Article follows.

Some thoughts.

I found it kind of difficult to write this. Not sure what approach to take. I ended up with something long (what else? :P). What's here is probably a 'maximal' article: bits of it could be deleted, or used for smaller articles.

To discuss the document meaningfully, I feel like I have to go through the history first. I also feel like people should be educated about the whole thing. Unfortunately this means taking quite a detour, which we can't really relate directly to our document: our document is a statement of Islamic Courts strategy from 2005, and the Courts only became a significant military force in 2006.

If this were like a proper research article, academic and all, you could tell the story in chronological order. But the point here is to talk about our document. So we must start with the relevance of our document; then go back and discuss the history; and then discuss the document and its meaning. This means the structure is a little unpleasing but I don't know what else to do.

Also, I didn't find any nice hard line to take on this document. One hardly wants to glorify a potentially hardline islamist movement, and nor does one want to denounce it as terrorist when it isn't thoroughly so, which would only add flames to US propaganda fire. I found myself compelled to go with an 'it's more complicated than that' sort of message.

I did mention the 'should be shot' part, but only a couple of times. Make more of it for sensationalist purposes? Make less of it for purposes of protecting potential victims in Somalia? As we discussed, the time for any potential consequences have probably long passed, but it's still a consideration.

Tone generally: too corporate-journalistic? Not corporate-journalistic enough? Too academic? Depends on our audience, where we want to publish, etc.

Not completely polished. You may find some over-repetition, and some badly worded or badly argued parts. I don't want to proofread it over and over though before showing it. I don't think there should be many spelling/grammar mistakes, but maybe.

Arabic spellings: tried to be consistent.

You will notice rants to destroy pro-US-interventionist, pro-"Black Hawk Down"-ist, and anarcho-capitalist viewpoints. These are largely gratuitous but were fun, and can possibly be deleted.

Author still undecided? I wrote Bourbaki but whatever.

Title... maybe something snappier?

English-style rather than American-style spellings, should be changed maybe?

Footnotes included, but more for our benefit than for an eventual version. Just so you can see what my sources were. (There are more, but I can't be bothered doing more cross-referencing, I've spent long enough already!) Dates in footnotes are English-style, anyway; if kept, should be changed?

Inside the Somali Civil War and the Islamic Courts

19/12/06

Bourbaki

As Somalia lies at a critical juncture in its history, a secret document which has recently come into our possession provides a unique insight into the struggles and politics of the presently dominant faction in Somalia's civil war, the Union of Islamic Courts. The document details strategies to undermine and defeat rival factions and intervening powers, including assassinations and cooperation with criminals. The secrecy of the document is underlined by its final point: 'Whosoever leaks this information and is found guilty should be shot.' The unscrupulousness of some of the strategies advocated is presumably the reason for such extreme secrecy. But if it can be taken at face value as a statement of strategy and policy, it throws doubt on US claims that the Union of Islamic Courts is a terrorist organisation planning suicide bombings in Kenya and Ethiopia, and demonstrates that the situation in Somalia is more complicated than US, UN or Islamist spokespeople would have us believe.

At this very moment, Somalia is at a crucial point in its history. In the midst of Somalia's devastating civil war, raging since 1991, no faction emerged as dominant until this year. The Union of Islamic Courts (UIC), only emerging this year as a serious military force, has rapidly achieved dominance. It has prosecuted an extraordinarily successful military, ideological, religious and social campaign this year. Putting to one side the large semi-autonomous regions of Somaliland and Puntland, the UIC is in effective control of the entire country, except for the town of Baidoa. The UIC is poised to control the entire country.

Today a crucial deadline expires for foreign troops to leave Baidoa, and it may be captured. There is an imminent risk of wider regional war; there is currently Ethiopian involvement, and the risk of further interventions from other neighbouring nations, the AU, UN and US; there is a risk of establishment of a hardline Islamic theocratic Somali state; and a recent UN Security Council resolution may only inflame the situation.

In short, Somalia is on a knife edge. And at this critical juncture, this new document, a 'secret decision' from November 2005 by one of the leaders of this faction, helps us to understand the thinking and the goals of the UIC, and what we may expect in the near future. The credibility of the document is enhanced by the fact that many of the strategies and goals outlined in this document last year have already been pursued and come to fruition. If it is genuine – and it appears that it is – then it is the first policy document of the UIC, beyond public announcements, to make it into the hands of the international media.

