Profiles
key Somali political actors 1991-2009

Somalia

General Mohamed Siad Barre As head of the army Siad Barre led the coup that overthrew the civilian government of Somalia in 1969. He held on to power for 21 years, presiding over a regime that introduced Scientific Socialism to Somalia in 1970 and took Somalia into a relationship with the Soviet Union, introduced a Somali orthography in 1972, took the country to war with Ethiopia to reclaim the Ogaden region in 1977, and became an ally of the US in 1979. His divisive and predatory military dictatorship laid the foundations for state collapse that followed his fall from power in January 1991. He died in Nigeria in 1995.

Ali Mahdi Mohamed A former hotelier and member of the ‘Manifesto Group’ that called for Siad Barre’s resignation in 1990. He was selected as interim president by one faction of the United Somali Congress (USC) in January 1991, after Barre had been overthrown. This position was confirmed by the Djibouti agreement of July 1991, but rejected by General Aideed. His battle with Aideed for control of Mogadishu (1991-92) destroyed the city killing an estimated 25,000 people. His forces controlled northern Mogadishu only. He continued to harbour presidential aspirations until the creation of the Transitional National Government (TNG) in 2000.

General Mohamed Farah Aideed Military commander of the USC forces that fought the Somali Army in the central regions between 1989-90 and entered Mogadishu in December 1990. He became the most powerful military leader in the early 1990s, claiming at one time to control most of southern Somalia. After his forces killed 24 UN peacekeepers in 2003 he became a fugitive from the UN. He survived until UNOSOM departed in 1995, when he established a “broad based” (salballar) government. He was killed in a battle with his former financier Osman ‘Atto’.

Hussein Mohamed Aideed Son of General Aideed. He inherited his father’s position as leader of the salballar government whose USC/SNA forces controlled much of south Mogadishu and large tracts of southern Somalia in the 1990s. He was a member of the Somali Reconciliation and Restoration Council (SRRC) and opposed the TNG. He was Minister of Internal Affairs in the Transitional Federal Government (TFG) cabinet of Ali Mohamed Gedi until 2007. He left Somalia and joined the opposition in Eritrea in 2007.

Abdulqasim Salad Hassan A former minister in Siad Barre’s government, Abdulqasim was elected President of the TNG at the Arta conference in 2000. He had close ties with some of the Islamic Courts and the business community in Mogadishu. His term in office ended in 2003 during the IGAD-sponsored reconciliation conference.

Abdullahi Yusuf Ahmed Founding member of the SSDF and former President of Puntland, Yusuf was selected President of the Somali TFG in 2004. Backed by Ethiopia, he ousted the Islamic Courts Union (ICU) in 2007. After two years of fighting, which displaced much of the population of Mogadishu, he resigned the presidency in December 2008 under international pressure for refusing to strike a deal with the opposition. He currently resides in Yemen.

Sheikh Sharif Sheikh Ahmed A traditional Sufi cleric, Sheikh Sharif rapidly rose to power as the moderate Islamist leader in the ICU, which came to control much of south-central Somalia in 2006, before being ousted by the Ethiopian-backed TFG forces. He subsequently shared leadership of the Alliance for the Re-liberation of Somalia (ARS) with Sharif Hassan Sheikh Adan, entering into negotiation with the TFG in 2008. In January 2009, Sharif was selected by parliament as the President of Somalia.

Hassan Hussein Nur ‘Adde’ Nur Adde served as the TFG prime minister in 2008. Prior to his appointment he was head of Somali Red Crescent. Nur Adde led a moderate faction of the TFG into UN-brokered negotiations with the opposition. He stood as a candidate for president after Abdullahi Yusuf resigned, but failed to get elected.

Sheikh Hassan Dahir Aweys An Islamist hardliner and formerly head of Al Itihad Al Islamiyya, Aweys was the most powerful figure in the ICU in 2006 as head of the Shura, with influence over Al Shabaab. He fled Somalia in 2007 along with other leaders of the ICU. He returned to Mogadishu on 28 April 2009 and now leads Hizbul Islam, an armed opposition movement aligned with Alshesacs against government of Sheikh Sharif.

Sheikh Mukhtar Robow Mansur (Abu Mansur) Abu Mansur is leader of Al Shabaab in Bay region and one of its key spokesmen. Educated in Islamic law at Khartoum University and thought to have fought with the Taliban in Afghanistan, he became a deputy commander of the ICU.

