

## Understanding political Islam in Somalia

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### Preface

By the time this article is published, much will have transpired in recent months within Somalia. Between December 2006 and January 2007, the Ethiopian and United States governments invaded Somalia by land and air, respectively, ousting the ruling Union of Islamic Courts based in Mogadishu. Now, aided by neighboring African peacekeeping forces, Ethiopia and the US are attempting to reinstate Somalia's weak Transitional Federal Government, once based in Baidoa, within Mogadishu city proper. The Transitional Federal Government, in its first major declaration of power over Mogadishu, instituted martial law over the city, cracking down on the same public services that the Union of Islamic Courts were criticized for targeting. Ethiopia's forces, reported to be 15,000 strong, remain stationed throughout Somalia but are due to withdraw in the coming weeks, once peacekeeping forces commissioned by the African Union arrive. US air, ground and naval forces, however, are stationed indefinitely within the region in an attempt to track down three suspected al-Qaeda operatives assumed to be in collusion with the Union of Islamic Courts, though the Courts have denied any affiliation.

Not long after US military strikes on Somalia, on January 17, 2007, in public remarks at a Somalia conference hosted by the Center for Strategic and International Studies in Washington DC (Frazer 2007), US State Department's Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs Jendayi Frazer stated that the US will pursue three objectives in Somalia: (1) mobilize international support for the Transitional Federal

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Government and humanitarian assistance in Somalia, (2) deploy an African stabilization force within Somalia, and (3) encourage political dialogue between the Transitional Federal Government and key Somali stakeholders. It is this third objective that is most relevant to this article. The United States government, according to Ambassador Frazer, insists that the Transitional Federal Government must pursue a path of peace, reconciliation of stability and begin dialoguing with all stakeholders, including moderate Islamists. However, the US simultaneously insists that the Union of Islamic Courts must not be reconstituted as a political entity. As part of the dialogue and reconciliation process within Somalia, US Ambassador Frazer in her statement on January 17, 2007 pledged indefinite US participation in and support of the dialogue process initiated by the Transitional Federal Government.

In all these efforts, what the US fails to recognize, to which this article will attest, is that the politically-oriented Islamist movement within Somalia will not suddenly or dramatically diminish now that the Union of Islamic Courts lacks power over Mogadishu. Ambassador Frazer stated that the US will allow for dialogue with organic court systems throughout Somalia, but dismissed engagement with politically-inclined Islamic court systems. However, continued US isolation of a once-and-still pervasive political Islamic movement within Somalia will only serve to marginalize a substantial portion of the population and exclude from the dialogue process a majority, not minority. Moreover, US proclivity to label Somali religious leaders as Islamist extremists – whom clan members perceive as fellow clansmen – will only further alienate potential allies. Failure to include all Somali stakeholders in the dialogue process, even the Islamists considered extremists by the US will weaken and eventually erode any government's ability to rule with full legitimacy. Lastly, as this article will explain, Ethiopia- and US-affiliation with the Transitional Federal Government substantially undermines the already-weakened government's ability to gain confidence among the Somali people and hinders its ability to gain lasting control of Mogadishu.

It is critically important for the Transitional Federal Government, the Ethiopian and US governments, and concerned African neighbors and international allies providing peacekeeping troops and humanitarian assistance, to understand why political Islam emerged so forcefully in 2006 and why it resonated within the Somali populace. Unwillingness to comprehend the origins of this movement and efforts by the Transitional Federal Government, Ethiopia or the US to exclude political Islamic elements from dialogue, reconciliation, or governance, will further undermine attempts to create a sustainable Somali nation-state and increase the likelihood of a reemergence of political forces operating outside the jurisdiction of the internationally-recognized government.

This article provides a necessary primer for officials reconstituting Somalia's political leadership. Unless this reconstitution process is conducted with full awareness of and deference for what emerged and transpired politically in 2006, Somalia's new leadership will falter, and quickly. If, however, interveners like Ambassador Frazer recognize and account for the historical origins, importance of identity, theological implications, and overall popularity of political Islam within Somalia, then perhaps a sustainable future lies ahead for Somalia. It is on this note that the article begins.

## Introduction

This article explores the reasoning behind Somalia's recent surge towards political Islam and theocratic governance. In 2006, political Islam became the primary governing structure for most of Somalia, including the southern, eastern and northern regions. The only remaining area of Somalia explicitly secular in governance was the west, where the weak Transitional Federal Government remained situated in the town of Baidoa. Before expounding on political Islam in Somalia, however, a brief overview of the tenets within the Qur'an, the Sunnah and the Hadith that prescribe a foundation for an Islamic-oriented system of governance is necessary. Within the Qur'an, the Sunnah and the Hadith, many verses point to how Muslims should govern; nothing, however, is more explicit in governance recommendations than the Shari'ah. The Shari'ah, which was developed by the Ulama, Islam's clerical establishment, is a "comprehensive body of rules guiding the life of all Muslims" (Aslan 2006: 162) and prescribes a basic framework for understanding all Muslim action, including politics, economics, banking, business law, contract law, sexuality and social issues.