The UIC controls everything except Baidoa; and the significance of Baidoa is not that it is the capital or of any great strategic or geographical significance. Rather, Baidoa is presently the home of the UN-sponsored transitional federal government (TFG), formed in

2004 in Kenya. The TFG never established itself in the Somali capital, Mogadishu, as the city suffered the turf wars and bloody violence of rival warlords. Although many warlords were given high-level posts in the TFG, they continued to operate their militias privately, even as those militias fought for control of the capital. Mogadishu was therefore considered too dangerous for the TFG, lacking any strong army or militia or any way to establish control, and Baidoa was chosen as the temporary seat of government instead.

But now the UIC is poised to take Baidoa. The TFG holds out in one city, with virtually no military force of its own, lacking authority anywhere else in the country, propped up by Ethopian troops, and backed diplomatically by UN resolutions and US threats. The UN clings to the results of its diplomatic efforts, even as they are destroyed, along with their legitimacy, by facts on the ground.

One is forced to ask, then: How did Somalia find itself in this situation? How did the UN find itself in this situation? What is the UIC, and how did they rise so fast in such a chaotic situation, where no others have succeeded? And what is likely to happen if they gain control of the country? The document we have obtained helps to answer all these questions.

Somalia beyond "Black Hawk Down"

To answer these questions, one must look a little into Somali history. To the average Western mind the words 'Somalia' or 'Mogadishu' barely even register, but if they do it is probably because of the awful Hollywood propaganda movie 'Black Hawk Down', or indirectly because of the UN-sanctioned US intervention there from 1992-1995.

That movie does not tell a pleasant story; the intervention was a disaster for the US. But it was an even larger disaster for Somalis. And indeed, the modern history of Somalia is even less pleasant.

Like most of the continent, the region suffered the yoke of European colonialism and imperialism, under the British, French and Italians. Somalis fought as proxies for the imperial powers. Their lands were split along arbitrary lines, ethnic groupings finding themselves displaced across imperial borders; as with much of the rest of Africa, they were fought over and treated as pawns in the race of the Western powers for power and resources. Ethnic Somalis live in areas of the present-day countries of Ethiopia, Kenya, Djibouti, as well as Somalia. The colonial situation persisted through World War II. One can imagine the position of the Somalis called upon, lured and coerced into fratricide.

After World War II, in 1950 the UN established a trust territory under Italian control. In 1960 the former British and Italian Somali colonies became independent as a united Somalia. The formerly British part is the northwestern region known as Somaliland, and today operates as a de facto independent nation, though without any international recognition.

From 1969 until 1991 the country was ruled by Muhammad Siad Barre, a Soviet and then US-backed dictator; such was the cynicism of the superpowers in the cold war that his

ruthless dictatorship was acceptable to either side. Barre established several social programmes, raised literacy and educational standards, improved infrastructure, and implemented capital works programmes. His regime was also brutally authoritarian, murdering thousands. It was corrupt and dependent on foreign aid, which was often diverted to projects of political largesse and self-aggrandisement rather than social welfare. Barre engaged in a futile war with Ethiopia over the Ogaden region of Ethiopia, leading to tens of thousands of deaths. Somalis were subject to one of the worst African dictatorships.

Somali society is deeply clan-based; people identify first as a member of their clan, before anything else. Political alliances are often expressed through clan affiliations and traditional clan institutions. More importantly, the traditional clan structure of society has helped people to endure the harshness of their climate and geography, even in the face of government neglect or abuse. Traditional kinship institutions are still vitally important. Muhammad Siad Barre united the clans, but at the cost of maintaining an extensive network of allegiances and largesse across clan networks. The corruption inherent in that system led to a great disillusionment and cynicism of the state amongst ordinary Somalis. The clan is, therefore, the backbone of Somali society.

Following Barre's death, the struggle for power between rival militias threw the country into convulsions of violence and chaos. In 1991 the northwestern region of Somaliland declared independence, and still considers itself and independent nation; it has a relatively stable functioning government, but no foreign recognition. In 1998 the northern region of Puntland declared autonomy, asserting that it will govern itself until Somalia has a functioning government, which it will then rejoin. Puntland and Somaliland have been spared much of the violence of the rest of the country; together they form a contiguous region which is approximately the northern third of Somalia.