Omar Abdirashid Ali Sharmarke Appointed Prime Minister of the TFG in February 2009. His father was Somalia’s second civilian president, Abdirashid Ali Shermarke, who was assassinated in 1969 ahead of the military coup that brought Siad Barre to power.

Puntland

Dr Abdirahman Mohamed Farole Farole was elected the fourth President of the semi-autonomous Puntland Federal State of Somalia on 8 January 2009, by the parliament of Puntland. He previously held the posts of Finance and Planning Ministers in earlier Puntland governments.

General Ade Muse Hirsi President of the self-declared autonomous region of Puntland from 2005-2009. He returned to Somalia in 2001 to lead opposition forces against Abdullahi Yusuf, then leader of Puntland, until 2003 when they signed a peace deal.

Somaliland

Mohamed Haji Ibrahim Egal As first minister in the Advisory Council, he led Somaliland to independence from Britain on 26 June 1960. He was Prime Minister of Somalia from 1967 until the military coup of 1969 and was imprisoned by Siad Barre for 12 years. He became President of the newly independent Somaliland in 1993, and oversaw the establishment of government and the reconstruction of the country. He died in hospital in South Africa in 2002.

Dahir Riyale Kahin Riyale has served as President of the secessionist state of Somaliland since 2002, following the death of Mohamed Haji Ibrahim Egal. In 2003 he won a very close and controversial election to remain president. He is standing for a second time as presidential candidate for his party, the United Democratic People’s Party (UDUB), in elections scheduled for 2009.

Ahmed Mohamed Silanyo Silanyo is chairman of Kulmiye, the main opposition party in Somaliland, and narrowly lost the Somaliland presidential election in 2003. Throughout the 1980s, Silanyo was Chairman of the Somali National Movement (SNM), an armed liberation movement that opposed the Barre regime.
Somali armed groups and political parties

Over the past two decades in the wake of state collapse, there have been a bewildering number of political and armed Somali groups. The following is a brief profile of the most prominent ones as they have emerged.

**Somalia**

The **Somali Salvation Democratic Front (SSDF)** was the first group to take up arms against the Siyad Barre government. Formed by army officers following a failed coup attempt in 1979, its first leader was Colonel Abdullahi Yusuf Ahmed, a Majeerteen. The insurgency was short-lived as its leading members were arrested by the Ethiopian government in 1984.

The SSDF was revived again after the fall of Siyad Barre but divided into two factions, representing different sub-clans of the Majeerteen and different perspectives on the conflict. One was led by Mohamed Abshire Muse and the other by Abdullahi Yusuf. The SSDF was dissolved after the formation of Puntland State of Somalia in 1998.

The **Somali National Movement (SNM)** was formed shortly after the SSDF in 1982 in Britain by Isaaq émigrés. It ran a limited insurgency in the northwest of the country from bases in Ethiopia until 1991, when it defeated the remnants of the Somali Army. It transformed itself into the government of Somaliland after declaring independence in May 1991, and handed over to a civilian government at the Borama conference of 1993.

The SNM formed an alliance with the **United Somali Congress (USC)** and the **Somali Patriotic Movement (SPM)** in 1989 to defeat the Barre regime. The USC was formed in Rome, and received support from the Hawiye clan family. In Somalia the USC was led by General Mohamed Farah Aideed, whose forces entered Mogadishu in December 1990. The SPM was formed by Colonel Omar Jess, who defected from the government during the war against the SNM. It drew most of its support from the Ogaden clan and attacked the Barre government in the southern stretches of Somalia.

After the fall of Siyad Barre, the USC split into several factions, the main two comprising supporters of General Aideed and Ali Mahdi Mohamed. General Aideed transformed his faction into the **Somali National Alliance (SNA)**, proclaiming to be a ‘broad based’ government that controlled most of southern Somalia.**

**Al Ithiad Al Islamiya** (Islamic Union) came to prominence in 1992. Formed in the 1980s, AlAIAI was an unarmed neo-**Salafist** movement that propagated a vision of a pan-Somali caliphate in the Somali-inhabited lands of the Horn of Africa. Following the collapse of the state it became an armed movement. In contrast to other militia factions at that time AlAIAI attracted Somalis from across clans. It briefly controlled territory at different times in Kismayo, Bosasso and Lugh. Some members of AlAIAI are alleged to have had dealings with Al Qaeda and may have received training in Afghanistan. It was accused of instigating terrorist attacks on Ethiopia in 1995 and abetting and sheltering Al Qaeda operatives responsible for such acts in Kenya and Tanzania.