According to the Qur'an, Islamic states have only three options for incorporating Shari'ah into its systems: "It can accept the Shari'ah as a legitimate source of civil law, but choose to ignore it in all but the most obvious family, divorce, or inheritance cases, as Egypt and Pakistan do. It can fully apply the Shari'ah to the state with no attempt either to modernize it or adapt it to contemporary norms of law and society, as Saudi Arabia and Afghanistan under the Taliban have done. Or it can attempt to fuse the traditional values of the Shari'ah law with modern principles of democracy and human rights through a comprehensive reform methodology" (Aslan 2006: 170). In the case of Somalia, Shari'ah implementation appeared to be most reminiscent of the second and third options as the Islamic leaders themselves were torn between how traditionally or progressively Shari'ah should be applied. Factions existed, making the implementation of Shari'ah law a fractious process within Somalia.

Beyond the obvious implications of Shari'ah Law on the nation-state, as guided by the Qur'an, and considering the fact that Somalia is the only country in the African continent whose population is virtually all Muslim (Cassanelli 1982: 199), this article examines the additional factors that drove Islam's popularity as a mechanism for governance and inspired Somalis to latch onto this concept of political Islam.

## The Union of Islamic Courts

In 2006, the Union on Islamic Courts (UIC), formerly a loose federation of regional judiciary systems, having defeated the ruling CIA-backed warlords who controlled Mogadishu for nearly the last 15 years, became more politically powerful and relevant than the rival Transitional Federal Government (TFG) based in Baidoa, despite (or because of) the TFG's alliance with the United Nations and the United States. Since the early 1990s, Somalia lacked any semblance of a strong, populist government. After the Somali government collapsed in 1991, Shari'ah-oriented Islamic courts were founded and began to manage the judiciary system, act as local

police by preventing robberies and drug-dealing, and offer other services such as education and health care.

Generally, these regionally dispersed Islamic courts enjoyed wide public support and in 1999 the courts began to assert their authority. Seven years later, in the summer of 2006, the regional system of Islamic courts banded together to form a rival government to compete with the Transitional Federal Government in Baidoa. Up until Ethiopia's invasion of Somalia in late 2006, 7 months after the UIC assumed control of Mogadishu seizing power from the warlords, the UIC continued to benefit from wide public support among Somali citizens; in fact support was growing, but why? Why were the UIC and political Islamists gaining such credibility?

The reasoning behind political Islam's emergence in Somalia requires both a historical and contemporary analysis. Somalia's proclivity for political Islam can not be summarily understood as the latest victim of a growing Taliban regime, as some in the West would prefer. The UIC failed to exhibit Taliban-like tendencies, i.e. strict application of Islamic law, prohibition of employment and healthcare for women, enforcement of *burqa*-wearing for women, or violent and grotesque punishment for law-breakers. Rather, Somalia's geo-political history, ethic-and-clan composition and religious doctrines are critical components in understanding what lay the fertile foundation for political Islam to flourish. Consequently, this article explores how the historical influences of Arab-Islamic empirical efforts in the Horn of Africa in 7th century A.D.; previous attempts to organize clans under a Somali nation-state; and religious doctrines motivating both an internal and external jihad played a role in the materialization of political Islam in Somalia.

### **History: transgenerational transmission and entitlement ideology**

Within Somalia, there is widespread belief that Islam was delivered to the north as early as the time of the Prophet Muhammad. While there is a lack of evidence to substantiate this claim, the earliest documented Muslim migrants to Somalia occurred in early 600 A.D., within the period of Abu Bakar, the first Caliph of Islam (Hassan 1957: 127). The process of Arabization and Islamization subsequently gained momentum in the Horn in the late seventh century when Umayyad conquerors from Damascus, during the Islamic Caliphate of Abdulmalik Ibn Marwan, came to "teach the Qur'an, and to safeguard the security of the country and assure its loyalty to the Islamic state in Damascus" (Cerulli 1957: 238).

