islamic discourse.

These powers enabled him to lead *Al Shabaab* to its stage of maximum territorial expansion until around 2011. It was precisely under Godane's mandate that the turn towards a closer relationship with central Al Qaeda and the assumption of the "global jihad" criterion took place. This process of linkage between the two organizations was to be slow and would not be officially recognized by the Al Qaeda leadership until February 2012. It was here that the change in the methods of struggle took place, when suicide attacks and car bombs began to be used against local authorities and the civilian population opposed to their principles.

According to some analyses, in 2011 *Al Shabaab* was a militia divided into three factions, with Godane at the head of the most powerful one, the Lebanese Berjawi in another and the Kenyan Iman Ali in the third. It is for this reason that the oath of allegiance to Al Qaeda expressed by Godane in February 2012 was interpreted by his rivals and detractors as an attempt to reinforce his authority and power, as well as to internationalize the militia.

A further change in leadership occurred in 2014 when, as a result of another U.S. airstrike – a trend that can be identified in the U.S. response to this problem in Somalia: targeted attacks using drones – Godane was killed on September 1, 2014 in the *Lower Shabelle* region in the south of the country (Chothia 2014). Godane was succeeded by Ahmad Umar³ also from the dir clan and who remains the leader of the group to this day⁴. Before reaching this position, Ahmad Umar had been the leader of *Amniyat*, an elite unit of *Al Shabaab* in charge of the execution of assassinations, attacks and security and intelligence work. It is precisely their size in the intelligence sector that has allowed them to infiltrate the structures of the eroded Somali state and armed forces. In this regard, several Somali officials have been accused of collaborating with or favoring *Al Shabaab*.

A change in the organization's fighting methods came when they began to carry out cross-border actions in "retaliation" to the regional military presence in the country. The first in this series of attacks occurred in July 2010 when a group of suicide bombers detonated several bombs in a market in Uganda, killing 78 people who were gathered watching the World Cup

3 He joined the group in 2006 and since then began to hold important positions in the leadership as governor of Lower Juba (2008) and Bay and Bakool (2009) regions. He is also known as Ahmed Diriye or Abu Ubaidah. In April 2015, he was placed on the U.S. State Department's *Specially Designated Global Terrorist list* (U.S. State Department, Office of the Spokesperson. 2015).

4 He is posited to be around 40 years of age and hails from the southern part of the country, from the port of Kismayo. He was a figure very close to Godane and had participated in the elimination of his rivals in 2013 (Iaccino, L. 2014).

in South Africa. The second significant episode was the attack executed in September 2013 at the *Westgate Mall* in Kenya, as a result of which some 68 people were killed. The third and deadliest was the assault on Garissa University College, also in Kenya, in April 2015 where 147 students were killed. These events already speak of an eminently terrorist vocation of the group, by attacking vulnerable civilian targets with the aim of a political-military purpose. In all three cases, the aim was to “pressure” the authorities of both Uganda and Kenya to withdraw their military troops present in Somalia as part of the troops deployed by the AU in the country.

Regional and international actors: their presence in Somalia

From the very beginning of the Somali conflict, countries in the region have been involved in different ways, from Sudan to Kenya and Uganda have played a role in the Somali scenario. Chief among them has been Ethiopia, which shares a long and porous border with Somalia, as well as maintaining populations of the same Somali origin on both sides of the Ogaden region. Developments in Somalia are therefore a national security issue for the government in Addis Ababa. Similarly, Kenya has a similar situation, but along the southern border, in addition to the presence of tens of thousands of Somali refugees on its territory. This also determines the military incursions of the Kenyan army into Somali territory.

In Kenya there are about half a million Somali refugees settled there since the very beginning of the civil war that caused the increase of tensions in the regions where they settled because they changed the ethnic balance of the area, where Somali clans of Kenyan origin also live. The main Somali refugee camp in the country is called Dabaab. In order to “prevent” the spread of *Al Shabaab*’s actions, the *Kenya Defense Forces* (KDF) intervened in Somalia in October 2011. This operation was called *Linda Nchi* and its pretext was the kidnapping of three Spanish aid workers from the Dabaab camp. The result has been a process of radicalization by some Kenyan Somalis in support of *Al Shabaab*.