The Somali cynicism towards all official institutions was not improved by its recent experience with international intervention. We have already mentioned 'Black Hawk Down', which depicts one incident in the US-led UN intervention in Somalia. The movie is a story of one incident in that intervention, told entirely from the US military perspective, missing crucial details, and glorifying US soldiers and war crimes. Indeed, the Hollywood version was sufficiently acceptable that the filmmakers were permitted full cooperation from the US military.¹

To those who believe in the essential benevolence of US power and foreign interventions — which includes the entire permissible spectrum of political thought in the US — the intervention in Somalia is the prime example of such benevolence. One can point to dozens of other US interventions for which there is not one glimmer of humanity — Chile, Guatemala, Iran, Nicaragua, Panama, Iraq, Vietnam, Laos, Cambodia, the list goes on and on — and they reply, what about Somalia! No matter that all history establishes the opposite conclusion. No direct US interests there — what altruism, they say! Except for the lucrative oil exploration going on there at the time: the US even used oil company Conoco's offices as a temporary embassy at the time. No benefit to the US government to be gained from an invasion, they say! Except the usual benefit to a government by whipping up patriotic fervour and belief in State benevolence, enforced through the military. And the benefits of a public relations exercise, both for the domestic and international audience. Indeed, the

¹ Wikipedia article on Black Hawk Down.

public relations component of the intervention can hardly be missed – as anyone who recalls the farce of US marines making an amphibious night landing on the Somali shoreline, being confronted by hordes of journalists, will remember. Of course, the campaign was supposed to be easy, painless (for US soldiers), and effective, returning functioning government swiftly to a region torn by strife. And perhaps it could have been.²

But it was nothing of the sort. To what mixture of arrogance, incompetence, ignorance, bullying, revenge, racism or imperialism one should ascribe US and UN actions, one can debate. But the facts are clear; here are some key ones. Following the brutal murders of some Pakistani UN troops by the militia of Somali warlord Mohamed Farrah Aidid, US-led UN forces soon abandoned neutrality and the mission, rather than establishing a stable, impartial, transitional order, became a war against Aidid. Such favouritism did not go unnoticed in Somalia. In the process of its campaign, US forces raided the offices of the UN Development Programme, the charity World Concern, and Medecins Sans Frontiers. But perhaps the most significant action was at a meeting in a warehouse of leaders and elders from Aidid's clan, discussing a peace agreement with the UN. The US received erroneous intelligence that it was a meeting where Aidid was planning attacks, and ordered that it be bombed. As respected leaders of Somali civil society discussed their future, that future was mercilessly destroyed by the horrendous American death machines known as Cobra helicopters. Fifty-four senior members of Somali society were slaughtered. No apology was given; no US or UN military leader was brought to justice. No wonder then, that Somalia united against the intervention forces. No wonder that the 'Black Hawk Down' situation soon followed. Of course, none of these relevant facts are mentioned in the Hollywood version. UN troops were withdrawn in short order, leaving Somali society further brutalised. To US leaders, of course, the most important result of the operation was not the war crimes, or the obligation to pay reparations, but the death of 18 US soldiers. The Somali death toll was of course far higher: in the course of the 'Black Hawk Down' operation alone, American estimates are 1000-1500 Somali deaths, militia and civilians.³

Since then, the civil war has continued unabated. Somaliland and Puntland have enjoyed relative stability, but many factions, militias and warlords have struggled to control territory, people and resources. Despite all the blood that has been spilt, none managed to gain the upper hand. UN and regional efforts to achieve ceasefires repeatedly failed; attempts to form temporary governments repeatedly failed; attempts to achieve peace repeatedly failed. Relative peace obtained in the two effectively autonomous regions of Somaliland and Puntland, but the rest of the country, in particular the capital Mogadishu, remained without any effective government.⁴

The ability of Somalis to survive in Mogadishu under conditions of massive brutality and violence testifies to their resilience. To cross from one warlord's region into another involves major risk; sometimes even to leave one's house entails major risk. Nevertheless, many of the bazaars and markets have continued to function, and life goes on.⁵

² The Conoco – Somalia Declassification Project, maintained by Prof Keith Yearman, Geography department, College of DuPage, http://www.cod.edu/people/faculty/yearman/somalia.htm.

³ Wikipedia articles on UNOSOM I, Operation Restore Hope, UNOSOM II, Battle of Mogadishu, Black Hawk Down. George Monbiot, 'Both Saviour and Victim: The film Black Hawk Dwon is helping to create a new myth of American nationhood, which threatens everyone on earth', ZNet, February 12, 2002.

⁴ Wikipedia articles on Somaliland and Puntland.

⁵ See the personal reports and anecdotes at the BBC Somalia site.