Up until the tenth century, Muslim migration to Somalia was constant, influenced heavily by eight major waves of Arab settlements in Somalia (Zaki 1960: 71). This influx of Islam typified the height of the Islamic empire, which stretched from the Atlantic Ocean in the west to Central Asia in the east. During the tenth century, the Islamic imperialist state was peaking in power and Muslims were slowly becoming the majority in conquered territories like Somalia. In Somalia, though, Muslims did not become the majority populace until the end of the Islamic golden age – an era which is generally understood as 700–1400 A.D.

By the 15th century, "Islam already had become the most common religion nearly everywhere" (Ehret 1995: 254) in the Horn. Immediately preceding the fall of the

Islamic empire and the demise of the Islamic golden age, Somalia witnessed the rule of the Audal Kingdom, known as “one of the greatest and most powerful Islamic states that existed in the Horn of Africa,” (Mansur 1995b: 121) which lasted from the 15th to the 16th centuries. These Islamization efforts retained lasting staying power in Somalia and ensured the existence of a Muslim majority until the present day.

Shortly after the golden age of Islam lost its luster, the Arab-Islamic Empire fell to European powers in the 17th and 18th centuries and the Islamic caliphate never regained formidable strength on par with previous historical precedent. Yet the memory of a caliphate remained strong within the minds of Muslims whose geographical proximity (to the Arab-Islamic Empire) allowed the transmission of an ideology throughout generations. This process of transgenerationally transmitting a near-mythological concept of a formidable and impenetrable Islamic state or empire, along with a concomitant entitlement ideology (i.e. a sense of entitlement borne out of the Islamic empire that assumes a return to power), offers clues into why Somalia undertook a political transformation – a metamorphosis that appeared merely as a manifestation of residual ancestral deposits. (Deposits, a theory of Vamik Volkan, will be explained in the next paragraph.)

Somalis deposited their mourning for and grief over the loss of the Islamic caliphate through oral story and myth. According to one author, “To understand Somali culture, one must consider the extreme importance of oral poetry,” (Mansur 1995a: 109). In the depositing process, according to Volkan, “the adult is more actively pushing specific self-images and internalized images of others into the developing self of the child” (Volkan 2006: 159). These images were captured in Somali oral myth and remained vibrant and pervasive from generation to generation. The following excerpts from Somalia’s rich tradition of oral storytelling, now documented and translated, showcase the ubiquity of a transmitted ideology and the belief that Somali identity was “maintained through constant struggle” (Ahmed 1996: 136). The first two texts illuminate the mourning process for a former Somalia, while the last text, written by Somali poet Mohamud S. Togane, exhibits anger towards the European empires (i.e. the “white man” who conquered the Islamic empire).

#### First Text

“Lord, my ruler,  
Amen, amen,  
May Somalia become one  
And Hamar and Hargaysa,  
Lord make them one  
And Lord return Hamar to its old glory.” (Ahmed 1996: 158)

#### Second Text

“It’s you Qayib  
That among the tribes  
Who hitherto in harmony together lived...” (Mansur 1995a: 111)

#### Third Text

“When I considered

In lucid drunken anger  
 The freaks of Africa  
 I hollered: UHURA, a whore!  
 A shout shook me shuddering the shack bar:  
 Come back! Come back, white man! Come back to Africa!  
 EVERYTHING FORGIVEN!" (Ahmed 1995: 144)

Transgenerational transmission is clearly evidenced in the Somali poetry above. Vamik Volkan describes the concept of transgenerational transmission by saying that a society may be unable to "perform certain necessary psychological tasks" and therefore "transfer such unfinished tasks to the next generation(s) so that their offspring might perform these unfinished tasks for them" (Volkan 2006: 108). Furthermore, transgenerationally transmitted tasks "may play a crucial role in shaping societal, political, and historical processes, in inspiring the eruption of massive violence, and in influencing large-group identity" (Volkan 2006: 109). What often results when the group's identity is threatened, according to Volkan, is an exaggerated entitlement ideology that "can be manipulated by political leaders to initiate new political programs and/or take new actions supported by this ideology" (Volkan 2006: 174). Consequently, how do Volkan's theories on transgenerational transmission and entitlement ideology help translate Somalia's history? What clues within Volkan's theories can help make sense of Somalia's transmitted identity?

The Islamic legacy, or remembrances of it, remained salient and strong within the identity of Somalis. Arab-Islamic identity, whether real or imagined, transmitted itself transgenerationally throughout Somalia's post-golden era. The history of the Islamic empire is remembered as the "glorious days" where Islam unified "tribes, previously divided, built states and empires and became dominant players in world history" (Mukhtar 1995: 15). Under the banner of Islam, the nomadic groups of Somalia, much like the Arabs, became "organized and found leadership in the Prophet Muhammad and his succeeding Caliphs" (Mukhtar 1995: 15).