Despite individual military initiatives taken by Ethiopia and Kenya, this military presence was institutionalized through a mandate of the African Union together with the UN, which established AMISOM in 2007. At the beginning, most of the soldiers were from Uganda and Burundi, but after

successive stages it reached 17,000 troops⁵. It currently has 22,000 men on the ground (AMISOM). The change in the correlation of forces that its presence in the country implied and the offensive against *Al Shabaab* cells in union with the so-called Somali⁶ *National Army* (*Somalia National Force*, SNF), resulted in a series of defeats for the group. In response, the organization has concentrated all its military power against AMISOM troops, the only ones that “guarantee” certain levels of security in the country and support the weak management of the government installed in Mogadishu since September 2012.

The deployment of AMISOM has been the most direct example of the UN’s presence as a key player in the mediation process within the Somali conflict, as is the AU. However, in May 2013, the UN Security Council approved the establishment of the Assistance Mission in Somalia (UNSOM), with a mandate to facilitate policy advice to the federal government and AMISOM at the levels of peace and state building, governance, security sector reform, and coordination of international donor support. The UN Security Council pays particular attention to the evolving political situation inside Somalia, which is an example of the impact of this conflict on international relations.

For their part, the United States and its European allies have also had a direct impact on the Somali conflict. U.S. troops from their base in Djibouti territory have continued to carry out selective drone attacks against targets belonging to *Al Shabaab*, which has become a regular method used by U.S. troops. Prominent leaders of the group have been eliminated in these attacks. For example, in December 2014, the group’s intelligence chief Tahlil Abdishaku was eliminated. In February 2015, in another attack in the south of the country, the group’s head of external operations Yusuf Dheeq was reportedly eliminated. In other words, the military response continues to predominate and the foreign military presence continues to be legitimized. The collateral “damages” of these indiscriminate attacks do not count either, which do not receive international criticism and have been established as the main method of eliminating terrorist leaders, although it implies a constant violation of the sovereignty of the states.

With respect to this type of actions carried out by the United States and in spite of the official military “collaboration”, the attacks with drones have provoked complaints from the Somali authorities. For example, in the region of Galmudug an attack of this type affected the armed forces of this

5 Uganda (with 6,233 troops), Burundi (5,432), Ethiopia (4,395), Kenya (3,644), Djibouti (1,000) and Sierra Leone (850).

6 The Somali National Army has a command and control structure based on the clan system.

state mistaken for presumed terrorists. Washington claimed that it was a “self-defense” attack and that they had indeed eliminated nine members of *Al Shabaab*, but other reports indicated collateral casualties. As confirmed by Somali General Ali Bashi, *Al Shabaab* was not operating in the area (Reuters 2016). Social protests – anti-U.S. – were activated in the state capital Galkayo, where protesters burned U.S. flags. The Somali government demanded an explanation from U.S. authorities in this regard (Al Jazeera 2016), a sign that Somali institutions are not always taken into account in carrying out these targeted attacks.

They have also contributed to the rearmament of the Somali Armed Forces with the supply of military equipment using State Department contractors: *Bancroft Global Development* (BGD) and *Dyn Corporation*, which are also indirectly involved in military technical assistance to AMISOM troops (Orzáez 2015, 145). Another of its functions has been military training to Somali soldiers with the support, for example, of the Ugandan Popular Defense Forces. In January 2013, the US government recognized the Somali government and nominated the first ambassador to this country since the beginning of the war in 1991: Ms. Katherine Dhanani, although her office was located in the US embassy in Nairobi (Jonathan Masters and Aly Sergie 2015).

Meanwhile, the European Union deployed its training mission *EUTM-Somalia* with the objective of “supporting” the security sector reform process in the country through military assistance to the SNF in collaboration with the U.S. This European mission has been extended since 2010 and has trained 3,300 military personnel (1,200 command staff and 120 instructors) (Orzáez 2015, 145 and 149), consolidating the military response and approach that the Western powers are seeking as a solution to the conflict in Somalia.

Kenya’s military presence in the southern part of Somalia constitutes a “priority” for its national security, since from these areas the group carries out military incursions into its national territory. The Kenyan region of *North Eastern Province* has been the most affected by *Al Shabaab* attacks and is also where most of the Somalis in refugee camps, as well as Somalis of Kenyan nationality, are located. Since Nairobi’s military presence in Somalia began in 2011, there have been, according to Kenyan counter-terrorism police, more than 135 minor attacks in this province at a cost of more than 500 civilian casualties. The possibility of building a wall along part of the 680 km Somali-Kenyan border was even raised: “*Somalia Border Control Project*”.