To some anarcho-capitalists the situation in Mogadishu is regarded as hopeful, pointing the way, they say, to an apparently utopian model of a capitalist economic system without a state. In evidence they cite the better functioning of the telecommunications system than some nearby countries (Somalia has 15 telephones per 1000 people, rather than 10 as in neighbouring countries). Never mind that the network is operated in conjunction with major multinational corporations sch as Spring and Telenor, that the system was established with the help of the UN and the International Telecommunications Union, and that the Somali Telecom Association is headquartered outside the country in Dubai. They cite private provision of water access. Never mind that many families are now in debt for water, and that no market incentive or regulatory obligation has convinced those private operators to purify their water: access to safe water is low even by African standards. They also cite air travel operation without any government regulation. Never mind that other countries are relied upon to maintain aircraft, and that Somali airports operate without trained aircraft controllers, fire crews, runway lights, or even fences to keep out stray animals. And never mind that the local currencies' value has been destroyed. No, there is nothing beautiful about the presence of capitalist profiteering in the absence of a functioning state.6

We may admire the resilience of Somalis and their ability to continue life, in many respects as normal, under such adverse circumstances. They have continued with traditional institutions and systems, which help to maintain social cohesion. They have endured the ravings, the egos, the bullying and the brutality of the warlords; and as the warlords have been banished from ever larger parts of the country by the UIC, they have applauded, if nothing else, their newfound ability to go about their lives unhindered.⁷

The Rise of the UIC

It may well seem like a miracle: indeed, some have explicitly said so. The UIC, existing in some form since 2000, only became a powerful political and military entity in early 2006. Major fighting was reported in March, and by June they had taken the capital Mogadishu. The warlords fled, and suffered defeat upon defeat. The UIC has swept all before it, and today is poised to take over the one remaining town, Baidoa, seat of the TFG, defended by Ethiopian troops, and backed diplomatically by UN resolutions and US threats.⁸

⁶ An example is Tatiana Nenova and Tim Harford, 'Anarchy and Invention: How does Somalia's Private Sector Cope without Government?' Public Policy for the Private Sector, World Bank Group, Private Sector Development Vice Presidency, November 2004.

⁷ Yusuf Garaad, 'Somalis learn to follow the law', BBC News, 1/11/2006, http://news.bbc.co.uk/go/pr/fr/2/hi/africa/6106398.stm. People are astounded by changes, business ooming, people proud to show off their security.

⁸ Abdulakdir J. Dualeh, 'the Miracles at Hargeisa and Mogadishu. What lessons can be learned and what is the path to the future?' November 2006, Hiiraan online, http://www.hiiraan.com/op2/2006/nov/the_miracles_at_hargeisa_and_mogadishu_what_lessons_can_be_le arned_and_what_is_the_path_to_the_future_.aspx. 'Somali warlords battle Islamists', BBC News 23/3/2006, http://news.bbc.co.uk/go/pr/fr/-/2/hi/africa/4836494.stm. 'Islamists seize key Somali town', BBC News, 4/6/2006, http://news.bbc.co.uk/go/pr/fr/-/2/hi/africa/5046402.stm. Marc Lacey, 'Islamic militias take control of Somali capital', New York Times, 7/6/2006.

The UIC is somewhat unusual, in comparison to the other factions in the civil war. It is literally, as its name suggests, a union of courts practicing Islamic of Sharia law. After the collapse of government in 1991, aided by businessmen desiring an orderly commercial environment, Sharia courts became the main judicial system, and evolved to provide education, health care and police services. They gained widespread public support, and helped to reduce robberies, drug-dealing, as well as what they consider pornography. The militias which enforced their decisions have evolved into the fighting force which has effectively conquered most of the country. The affiliation of the courts is somewhat loose: each court makes its own decisions, and different courts and judges apply Sharia law in different ways. Somalia is a deeply Muslim nation, but has historically practiced a relatively liberal form of their religion. The membership and leadership of the UIC both contain moderate and hardline elements.⁹

The UIC, through support from the mosques and Imams, has gained a great deal of legitimacy. Citizens can be expected to appreciate the work of any organisation which ends years of violence and establishes peaceful social relations. But it appears that the uniquely religious, social and judicial elements of the UIC have also helped them to gain support and legitimacy, and also to establish alliances with which to secure and consolidate power. The enforcement of a hardline conservative version of Islam may be repressive and unpopular where this occurs, but at least for an initial period, the UIC carries a significant amount of public goodwill. They have filled a power vacuum, they have promised to bring peace and justice through their courts, and they have brought peace and emerged victorious. Numerous defections of enemy troops to the UIC have been reported throughout their advances; they are certainly seen as more legitimate than the warlords. Nonetheless, their takeover of Mogadishu by the UIC and the threat of full-scale war led to a stream of 18,000 refugees into Kenya by August.¹⁰

On the other hand, the TFG may not have ever possessed as much legitimacy as its UN approval might suggest. Of course, as the result of an internationally-brokered agreement between major powerbrokers, it certainly has the potential to be a legitimate national government. But quite apart from Somalis' ongoing mistrust of international institutions, the TFG's very nature erodes its legitimacy. Being a compromise of the militarily powerful, it includes hated warlords among its ranks, incorporating them into major ministerial posts. As the UIC took control of Mogadishu, the militias fighting against them were led by warlords who were ministers in the TFG. The militias were fighting in a 'private' capacity, not on behalf of the TFG, however. Those ministers were expelled from the TFG shortly afterwards.¹¹

⁹ Wikipedia article on Islamic Courts Union. Joseph Winter, 'Profile: Somalia's Islamist leader', BBC News, 30/6/2006 http://news.bbc.co.uk/go/pr/fr/-/2/hi/africa/5120242.stm.