Awe and respect for Islam's power to unite a previously divided nomadic culture characterized Muslim psyche up until the fall of the Islamic Empire. The fall of the empire dealt a significant and devastating blow to Muslim regional identity and the subsequent transgenerational transmission process, not surprisingly, conveyed a loss of pride and esteem and an implicit desire to restore Islam's regional identity.

The need for attachment (or perceived entitlement) to a regional Islamic identity was later exacerbated by European colonialism in Horn of Africa in the 18th and 19th centuries and enflamed by (1) US-backed forces in neighboring, rival Ethiopia during the Ethiopia–Somalia war in the latter half of the 20th century and by (2) US-backed warlords controlling Mogadishu in the early 21st century. Constant throughout these centuries of non-Islamic-imperialist rule was the legacy of an Islamic state that once distinguished the Horn and the adjacent Arab peninsula. A return to the "glorious days" only became viable or feasible after colonialist powers (European, then American) weakened their grip on the Horn.

It is at this point that the transgenerationally transmitted ideology of an Islamic legacy began to manifest concretely in the form of the Union of Islamic Courts in

modern day Somalia. Prior to this manifestation, the legacy of political Islam was kept alive via oral story and myth about a time when Somalia's nomadic tribes "hitherto in harmony together lived" (Mansur 1995a: 111). Then in 2006, with the defeat of Mogadishu's warlords and the persistent weakening of Baidoa's Transitional Federal Government, the potential for political Islam, as envisioned by the UIC, reawakened the hope for a return of the once-wounded Islamic caliphate. The legacy of the Islamic empire, kept alive in Somali myth, finally found its voice in the UIC. The UIC, whose real or imagined ancestry "experienced a massive trauma and severe losses at the hands of the enemies" (Volkan 2006: 154), was finally completing the tasks cited by Volkan by reversing "shame and humiliation" and turning "passivity into assertion" (Volkan 2006: 154).

### **Identity: political Islam as a defense mechanism for Somalia's Muslim majority**

Replete with tribes, clans, and nomads, Somalia has always found it difficult to unite under one particular political umbrella. All attempts to institute a clan government have failed miserably, with devastating consequences for all who tried it (Ahmed 1995: 151). Moreover, initiatives by the ruling colonial elite were to no avail, as Somalis lack a concept of traditional state power and hierarchy.

Ample speculation exists on why one political hierarchy or paradigm was insufficient in, or incapable of, rallying Somali's clans under the rubric of a political agenda. Despite the fact that Somalia has a common language, culture and religion, one salient obstacle continues to confuse ethnic and clan identity: the understanding of a Somalia "that is *in* Africa, but not *of* Africa," and that is "not enough Arab and not enough African" (Ahmed 1995: 141).

Additionally, it is widely believed throughout Somalia that clan lineage descended from a common ancestor *Samale* and that the relationship between these clans is more or less egalitarian. Clans are neither in favor of nor in opposition to any particular clan, and bloodlines do not articulate any kind of clan hierarchy or preference. This egalitarianism prevented the emergence of a centralized government and Somalia remained for centuries a "state of chieftain where central political authority meant nothing" (Hersi 1977: 177), despite more recent attempts by ruling dictators in the latter half of the twentieth century to control the populace.

Inter-clan and intra-clan alignment did occur however. The Bedouin adage, "I against my brothers; my brothers and I against our cousins; brothers, cousins and I against the world" (Mukhtar 1995: 14) was not lost on Somalia and became apparent when threats arose. In an effort to protect one's family or clan, Somalis would "form a wide network of supporters and dependents whose potential aid will serve as a hedge against a host of natural and sociological uncertainties" (Rosen 1984: 135).

It comes as little surprise then, since the historical precedent exists for this type of behavior, that Somalis formed a wide network of brothers and cousins to face external threats like neighboring Ethiopia and the omnipresent United States. Firstly, the Ethiopian-armed Transitional Federal Government in Baidoa, Ethiopian troops stationed within the borders of Somalia, US-assisted Ethiopian troops, and US-backed warlords, all contributed to a growing fear of a possible attack on the Somali people (which has now, sadly, come true). Secondly, the Christian orientation of

Ethiopia and the United States, external forces perceived by Somalis to be threats to Somali security and livelihood, exacerbated the fear that the attack was not only physical but ideological.

Thus, the formation of the wide network of brothers and cousins gained momentum not because *clans* were being called upon to unite, a feat shown by history to be impossible, but rather because all *Muslim* brothers and cousins were being summoned, a feat more feasible given Somalia's majority Muslim population. Islam, consequently, emerged as a politically expedient tool for defending Somalia because of its capacity to unite Somalis. The prevailing rubric, a religious not an ethnic one, was proving with marked success its capacity to organize Somalis.