Due to the military actions of AMISOM international forces, *Al Shabaab* has lost much of the territories they controlled. This process in the group’s systematic retreat, started in 2011, has been sustained. This is what

makes it possible to explain their “need” for a change in fighting tactics: the increase in irregular operations, not only against AMISOM troops, but also in attacks against civilian populations and Somali authorities.

Among the major milestones of this military regression was their expulsion in 2011 from the capital by AMISOM forces, although they kept doing operations in Mogadishu. Another significant moment was the loss of the port of Kismayo in 2012 which was very important for them as a source of income and that of the port of Barawe in 2014 through which they smuggled charcoal, one of their sources of financing (Díez Alcalde 2015). Through this port, which had been for six years under their control, the group carried out part of the import of smuggled weaponry and the movement of their militants (Spanish Institute for Strategic Studies 2015, 169). Therefore, it would be even more difficult for this type of activity.

One of the last AMISOM operations was named *Operation Juba Corridor*, with the objective of capturing its main points in the regions of Gedo, Bakool and Bay. The Ethiopian *National Defence Forces* (ENDF) and Kenyan forces (KDF) were involved in this campaign in support of the SNA. The result was the liberation of several villages in these regions⁷. These victories alone are no guarantee that the “liberated” areas will fall back under the group’s influence. This indicated the firepower they still have and the effectiveness of their punctual tactics against specific military targets.

These attacks continue to pose a dilemma for AMISOM which is torn between being able to ensure security in the “liberated” areas or to eliminate the presence of *Al Shabaab* from the other regions. In this regard, the dilemma of the reorganization of AMISOM troops to ensure control over 80% of south-central Somalia was presented (Institute for Security Studies 2015b, 6) and discusses the consequences that the eventual withdrawal of AMISOM forces could generate for the “achieved” stabilization of the country and an eventual increase in ALS (*Al Shabaab*) actions.

All these developments – advances and setbacks of *Al Shabaab*, the military presence of international actors in the conflict and the high levels of insecurity due to terrorist actions, determined the internal Somali context, in the midst of which it was intended to promote a change in the political-institutional structure. This speaks of the complexities faced by the Somali authorities in order to achieve higher levels of “stabilization” in a completely

7 In the Bakool region, the villages of Buur-dhuhunle, Kulun-jareer, Moragabey, Legaly and Gelewoyni were recovered, while in the Bay region, Ufurow, Eesow, Hasanow-Mumin, LIdaale, Makoon, Dhargo and Manaas were recovered.

adverse context. From the 2012 elections and those of 2016, a new phase began, which has not been without the same security challenges.

Somali-“style” presidential election: a new government in Mogadishu

A fundamental element for concluding the transitional governments and advancing in the establishment of a federal system was the holding of presidential elections. To this end, between July and August 2012, several measures were taken to complete the transition period. Among them was the establishment of an assembly of clan leaders to elect the country’s authorities. Thus, in September 2012, a *sui generis* electoral process was held – betting for the first time on the Somali African reality and not following Western patterns in this regard – which ensured the election of a “legitimate” federal government in Somalia (*Federal Government of Somalia*, FGS).

On this occasion, the president was elected by the Somali Parliament instituted for this purpose. The parliamentarians were suggested by 135 leaders of different clans and sub-clans in response to the Somali reality. Of the more than 200 proposals, some 70 people were finally rejected because they did not meet the requirements, one of which was that they should not have been involved in the conflict, such as the so-called “warlords”. A total of 22 candidates were nominated, including Sheikh Sharif Ahmed, but he was defeated by Hassan Sheikh Mohamud⁸ of the Peace and Development Party (PDP).

This government was committed to the real construction of a federal system through the organization of regional authorities. In this sense, positive steps were taken, but political rivalries hindered its further implementation. The adoption of the federal system has still been quite controversial because of the way it should be implemented at both the state and regional levels. For example, one of the main contradictions emerged when, at a conference held in Kismayo on May 15, 2013, the southern state of Jubaland was established, against which a Raas Kamboni militia leader, Sheikh Ahmed Mohamed Islam aka Madobe, was elected as president, a position that was claimed by five other contenders (Solomon 2014, 28-29). At the government level there were also

⁸ Hassan Sheikh Mohamud was a university professor. He worked for the Ministry of Education in the government of Siad Barré in the 1980s. After the fall of Barré, he started collaborating with several international organizations such as Unicef and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP).

three changes of the Prime Minister⁹ as a result of contradictions between them and the president, weakening the continuity of the political process in a context in which the main threat remained *Al Shabaab*.