¹⁰ 'Islamists claim Mogadishu victory', BBC News, 5/6/2006, http://news.bbc.co.uk/go/pr/fr/-/1/hi/world/africa/5047766.stm. In particular there the head of the BBC's Somali service is quoted as describing the rise of the Islamic courts as a popular uprising. 'Ethiopian troops on Somali soil', BBC News, 20/7/2006, http://news.bbc.co.uk/pr/fr/-/2/hi/africa/5198338.stm . This article has reports of defections. Rob Crilly, 'Somalia' refugees stream into Kenya', Christian Science Monitor, 16/8/2006, http://www.csmonitor.com/2006/0816/p06s01-woaf.html .

¹¹ 'Profile: Somalia's Islamic Courts', BBC News 6/6/2006, http://news.bbc.co.uk/go/pr/ft/-/2/hi/africa/5051588.stm. 'Warring Somali ministers warned', BBC News, 13/5/2006, http://news.bbc.co.uk/go/pr/fr/-/2/hi/africa/4768857.stm.

Hardline elements of the UIC have made major impingements on civil liberties, public expression and entertainment already. They have shut down groups watching soccer matches. They have shut down theatres showing supposedly 'pornographic' movies – it is not clear what counts as 'pornographic' to them. There have been reports of enforcing strict dress codes on women. Elopements have been banned. The UIC also banned khat, a popular stimulant, leading to protests. The US has accused the UIC of planning to establish a Taliban-like state; this has been denied by the UIC, though their actions do not always provide much comfort.¹²

The two main leaders of the UIC are Sheikh Sharif Skeikh Ahmed and Sheikh Hassan Dahir Aweys. Ahmed is the more moderate of the two: he is chairman of the UIC, a law graduate and former high school teacher. He heads the eight-member executive committee and is the public face of the UIC. Aweys, on the other hand, is more radical. He is the head of the shura consultative council, and regarded as the spiritual leader of the organisation and the military genius behind its recent successes: though at 61 years old, he is reported to have organised their training and strategy. He was decorated in the 1977 Ogaden war against Ethiopia, and in the 1990s headed al-Itihaad al-Islamiya, an Islamist group. This group was funded by Osama bin Laden and, though associated with al-Qaeda, had elements of a social movement: they helped to establish sharia courts, and comprised various factions of varying character. According to US intelligence, al-Itihaad al-Islamiya cooperated with the al-Qaeda members who carried out the 1998 US embassy bombings in Kenya and Tanzania. Aweys has expansionist ambitions: he has called for a 'greater Somalia' incorporating ethnic Somali regions of Ethiopia and Kenya, just as Muhammad Siad Barre did in the past. Sheikh Sharif Sheikh Ahmed, on the other hand, has denied any great desire for land, professing that the courts are no threat and desire only order. Aweys is the author of our secret document.¹³

As the UIC has taken further control of the country, it has attempted to impose further elements of governmental power. It has begun collecting taxes in the markets, although the primary purpose of these taxes appears to be funding its ongoing military battles. It has sent its 'foreign minister' to Yemen. In November, talks between the TFG and UIC broke down, and the UIC has since moved to consolidate their position and move towards Baidoa. By December 4 Baidoa was effectively encircled. On December 12 the UIC gave Ethiopian forces a week to leave the country or face attack. Over the last few days, fresh advances have been made by the UIC. Troops on both sides dug in around Baidoa on

¹² 'Somali Islamic state 'ruled out'', BBC News, 7/6/2006, http://news.bbc.co.uk/go/pr/fr/-/2/hi/africa/5051220.stm. Rashid Abdi, 'Unveiling Somalia's Islamists', BBC Focus on Africa magazine, 6/10/2006. Discusses the World Cup crackdown. Yusuf Garaad, 'Somalis learn to follow the law', BBC News, 1/11/2006, http://news.bbc.co.uk/go/pr/fr/-/2/hi/africa/6106398.stm. Talks about elopements. 'Somali Islamists ban popular drug', BBC News, 17/11/2006. Khat and evictions and reports of dress code enforcement.