“Territorial encroachment” (Bandura 1973: 19) was perceived by Somalis to be occurring on two different levels: geographically and ideologically. Geographically speaking, although the aggressive behavior exhibited by Ethiopia and the United States had not ignited a violent reprisal by the Union of Islamic Courts in an effort to, in Albert Bandura's words, “attack rivals who intrude on their domain” (Bandura 1973: 19), the territorial encroachment by the “west” (understood locally as Ethiopia and internationally as the United States) was a powerful catalyst in unifying formerly disparate and sovereign clans.

While geographical encroachment may be the catalyst, it was the ideological territorial encroachment that was the sinewy glue holding the clans together under a paradigm of protection: political Islam. As long as Ethiopia and the United States continued to exhibit aggressive behavior at the doorsteps of Somalia's borders, political Islam would remain impenetrable because, in many respects, it was entirely dependent on the real or perceived threat to the Somali people. Political Islam was the shield behind which disparate clans found refuge; it was a manifestation of the culture of “brothers, cousins and I” who form a wide network to “hedge against a host of natural and sociological uncertainties.”

According to Bandura, “Aggression is typically provoked by threats intruders pose to food supplies, to nesting sites, to offspring, to mates, and to dominance status...In these instances, events that forebode painful consequences provoke combat” (Bandura 1973: 161). Considering what Somalis witnessed on a local, regional and international level, the defensive positioning was logical from a Bandurian perspective. Confronting Somalis, historically and more recently in 2006, were the following: (1) corrupt warlords, supported by the CIA, who controlled local communities mainly through munitions and violence; (2) heavily armed Ethiopian troops, equipped by the US, stationed within Somali borders; and (3) threatened, planned or actual invasions into neighboring countries by heavily armed US forces. Prior to the warlords in Mogadishu, prior to the recent arming of Ethiopian troops, prior to the invasion of Iraq and the potential invasion of Iran or Syria by US forces, political Islam in Somalia had neither momentum nor munitions.

In 2006 it acquired both; furthermore, it was galvanized by the anti-Islamic rhetoric emanating from the US and the UK. Why? Two reasons are plausible: (1) Somalia's version of political Islam had learned, through observation of the violence exerted by the warlords, Ethiopia and the United States, that violence is effective in getting results and achieving a stated goal; and (2) the violence by the warlords, Ethiopia and the United States was understood by Somalis within the Qur'anic framework of *Asghar jihad* (Fuller 2003: 150) or the lesser jihad, an externally-

oriented jihad that legitimates the defense of the Muslim community against the non-Muslim community.

In the case of the former point, research shows that if “aggression, however learned, is positively reinforced, it will become a preferred mode of response” (Bandura 1973: 92). In Somalia, the Union of Islamic Courts have, for the past decade, watched warlords positively reinforced by the US (in terms of financial, logistical and tactical support) for their aggressive behavior, witnessed Ethiopia positively reinforced by the US (money, munitions) for their aggressive aspirations in the Horn, and observed the US positively reinforced (increased access to oil, wealth) by its aggressive actions in neighboring countries (Nigeria, Iraq). Extrapolating from this theory of positive reinforcement, it is not surprising then that political Islam would exhibit similar aggressive behavior – though the UIC’s aggressive behavior paled in comparison to the behavior exhibited by warlords, Ethiopia and the US – in an attempt to reap assumed rewards.

In the case of the latter point, *Asghar* jihad allowed Muslims to protect themselves from external threats, “to fight [the enemy] until there is no persecution” (Qur'an 2: 193), and to “protect Islam and Muslims from harm” (Peters 1996: 103–148). Not surprisingly, Somalis perceived Ethiopian and US aggressiveness, due to the explicit Christian orientation of both nations, as a threat to Somalia’s Muslim population specifically. Increased aggressiveness by Christian countries – as had been the case in 2006 with Ethiopian troops maneuvering within Somali borders and US State officials publicizing plans for a military intervention – resulted in reciprocated defensive posturing by the Union of Islamic Courts. And it was justified by *Asghar* jihad.

Since the perceived threat failed to diminish, political Islam remained fueled by the aggressive jihadist desire to protect Somalia’s Muslim majority. Moreover, as long as anti-Islamic sentiment was expressed and felt globally, political Islam (as an aggressive counter-reaction to real or perceived anti-Islamism) remained the unifying mechanism for previously disparate clans and sub-clans within Somalia.