Due to military pressure from Ethiopia, which forced AlAIAI from Lugh in 1996 and 1997, and internal schisms, its formal structure was dissolved. Some of its leaders focussed on expanding its influence as a grassroots movement working within the clan system to build a network of support within different clans and business groups. It was placed on the US list of terrorist organizations in 2001. One of its leaders, Hassan Dahir Aweys, re-emerged as the most influential leader of the ICU in 2006.

The **Rahanweyn Resistance Army (RRA)** was formed in 1995 after General Aideed overthrew the Digili-Merifle Governing Council and occupied Bay and Bakool region. The Rahanweyn were poorly armed and unable to resist the marauding militia in the first years of the war, helping to make Baidoa the epicentre of the 1991-93 famine. With Ethiopian military support the RRA recaptured Bay and Bakool in 1999 and established an administration in Baidoa. This collapsed due to splits in the RRA.

The **Transitional National Government (TNG)** was formed in August 2000 as the outcome of a national reconciliation conference in Arta, hosted by the Djiboutian government. Abdulkasim Salad Hassan became the first president of the first Somali government to be accorded international recognition since 1991.

Inside Somalia, however, the TNG was unable to extend government authority beyond a few streets in Mogadishu. In the wake of 9/11 it failed to win the backing of Ethiopia or the confidence of donors who were concerned at the influence of Islamists, who made irredentist claims over Somali-inhabited territory in Ethiopia. In Somalia public support for the TNG waned due to its association with the powerful Mogadishu clans and business class, and in the face of accusations of corruption.

Ethiopian concerns about the TNG became clear in Addis Ababa’s active support for the creation of the **Somalia Reconciliation and Restoration Council (SRRC)**, a military alliance of powerful warlords and other political figures, including Abdullahi Yusuf. With their headquarters in Baidoa and some of the warlords maintaining a presence in Mogadishu, the TNG’s freedom to expand its authority was severely constrained.

In 2004 the TNG was succeeded by the **Transitional Federal Government** (TFG) formed after two years of protracted negotiations in Kenya, held under the auspices of IGAD. The TFG won immediate international recognition and promises of substantial donor support. But when TFG president Abdullahi Yusuf failed to secure the 20,000 peacekeepers that he requested from the African Union, he initially located his government in Jowhar due to security concerns with Mogadishu, while the Transitional Federal Parliament based in Baidoa.

In 2006 the authority of the TFG was challenged by the rise of the **Islamic Courts Union** (ICU), which routed a coalition of warlords in Mogadishu financed by the US, and established control over Mogadishu and large parts of south centreal Somalia. The ICU comprised a grouping of Islamic courts and brought together moderate and militant Islamists, including **Harakat Al Shabaab** (Youth Movement). The ICU gained popular support for restoring security to the streets of Mogadishu for the first time in 19 years, only to be ousted by Ethiopian-backed forces of the TFG in December 2006.

Al Shabaab has its origins as a **Shari’a Court militia** in the late 1990s. Created by Hassan Dahir Aweys it differed from other clan-based court militias, being multi-clan and composed of fighters committed to a radical Islamist agenda. It was later commanded by Ahmed Hashi Farah ‘Ayro’, an acolyte of Hassan Dahir Aweys and from the same Hawiye sub-clan. He engaged in a series of assassinations of opponents of the Islamists, civic leaders and individuals suspected of links to foreign intelligence agencies.

Al Shabaab played an important role in the military victory of the ICU in Mogadishu and won support during the insurgency against Ethiopia. But its radical agenda meant it developed as an autonomous force outside the control of both clans and more moderate Islamist voices. It was listed as a terrorist organization by the US in 2008, and ‘Ayro’ was killed in a US airstrike shortly after in May 2008.

The ICU leadership escaped the country and established themselves in Eritrea where the **Alliance for the Re-Liberation of Somalia (ARS)** was created, demanding the complete withdrawal of Ethiopian forces. When
the TFG tried to impose a ‘victor’s peace’ and disarm Mogadishu, it met resistance from clan militia and Al Shabaab forces that had regrouped.