¹³ Wikipedia article on Hassan Aweys, Al-Itihaad al-Islamiya, Sharif Ahmed. 'Profile: Somalia's Islamic Courts', BBC News 6/6/2006, http://news.bbc.co.uk/go/pr/fr/-/2/hi/africa/5051588.stm. Hassan Barise, 'Mogadishu's modest Islamic leader', BBC News 12/6/2006, http://news.bbc.co.uk/go/pr/fr/-/2/hi/africa/5120242.stm. Mohamed Olad Hassan, 'Islamic Leader Urges 'Greater Somalia', AP wire, reported in forbes.com, 18/11/06.

¹⁴ Christian Science Monitor, 4/12/2006.

¹⁵ Aweys Osman Yusuf, 'Islamist Fighters Grab a Fresh Settlement', Shabelle Media Network, 13/12/2006, available at allafrica.com.

December 13, and an EU diplomatic effort to avert war began, though with no results yet. Ethiopian troops have backed up TFG fighters in recent battles, and remained stationed in Baidoa in the city's defence.¹⁶

This comes at a time when over 400,000 people in Somalia are affected by flooding, with up to 900,000 at risk if the flooding continues.¹⁷ The tragedy continues.

Foreign Involvement

The so-called Somali civil war cannot be regarded as entirely an internal affair. Apart from the UN intervention, there have been other countries providing support to various factions in the conflict. Somalia is subject to an arms embargo, so any such armed intervention, military aid or provision of arms and materiel is illegal under international law.

Perhaps the largest involvement is Somalia's western neighbour Ethiopia. Somalia and Ethiopia have a long history of violence, dating back at least to the 1977 Ogaden war. There is substantial evidence of several Ethiopian government interventions in Somalia in recent years. Since the rise of the UIC, the main interest of largely Christian Ethiopia has been to prevent the establishment of an Islamic state on its border, and to support the TFG, which is led by a long-time Ethiopian ally. According to Reuters, a confidential UN report estimated 6,000-8,000 Ethiopian troops were in Somalia in early November. The buildup has continued since then, and Reuters quotes witnesses and security experts estimating 10,000 Ethiopian soldiers presently in the country. The UIC has repeatedly declared jihad on Ethiopia for supporting the TFG; Ethiopia has openly denounced the UIC as a threat.¹⁸

It seems clear from multiple confirmed reports, despite Ethiopian denials, that there are thousands of Ethoipian troops in Somalia at present, mainly around Baidoa, defending the TFG. Since the TFG is so militarily weak, it is effectively dependent on Ethoipia, giving rise to the perception that it is an Ethiopian puppet government.¹⁹

¹⁶ Wikipedia article on Somalia. ''Heavy fighting' in Somali town', BBC News, 8/12/2006. Aweys Osman Yusuf, 'Islamists begin collective taxes in Mogadishu's markets', Shabelle Media Network, 11/12/2006, available at allafrica.com. 'Ethiopia deadline to quit Somalia', BBC News, 12/12/2006. Aweys Osman Yusuf, 'Islamist chair to fly to Yemen as tension in the country runs high', Shabelle Media Network, 12/12/2006, available at allafrica.com. UIC foreign minister travel. 'Somalia: Bid to avert all-out war', Reuters, 13/12/2006. Mentions the flooding at the end. The EU bid.

¹⁷ 'Somalia: Bid to avert all-out war', Reuters, 13/12/2006. Mentions the flooding at the end.

¹⁸ 'Ethiopia says Somalia 'a threat'', BBC News, 28/6/2006, http://news.bbc.co.uk/go/pr/fr/-/2/hi/africa/5124068.stm. 'Ethiopian troops on Somali soil', BBC News, 20/7/2006, http://news.bbc.co.uk/pr/fr/-/2/hi/africa/5198338.stm. Mohammed Adow, 'Why Ethiopia is on war footing', BBC News, 21/7/2006, http://news.bbc.co.uk/go/pr/fr/-/2/hi/africa/5201470.stm. 'Fighting erupts in Somalia as peace talks falter, says Islamic official', AP wire, International Herald Tribune, 6/11/2006. Mentions UN report of 6-8000 Ethiopian troops. 'Ethiopia 'ready for Islamist war'', BBC News, 23/11/2006. 'Somalia: Islamists take full control of border town', Garowe Online News, 24/11/2006. Reports that Ethiopian military build-up continues. 'AP Interview: Somali prime minister says government is surrounded', Associated Press, 11/12/2006. Mentions 8000 number again. Hassan Yare, 'Trops dig in as Somalia war fears gros', Reuters, 13/12/2006. Quotes the 30,000 number.