It is worth noting, finally, that the Somali Diaspora in the United States believed that without external threats, such as Ethiopia and the United States specifically, the Union of Islamic Courts would eventually crumble. This thinking spurred Somalia’s Diaspora to lobby the US State Department and US Congress to cease all talk of military intervention and to encourage Ethiopia’s immediate troop withdrawal. By removing the perceived threat, the Somali Diaspora believed that the UIC would be less inclined to engage in what Konrad Lorenz understood to be a natural and “essential part of the life-preserving organization of instincts” (Lorenz 1963: 48), aggression. As long as the perceived threat was perpetuated and promulgated, however, Somalis would continue to engage in life-preserving, aggressive defensiveness. And for a majority of Somalis, political Islam was the most expedient mechanism for this defensive posturing.

### **Morality: Islam and personal jihad, purging corruption**

Prior to the national amalgamation effort by the Union of Islamic Courts to consolidate power, neither the local warlords in Mogadishu nor the Transitional

Federal Government leadership in Baidoa was considered legitimate by Somali citizens.

The local warlords, ruling quasi-officially, were considered by many if not most Somalis as unmistakably corrupt. It was widely known that the local warlords received monies from the United States – monies theoretically intended for community security and welfare – and that these funds consistently and solely remained in warlord coffers.

The Transitional Federal Government of Somalia, erected in 2000 by the UN, following nearly a decade of warlord rule and civil war, was painfully inept, erringly corrupt (warlords held government seats) and situated inconveniently distant from Mogadishu, in the regional city of Baidoa, out of regional warlord reach and unable to bring order to the ensuing chaos in Mogadishu. In Somali citizens' perspective, the government, much like the warlords, retained a track record of corrupt leadership, exemplified most acutely by General Mohamed Siad Barre's brutal and corrupt dictatorship which lasted from 1969–1991, whom many Somalis accuse of war crimes (Lewis 2000).

Consequently, and not surprisingly, political Islam, in the form of the Union of Islamic Courts, coalesced as an answer to corrupt local and inept federal governance and was able to deftly win “support from ordinary people weary of years of violence, corrupt warlords and the absence of a functioning government” (Landay 2006).

The summoning by the Union of Islamic Courts for less corrupt local and federal leadership did not fall on deaf ears; there was already a religious framework among the majority Muslim population for understanding this summons. It was *jihad*, specifically the greater of the two forms of *jihad*, known as *Akbar jihad*. This greater internally-oriented *jihad* “is the constant struggle within the self against evil impulses that must be overcome to lead a pious life” (Fuller 2003: 150). The Union of Islamic Courts seized upon the application and relevancy of this personal *jihad* and encouraged Somalis to be victorious, unlike the warlords or government leadership, in the “internal struggle within each individual against one’s own evil inclinations” (Johnston 2003: 48). It was well known and publicly recognized that previous Somali leaders had failed in waging the internal *jihad*, or war “against one’s own uncontrollable passions, lack of spiritual discipline, and tendencies toward illegitimate violence” (Appleby 2000: 12) and that new leadership was necessary to ensure that the principles of *Akbar jihad* were maintained.

The vacuum in moral governance and the absence of leaders who strove to be consistent with *Akbar jihad* ideals opened the space for the UIC to seize control. After the UIC took control, in 2006, of Mogadishu and the southern and northern parts of Somalia, principles of *Akbar jihad* remained at the fore of their political messaging and maneuvering. Some examples included the banning of movie houses and televisions which were perceived as threats to the internal struggle for pious thoughts. Similarly, the UIC strove to maintain legitimacy (as non-corrupt leaders) by attending to citizens' needs, something the warlords and the brutal dictators never managed. The airport opened after 11 years of closure, shipping ports and sea ports were secured to ensure safe transport of food and products, law and order returned to Mogadishu, education and healthcare remained a top priority, environmental regulations were instituted (e.g. ban on deforestation, charcoal burning, killing rare animals and plants, etc.) and crime reduced significantly.

The UIC appeared to remain committed to successfully waging an internal jihad against their own evil inclinations but also “against the evils of one’s society” (Johnston 2003: 48), (another Islamic interpretation of the requisites of internal jihad). The UIC’s endeavor to “create an ethical public order that embodied divine justice and mercy” (Cox 1994: 274), in line with the teachings of Islam vis-à-vis the greater *Akbar* jihad, could hardly be debated as legitimate or real. UIC’s commitment was clear.

In comparison to the corrupt and violent regimes represented by local warlords and federal systems of governance, the UIC made it apparent to the Somali people that it valued a “divinely approved blueprint for human conduct that was inherently and essentially religious” (Cox 1994: 275) and understood, as Shari’ah law dictates, that “questions of ethical content [are] treated in every possibly sphere of human activity, including governance” (Cox 1994: 275). This terminology (and the accompanying ideology of a personal jihad in accord with Islamic principles) resonated with the Muslim majority and transcended clan identity and clan demarcations. In many Somali’s view, the language of Islam and the UIC’s emphasis on pious leadership was a marked relief from the previous power-brokers’ irreligiousness.