Related to the Somali political landscape, one should note the preparation process for the 2016 presidential elections as envisaged in the road-map adopted in 2012 and the “Vision 2016” strategy. This comprised three essential elements: the drafting of a new Constitution, the demarcation of the borders between the states that make up the federation and electoral reform. Progress in this regard was made in the establishment of regional authorities and the Constitution (Institute for Security Studies 2015b, 5). The most problematic point centered on the development of the elections.

For this important stage, efforts were made to strengthen the functioning of the political structures implemented since then. In this regard, the cabinet was re-established, in January 2015, with the figure of Omar Abdirashid Ali Sharmarke after he was appointed Prime Minister in December 2014¹⁰. Despite internal pressures, inter-clan and regional differences, the federal political system has remained functioning, which gives the measure of the country’s institutional progress, necessary to be able to cohere federal policies, including against *Al Shabaab*.

Serious challenges remained, for example, in the establishment of state authority in the areas liberated by AMISOM and Somali army troops, which was essential in order to consolidate local authorities in these regions as well. For its part, the government of Hassan Sheikh Mohamud maintained its policy of amnesty for all fighters affiliated with *Al Shabaab* who renounced violence. This was an additional element that also favored defections within the group and a factor in its weakening.

The Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) has been one of the subregional actors with the greatest impact on events in Somalia. Through this mechanism for political coordination, the main initiatives for the solution of the crisis in the country have been articulated. An important milestone in this regard was the holding in January 2015 of the 53rd Extraordinary Session of the IGAD Council of Ministers in Mogadishu, the first to be

9 In two years, Abdiweli Mohamed Ali (from August to October 2012), Abdi Farah Shirdon Saaid (from October 2012 to December 2013) and Abdiweli Sheikh Ahmed (from December 2013 to December 2014) succeeded each other in the post.

10 At the time of his appointment Ali Sharmarke was serving as Somalia’s Ambassador to the United States. His father was the second president of the country between 1967 and 1969 when he was removed by Siad Barre’s coup d’état. He comes from the majerten daarood clan of the Puntland region. He had been Prime Minister during the TFG of Sharif Sheikh Ahmed between 2009 and 2010 (EFE 2014).

held in the country since 1985. At the meeting, the commitment to continue with the process of federalism was raised and in this sense the formation of the federated states in the south of the country was supported, as well as the military advance over the terrorist group was recognized. Other significant moments were given by the meeting of Somali President Hassan Sheikh Mohamud with the then Ethiopian Prime Minister Hailemariam Desalegn in Addis Ababa and the visit of Djibouti's President Ismail Omar Gelle to Mogadishu in February 2015 (Institute for Security Studies 2015a, 12). All these elements pointed to the recognition of the Somali government's work and the strengthening of IGAD's regional role vis-à-vis the crisis in Somalia and the confrontation with terrorism.

An essential event for the strengthening of the country's institutions was the holding of the 2016 presidential elections. Initially, they were scheduled for October 30 after the renewal of the parliament, which is in turn the entity in charge of electing the president. For this opportunity, the same election principle was followed, but expanding the levels of participation with respect to the 2012 elections, since the election of the 275 members of Parliament would be carried out by 13,750 leaders of the country, taking into account the distribution of power among the different clans and sub-clans. In 2012, only 135 leaders did so (EFE 2016).

The *National Leaders Forum* (NLF) held in January 2016 was attended by federal authorities, as well as the presidents of the states of Puntland: Abdiweli Ali Gaas, Jubaland: Ahmed Mohamed Islam, South-West: Sharif Hassan Sheikh Adan and Galmudug: Abdikarim Hussein Guled. Its purpose was the discussion of the 2016 election process and its form of implementation. The result was the approval of an *Upper House of Parliament* with 54 seats distributed among the six states and elected by the regional assemblies. In other words, eight seats will be allocated per state for a total of 48, while the remaining six seats will be distributed equally between Somaliland and Puntland, with these two states having 11 representatives¹¹.