¹⁹ 'Somalia: Who supports Who?' BBC News, 2/11/06, http://news.bbc.co.uk/go/pr/fr/-/2/hi/africa/5092586.stm.

One week ago today, the UIC issued an ultimatum to Ethiopian forces in Baidoa to leave; that ultimatum expires today.

The US has also been involved. Its main interest now, like Ethiopia, is against any Islamist regime. As a result, in an extraordinary act of cynicism, the US came to support some of the same warlords who were US enemies in 1993, demonized in 'Black Hawk Down'. The CIA funded an alliance of warlords, the 'Alliance for the Restoration of Peace and Counter-Terrorism', in their battle against the UIC for control of Mogadishu. Not only did this strategy fail militarily when the UIC took control in June, it also enhanced the legitimacy of the UIC, seen as fighting against US aggression. The US has repeatedly claimed that terrorists in Somalia are planning suicide attacks in Kenya and Ethiopia. The US has repeatedly denounced the UIC as harbouring al Qaeda terrorists, and in particular accused Aweys of connections to al Qaeda; presumably this refers to his previous involvement with al-Itihaad al-Islamiya. US rhetoric appears inflated, for example, US assistant secretary of state on December 15:

The Council of Islamic Courts is now controlled by al Qaeda cell individuals, East Africa al Qaeda cell individuals. The top layer of the court are extremists. They are terrorists... They are killing nuns, they have killed children and they are calling for a jihad.

Such denunciation seems contradicted by the organisation of the UIC, as discussed previously, and achieves obvious political and propaganda goals. In any case no further evidence has been presented or is available in the media, particularly regarding the nuns and children. The US introduced a resolution into the UN Security Council in late November, which called for peacekeepers to defend the TFG; it was passed unanimously on December 7. Such a proposal will surely not be implemented in the near future, and poses major practical problems, but rather operates as diplomatic support, backed by the eventual threat of official UN military support in favour of the TFG. The resolution sparked major protests in Mogadishu. Backing such a weak, increasingly illegitimate and dependent regime as it nears collapse may not only be a futile strategy: it may also enhance the legitimacy of the UIC, as the TFG appears desperate and a US-Ethiopian puppet. The International Crisis Group warns that this move in the Security Council could trigger a regional conflict; it suggests that the UN should pressure both sides to resume negotiations, rather than favouring one.²⁰

For its part, the UIC also receives foreign support, according to UN reports. According to this report, it receives aid from Iran, Egypt, Djibouti, Libya Hezbollah, Saudi Arabia, Syria and Eritrea: Djibouti has provided uniforms and medicines; Egypt has provided training within Somalia; Iran has provided arms and ammunition; Hezbollah has provided military training and arms, and UIC fighters fought Israeli soldiers alongside Hezbollah in July 2006; Libya provided training, funds and arms; Eritrea provided arms, ammunition and

²⁰ Wikipedia article on Alliance for the Restoration of Peace and Counter-Terrorism. 'Islamists claim control of Mogadishu', aljazeera.net, 7/6/2006. One of the few articles to mention the shift in US alliances. Saeed Shabazz, 'Annan: U.S. wrong to support warlords in Somalia', 29/6/2006, FinalCall.com . 'Fighting erupts in Somalia as peace talks falter, says Islamic official', AP wire, International Herald Tribune, 6/11/2006. Mentions US embassy warnings. Sahal Abdulle, 'Somalis rally against US peacekeeping plan', Reuters, 4/12/2006. Joseph Winter, 'Somalia's peacekeeping conundrum', BBC News, 7/12/2006. Scott Baldauf, 'Global jihad's new front in Africa', Christain Science Monitor, 12/12/2006.

military equipment; Saudi Arabia provided logistical support and ammunition. This support, it seems, has not extended to the provision of official military personnel, although this is not clear. There are fears that the conflict could become an Eritrea-Ethiopia proxy war. Arrivals of thousands of foreign Islamic fighters have also been reported, especially in recent weeks.²¹

The UIC strategy

Our 'secret' UIC policy document, if it can be taken as an overall statement of policy, will show the types of strategies employed by the UIC in furtherance of its goals. Its goals are clearly Islamist, including the establishment of an Islamic State practicing Sharia law; although as a loose affiliation of distinct courts, the conservatism in the application of the law will presumably vary. It denounces Muhammad Siad Barre's regime as unjust, undermining and violating Sharia law. And it denounces the TFG is denounced as hunting religious leaders, and responsible for influencing the international community to believe that the UIC is a terrorist organisation.