Somalia’s socio-political shift towards a more pious religious system of governance, one that mirrored the individual’s jihadist struggle against evils, is not unlike what is happening in Egypt, Algeria, Morocco, Turkey, Malaysia and Indonesia. Co-religionists in these secular countries perceive the absence of state-provided services, like education, healthcare, environmental protection, transportation, as a “key source of despair and popular anger against the regime” (Fuller 2003: 28) and an indication that the secular regime, by hoarding public funds and failing to distribute them via public services, has failed to be victorious in their internal jihadist struggle against evils facing the self (in this case, greed). In each of these countries, Somalia included, political Islamic movements thus became known for the opposite, more pious behavior: “providing shelters, educational assistance, free or low-cost medical clinics, housing assistance to students from out of town, student advisory groups, facilitation of inexpensive mass marriage ceremonies to avoid prohibitively costly dowry demands, legal assistance...and women’s groups” (Fuller 2003: 28). Through the provision of public services, the message these Islamic movements are sending to their secular regimes is that they, unlike the secular leadership, are victorious in waging the internal jihad against evil and corruption because they are not succumbing to greed by hoarding public funds in private coffers.

In addition to broadcasting a highly moral message (by attending to public needs and starkly contrasting the secular regime’s immorality, corruption, violence or mere inability to provide for basic needs), political Islam’s efforts to ensure that basic human needs were sated elucidates what motivated the Somali citizen. By offering substantial public services to the community, political Islam was able to impress upon its followers that it remained victorious in the personal jihad against evils internally or externally. Simultaneously, through the provision of public services in an attempt to showcase aptitude in waging the internal jihad, the community found great favor in political Islamic movements because, on an individual level, their basic human needs like shelter, security, and sustenance were accounted for.

Basic human needs theory states that “individuals have inherent drives to fulfill a set of deep-seated, universal needs” (Jeong and Vayrynen 1999: 61). Failure by “repressive political structures, exploitative economic systems, lack of autonomy and other factors” to fulfill these basic human needs will “inevitably generate conflict because human beings are inherently driven to gratify their needs regardless of the consequences for the self or the society” (Jeong and Vayrynen 1999: 61). Therefore, as long as political Islam outshined or outranked the secular regimes’ capacity to meet the basic human needs of the ordinary individual, political Islam in Somalia would remain politically popular for individuals inherently driven to pursue the most expedient mechanism for needs-gratification.

In sum, both the internal jihad and basic human needs theory offer some rationale and explanation for political Islam’s success in Somalia. The former resonated with the Muslim majority within Somalia and provided a sharp contrast to the previous (corrupt) leaders’ inability to be victorious in the internal jihadist struggle against evil. The latter resonated with the Somali public because political Islam attended to the basic human needs of individuals (in an effort to appear strong vis-à-vis the internal jihad), something the previous warlords and current federal administration has never accomplished.

### Conclusion

Understanding Somalia’s surge towards political Islam undoubtedly goes beyond what this article could posit and encapsulate. Recognizing that the Qur'an, the Sunnah, the Hadith, and the attendant verses explicating Shari'ah law's relevance to the nation-state lay a fertile foundation for political Islam to emerge, this article explored what additional factors may be at play in stimulating theocratic governance in Somalia. This article examined how transgenerational transmission, aggression and the internal jihad summoned the rise of political Islam and intended to give the reader a deeper understanding into the reasoning behind Islam's popularity within a historically divided nation-state.

Vamik Volkan's theories on transgenerational transmission, ancestral depositing and entitlement ideology were particularly relevant in cataloguing the tragic losses accumulated (psychically) after the fall of the Islamic empire and the demise of the golden era of Islam and how these psychical wounds, and the concomitant wish for a return to the “glorious days,” were passed down through the generations via oral story and myth. Consequently, extrapolating from Volkan's theories, political Islam in the 21st century reinvigorated the ancestrally deposited wish to reverse this historical shame and humiliation and return Islam to its previous glory.

