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Somalia: Negotiating the balance between 'African Solutions' and international responses

Posted on Thursday 30th August 2012

The School of Government and the **Institute of Conflict, Cooperation and Security** (/research/activity/conflict-cooperation-security/index.aspx) (ICCS) recently (11 July 2012) hosted an event on **Somalia: Negotiating the balance between 'African Solutions' and international responses.**

Introduction to the Somalia workshop
Dr Danielle Beswick and Professor Nicholas Wheeler

Download: **Somalia workshop introduction (7MB, 8 minutes)** (http://www.download.bham.ac.uk/idd/podcasts/2012-07-11-somalia/introduction.mp3)

Workshop presentations

Here are the four workshop presentations click on the titles to see more information and to listen to the podcast.

'AMISOM's Challenges: A Hybrid Solution to an International Problem?'
(/schools/government-society/departments/international-development/news/2012/08/somalia-paul-williams.aspx) Professor Paul Williams, George Washington University

'Reflections on "African Solutions" in Somalia and beyond'
(/schools/government-society/departments/international-development/news/2012/08/somalia-knox-chitiyo.aspx) Dr Knox Chitiyo, Chatham House

'Kenya's Somalia invasion: local indications, regional implications'
(/schools/government-society/departments/international-development/news/2012/08/somalia-david-anderson.aspx) Professor David Anderson, Oxford University

'Uganda in Somalia: Five years on, still the same story?'
(/schools/government-society/departments/international-development/news/2012/08/somalia-jonathan-fisher.aspx) Dr Jonathan Fisher, Research Fellow, IDD, University of Birmingham

Overall summary:

For over two decades Somalia has presented a range of development and security challenges for national, regional and international actors, becoming a source of security threats for its citizens, immediate neighbours, the region, and the international community. The key challenges, which have combined to push Somalia progressively up the regional and international agenda, include: low human development indicators; high profile incidents of piracy by Somali groups; terrorist attacks claimed by the Somali group Al-Shabab in Uganda 2010 and Kenya more recently, and the formal alliance of Al-Shabab with Al-Qaeda. The papers and perspectives presented at this workshop demonstrated the diversity of these challenges and the responses to them from national, regional and international organisations and actors. Despite this diversity a number of key themes and observations emerged which cut across the papers:

'African Solutions' as a phrase requires further critical interrogation, or perhaps even to be abandoned in favour of less 'captured' terminology. Presenters argued it has been captured on the one hand by outside actors seeking to pressure African leaders and institutions into taking decisive action in response to crises on the continent, and on the other by African regimes trying to deter outside influence and interference in what they consider to be domestic matters.

The speakers and audience also debated the **usefulness of trying to identify and promote truly 'African solutions' insofar as these solutions, including both military and diplomatic responses to crises, often rely on funding and technical support from external agents, notably the US, UN and EU.** They also questioned whether the problems which have been prioritised by outside actors can be characterised as particularly or solely 'African,' and the implications of this for the 'African Solutions to African Problems' mantra. If both the problems and solutions are, as argued by the speakers, not strictly or uniquely African then could existing concepts, tools and theoretical frameworks used for examining responses to crises elsewhere globally be used to analyse African cases?

Military solutions must be accompanied by political solutions. Whether in relation to the case of Somalia, or in Libya, Cote d'Ivoire or Zimbabwe, the speakers emphasised the importance of local and regional political dynamics in determining what military solutions might look like, their success or effectiveness, and the possibilities for sustainable peace or stability.

Responses to crises undertaken by African organisations are heavily influenced by national actors and regional dynamics. African institutions have grown in recognition in recent years, and the African Union in particular has acquired greater legitimacy in its claim to represent 'Africa's response' to crises. However, concentrating on the AU at the expense of national and regional actors would lead to only partial understanding, whether considering SADCs responses to the AU Mission in Somalia or the relative contributions of, and competition between, Kenya and Ethiopia in their responses to crises in Somalia. Similarly, the importance of President Museveni in understanding the degree and timing of Uganda's involvement in AMISOM, and the key role of the Kenyan military and Kenya's domestic political cleavages in explaining their surprise involvement, cannot be overlooked.

Hybrid solutions is perhaps a more accurate term than 'African' solutions, but this leaves the unanswered question of the power and agency of African actors and organisations in defining and enacting responses to crises on the continents. The key question raised in the workshop, and which requires further research, is **what makes a 'solution' or response (more) 'African'?** Amongst the possibilities raised at the workshop, is it about strong African leadership in the identification and prioritisation of security threats, or in the role of African leaders in choosing the tools and approaches used to tackle crises, or perhaps in the use of African financial and human resources , whether diplomatic, humanitarian or military, in responding to these challenges?

More attention should be paid to anticipating the likely consequences, including unintended consequences, of intervention in Somalia. For example, Kenya's unexpected intervention resulted in a shift in refugee flows and displacement of Somali civilians into Ethiopia. The backing of different Somali militias in Kismayo by Kenya and Ethiopia also has potential implications for relations between these two states beyond their involvement in Somalia. Within African states, involvement in military responses to crises in Somalia may also be shifting the balance of power between civilian and military elites, raising questions about the stability of often fragile democracies where political competition is frequently associated with violence and factionalisation along identity lines.

There is still little agreement on what constitutes 'Somalia'. African states involved in AMISOM, donor states supporting their work and the parties which make up the Somali Government have differing views on whether currently autonomous regions Puntland and Somaliland should be part of a united single Somali polity.

For more information on the event please contact organiser Dr Danielle Beswick at **d.beswick@bham.ac.uk** (mailto:d.beswick@bham.ac.uk) .

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