By and large, the strategies Aweys advocates are largely those which can be expected by a faction in a civil war. Any party in a civil war can be expected to try to spread influence over the country, establish alliances and undermine enemies. One important question is how far the organisation is prepared to go, and what tactics it considers legitimate, to defeat its enemies. So then, what strategies are advocated in this document, in this document Aweys wants to be so secret – so secret, in fact, that 'whosoever leaks this information and is found guilty should be shot'?

It advocates opening Islamic courts in Puntland and Somailand in collaboration with clan elders; and indeed the autonomous government Puntland has agreed to the establishment of Sharia law, though on its own terms, using different methods from the UIC and without surrendering to the UIC.²²

It advocates 'plots' to mar the relationships between the TFG, Puntland and Somaliland, though it is not clear what this amounts to; subtleties of translation may be important here. But by compromise with Puntland, the UIC certainly has weakened the TFG.

It advocates infiltration into the armed forces of Puntland and Somaliland: we know of no reports to this effect, however.

It advocates purchasing weapons used by Puntland and Somaliland armed forces, and from their 'custodians', which seems rather curious.

²¹ Wikipedia article on Islamic Courts Union. 'AP Interview: Somali prime minister says government is surrounded', Associated Press, 11/12/2006. Gedi there accuses Islamists of having 3000 foreign fighters. 'Somali PM says Islamists preparing attack on govt', Reuters, 13/12/2006. Reports 4000 foreign fighers.

²² 'Somalia: Puntland leader reaches deal with local Islamic clerics', Garowe online news, 18/11/2006.

^{&#}x27;Puntland 'to fight Islamic Courts'', aljazeera.net, 21/11/2006.

It advocates alliances with clans, supporting local leaders, a natural strategy.

Religious lectures are to be used to influence the public in their favour; no doubt this has been the case.

Public friction with the TFG, Puntland or Somaliland administrations is to be minimized, while allies are identified within their cabinets and support provided to them.

It advocates supporting ethnic Somali rebels in Ethiopia, to weaken the capability of the Ethiopian military in Somalia: again, a natural strategy.

It advocates welcoming and influencing minority clans which are marginalized by the TFG, Somaliland and Puntland administrations.

It singles out particular clans and individuals for support against their rivals.

It advocates minimising animosity with religious leaders.

The most controversial decision, however, is for cooperation with 'criminals' and making large payments in return for assassinations of TFG, Somaliland and Puntland officials. So the UIC is prepared to deal with criminals, but the targets are to be officials, not civilians, and the UIC is not prepared to carry out such actions itself. This does indicate a lesser moral calibre than the UIC proclaims for itself, certainly; and would no doubt disappoint or outrage some of its local followers. But, if this statement can be taken at face value, and its terrorist inclinations go no further, then US accusations of plotting bombings in Kenya and Tanzania appear doubtful.

Two bombings have taken place in Somalia this year. On September 18, double suicide car bombings failed to kill TFG president Abdulahi Yusuf. And on November 30, a car bomb exploded at an entrance to Baidoa, though the intended target is not clear. The bombings were condemned by the UIC. It is possible they were sponsored by the UIC, and would be consistent with the strategies enunciated in our document; but that is a far cry from the sort of terrorism of which the US accuses it.²³

Recall that this document dates from November 2005, well before the UIC began its meteoric rise. The strategy proposed here, then, is one of non-confrontation and subversion of its major political rivals, namely Puntland, Somaliland and TFG. The warlords are barely mentioned, even though they were in control of Mogadishu at the time; perhaps they are simply regarded as part of the TFG. It is a statement of political strategy against major rivals, rather than military strategy. And it largely appears to have been carried out. The UIC has made local alliances through clan and religious networks as part of its astonishingly successful campaign.

Today, as the UIC's ultimatum against Ethiopian troops in Baidoa expires, battles may ensue. If Ethiopia becomes involved in fighting, there is potential for a wider regional war and great tragedy. If the UN continues in its present role, blindly supporting its TFG as its

²³ Aweys Osman Yusuf, 'Car Bomb Explosion Causes Casualties in Baidoa', Shabelle Media Network, 30/11/2006, available at allafrica.com .

legitimacy erodes and its 'seat of government' is overrun, it cannot improve the situation. If the US continues treating the UIC as if it consists entirely of terrorists, it will lose all credibility (if it has not already) among Somalis who, whatever their misgivings, appreciate the stability provided by the UIC filling the power vacuum. The situation is more complicated than any simplistic reading will imply.

Aweys' secret strategy is a natural one, and at times unscrupulous. Somalis, together with the international community, should seek to understand Aweys and the UIC, in order to understand what they are dealing with, and establish a lasting peace and good governance in Somalia.