Albert Bandura's theories on aggression were valuable in analyzing the defensive posturing of Somalia due to the perceived threats both geographically and ideologically. Geographically speaking, Ethiopia and the United States were considered real threats, due in part to the presence of Ethiopian troops within Somalia, the legacy of US-backed warlords, and US talk of military intervention within Somalia. Ideologically speaking, Somalia, a Muslim majority country, perceived the threat of Ethiopia and the United States, both Christian majority countries, as part of a larger Christian war against Islam. Both geographical and

ideological threats, as a result, were translated within the Somali socio-political sphere as “territorial encroachment” and “intruder threats.” These external threats forced Somalia, a historically clan-based society, to do what it had never done before: unite. Since in both cases, geographically and ideologically, Somalis faced attack, political Islam provided a convenient and expedient umbrella under which all Somalis could come together.

Internal jihad and basic human needs theory, lastly, give perspective into why political Islam followed so closely on the heels of Somalia’s inept, corrupt and brutal warlords and government ministers. Corrupt leadership in Mogadishu and Baidoa instigated the call among the Muslim majority in Somalia for increased fervor and rigor in the war against internal evils and desires. This resonated resolutely among the Muslim populace in light of their discontent with previous and/or existing leadership, and so began the campaign for moral, upright leadership and victory over one’s own internal jihad. In this quest, the Union of Islamic Courts strove to exemplify their righteous and pious pursuit (and set themselves apart from the corrupt warlords and government ministers) by attending to the public’s basic human needs, something the corrupt warlords and government ministers rarely orchestrated. This campaign, of course, while religiously congruous with Muslim ideology, appealed concurrently to the individual drive to satisfy basic human needs, a fundamental force in all human beings. In satisfying Somalis basic human need for shelter, security, and sustenance, the Union of Islamic Courts found favor in two ways: as a provider in the pursuit of need-satisfaction and as a victor in the Islamic internal jihad.

Assuredly, there are more theoretical frameworks that could be soundly applied to Somalia to assist understanding and articulate the rise of the Union of Islamic Courts, and more generally, the rise of political Islam. This article merely intends to provide officials working within Somalia or on behalf of Somalia an initial lens for analyzing and understanding recent Islamic trends. Despite recent Ethiopian and US military attacks on Somalia’s Islamic leadership, political Islam is not leaving the country anytime soon. Consequently, it would behoove foreign officials engaged in Somalia to better understand the origins and appeal of political Islam in Somalia. Most pointedly, this paper encourages government officials to closely examine the roots of political Islam and to understand not fear its re-emergence in Somalia. Far from a manifestation of the Taliban, political Islam was actually meeting the needs of Somalis, physically and psychically, and until external institutions and authorities recognize this, Somalia will remain guarded, isolating itself further from a society that fails to understand her.

### Postscript

In closing, it is worth briefly mentioning how the Somali Diaspora within the United States has responded to recent Ethiopian and US military action. Undoubtedly, there are vastly varying opinions and perspectives. Somali Diaspora loosely or formally affiliated with the Transitional Federal Government are, not surprisingly, generally supportive of Ethiopian and US moves to reinstate the government within Mogadishu proper. This move will prove quite lucrative for the Transitional Federal

Government and those associated with it. As this article goes to print, US Senators Feingold and Coleman are proposing legislation in the Senate that will allocate substantial funding – in addition to the \$40 million in stabilization funds provided by the US State Department – for Somalia’s transitional government, a leadership known for its financial malfeasance. Somali Diaspora more intimately connected to civil society and religious organizations within Mogadishu, however, appear more skeptical of the government’s ability to regain control of Mogadishu and win the hearts and minds of Somalis. One Somali columnist Khadija O. Ali, a former member of the Somali Transitional National Parliament and a Minister of State from 2000 to 2002, wrote “Despite the [Union of Islamic Court’s] military defeat, the war is far from over,” citing that a majority of Somalis view the Transitional Federal Government as a “puppet government” that has been “externally imposed with little popular support and legitimacy.” (Ali 2007) While Ali’s analysis contradicts US Ambassador Frazer’s belief in the viability of the Transitional Federal Government, implied by her recent comment that “they offer a promising vehicle forward for Somalia” (Frazer 2007), Ali’s concerns appear common among Somali Diaspora.

US eagerness to expeditiously instate some semblance of Somali leadership, consequently, must be tempered with extreme caution lest the US error once again. US-backed warlords failed miserably in attending to Somalis’ needs and so will the Transitional Federal Government so long as Ethiopia and the US continue to ignore political Islam and the role it played and will continue to play in Somali polity. As this article suggests, the governing forces operating within and on behalf of Somalia, must recognize and account for political Islam’s historical origins, importance of identity, theological implications, and overall popularity. By doing so, governing forces begin to build the foundation for a legitimate and representative leadership within Mogadishu. Such an overture also builds the necessary trust within a society deeply skeptical of external interventions. This is precisely what is needed at this critical juncture. Somalia cannot afford another bungled attempt by the US.

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