For its part, the 275 seats in the *Lower House* would be distributed taking into account the “4x5” formula that guarantees the distribution of power among the four main clans of the country and their respective clans and allied sub-clans. Taking into account this distribution formula in the Lower House of Parliament, there would be a proportion of 61 seats for each of the four main clans (daarood, hawiye, dir and rahamweyn or digil-mirifle) for a total of 244. The remaining 31 seats would be allocated equally proportionally

¹¹ Somaliland (11), Puntland (11) and the rest of the states with a total of 8 seats each (Koonfur, Galbeed, Jubaland, Galmudug and Shabelle-Hiiraan) (Somalinet 2016).

among the representatives of the respective minority clans and sub-clans. It is posited that 30% of the seats would be reserved for women (Europa Press 2016), which is indicative of the growing role of women's political participation. Despite this, there is still a long way to go in terms of gender equity issues in Somalia.

The electoral calendar suffered delays due to the slowness with which the election of the Parliament took place, a process that was to take place between September 24 and October 10 in order to make way for the presidential elections. This is due to the complexities of the Somali political system, taking into account the social structures and inter-clan divisions. With the implementation of this typical formula for the Somali case, the construction of a consensus political system that responds to the specificities of this country has undoubtedly been strengthened.

The big challenge of these elections remained the still active presence of *Al Shabaab*, the main actor opposing the government. Among the main candidates were President Hassan Sheikh Mohamud himself and Prime Minister Ali Sharmarke as well as former President Sharif Sheikh Ahmed. At the end of the process, Ali Sharmarke was elected as the new Somali president. In terms of female representation only 23% of those elected was reached for a total of 85 out of 276 parliamentarians (Centre for Feminist Foreign Policy 2016). These presidential elections, following the particularities of Somali society, meant a primary breakthrough in the establishment of federal institutions. One issue that remained outstanding was the incorporation of the Somaliland region into that process. Although this region has "representatives" in the federal parliament, they were elected *de facto*, because the authorities of the "State" of Somaliland have not accepted its incorporation into the Federation, so it continues to be a stumbling block for the complete unification of the former Somali territory.

Conclusion

Against this backdrop, it can be said that a gradual and weak process of restructuring the political institutionality in Somalia has been achieved, based on a relative balance of power and political stabilization, despite security problems such as terrorism and inter-clan contradictions. From the economic point of view, extreme poverty remains, which makes successful recruitment by ALS possible.

On the military level, they still depend on foreign military presence to ensure the country's security and the government's ability to function. AMISOM's capabilities have been limited to eradicate *Al Shabaab* and a new scenario is opening up with its gradual withdrawal from Somalia. This means that the Somali national army will have to ensure internal security on its own and fight the group on the ground, regardless of its logistical and manpower limitations.

In the political-institutional sphere, the impossibility of bringing together interclan interests in the government system and the maintenance of antagonistic forces endanger the functioning of the political system. Similarly, the existence of strong internal tensions in the government: disputes between federal authorities and regional and local entities, is another of the challenges they face.

Therefore, the internal situation in Somalia is still characterized by a deep political crisis and high levels of insecurity despite the institutional advances achieved with the strengthening of the federal system, although the incorporation of Somaliland into this process is not in sight. The objective factors that favor the continuity of *Al Shabaab*'s terrorist actions are still present in Somalia, as well as the persistent interclanic contradictions. All this makes it impossible to make further progress in terms of achieving security and, eventually, affecting the institutionality achieved in the country since the federal elections of 2012 and those of 2016.

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ABSTRACT

The conflict in Somalia has been one of the most complex to analyze because of the particularities of clan and inter-clan relations within its society. The country has experienced a long period of political instability as a result of the intensification of

the civil war that had its expression in such clan differences, which led to the balkanization or “disintegration” of Somalia following the emergence of autonomous “states”. In this context, Al Shabaab came to play a crucial role. This terrorist organization has been active since 2010 and operates in the rural areas of south-central Somalia. Since 2012, there has been a gradual return to institutionality, with the holding of two elections that have taken into account these particularities of Somali society. The aim of this paper is to demonstrate how a gradual and weak process of restructuring of political institutionality has been achieved in Somalia, based on a relative balance of power and political stabilization, despite security problems such as terrorism and inter-clan contradictions.

KEYWORDS

Somalia. Somaliland. Al Shabaab. Clans. Sub-clans. Terrorism. Presidential elections.

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