Pressure for dialogue led to the appointment of a new Prime Minister in 2008, Hassan Hussein Nuur, who opened talks with the opposition, mediated by the UN. When agreement was reached in Djibouti in late 2008 for the withdrawal of Ethiopian forces, Abdullahi Yusuf resigned. Sheikh Sharif Sheikh Ahmed, the former leader of the ICU, was elected in his place in January 2009.

In 2009 Al Shabaab continued to attack the new government of Sheikh Sharif. In April 2009 Hassan Dahir Aywey returned to Somalia from Asmara and established Hizbul Islamiya (the Islamic Party). Their combined forces acted to nearly topple the TFG in May 2009, which was defended by troops serving with the AU Mission in Somalia (AMISOM).

The militant Islamist forces are also opposed by Ahhu Sunna Wal Jama’a. This movement, which is supported by the main Somali sufi orders, was established in 1991 and was used by General Aideed to counter the growing influence of Islamists. It remained a fairly dormant group until late 2008 when it began to receive military support from Ethiopia.

**Puntland**

Since the SSDF was dissolved in 1998 Puntland has been governed under a clan power-sharing political arrangement established at the 1998 Garowe Community Constitutional Conference. In accordance with the governing charter, its government comprises an executive president and single chamber parliament. Since 1998 Puntland has had four presidents and is in the process of revising its constitution.

**Somaliland**

The SNM as a political movement was largely disbanded in 1993 when the first Somaliland government of Abdullah Rahmad Ali Ahmed Tuur was replaced by the government of Mohamed Haji Ibrahim Egal. Elements of the SNM political legacy continue to influence Somaliland politics but subsequent efforts to revive the SNM as a political force have come to nothing.

From 1993 to 2002 Somaliland had no active political party. Under a clan power-sharing political arrangement (the *beel* system) worked out in the 1993 Borama conference, Somaliland’s government comprises a US-style executive presidency with a British-style bicameral parliament.

The introduction of a constitution in 2001, approved by a plebiscite, allowed for the formation of political organizations. Six organizations were registered to participate in district and municipal elections in December 2002. Under the constitution the three parties that received the most votes became political parties and allowed to contest subsequent presidential and parliamentary elections.

**Kulmiye** (the Unity Party) was founded by Ahmed Mohamed Mohamoud ‘Silanyo’ in 2002. A former minister in Barre’s government he became the longest-serving chair of the SNM in 1984, and later served in President Egal’s administration. Kulmiye initially drew much of its support from Sanaaga and Togdheer regions in eastern Somaliland, the home of Silanyo’s Habar Ja’lo clan, but was subsequently able to attract support from diverse constituencies in the district and presidential elections. It came second in the 2003 presidential elections by a handful of votes and holds the second largest number of seats in parliament.

**UCID** (Justice and Welfare Party) was founded by its Chairperson Faisal Ali Farah ‘Waraahe’. UCID has campaigned on a set of centre-left welfarist policies. In the district council elections UCID drew most of its support from the ‘Idagalle clan of Faisal, but has developed a broader support base for subsequent elections.

**UDUB** (United Democratic People’s Party) was founded in July 2001 by the late President Mohamed Ibrahim Egal. Following his death, Vice-President Dahir Riyale Kahin became the party’s Chair and presidential candidate. UDUB draws support from across Somaliland and has received the majority vote in each election. Its electoral successes have been based on its ruling-party status, the public desire for stability and continuity, and the resources at its disposal.

In 2007 a move was made by several prominent politicians to challenge the three-party political system by forming a political association called *Qaran* to contest the next round of district elections. The party leaders Dr Mohamed Abdi Gabose, Mohamed Hashi Elmi and Jamal Abydid were arrested and imprisoned for five months. The issue of whether to open up the political system to more parties in Somaliland is contentious and has little support from the existing parties.

**Multilateral actors**

Somalia is a member of the United Nations (UN), the African Union (AU), the League of Arab States, the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC) and the Inter-Governmental Authority on Development (IGAD).

The collapse of statehood in Somalia and the tenuous character of the governments that have been formed since 2000 means, however, that the country has not been an effective member of these organizations. On the contrary, aspiring national governments in Somalia have sought to use their membership to shore up their international legitimacy.

**Inter-Governmental Authority on Development** The governments of Somalia, Djibouti, Sudan, Ethiopia, Kenya and Uganda established the Inter-Governmental Authority on Drought and Development (IGADD) in 1986 with a narrow mandate to improve regional cooperation on combating drought and desertification. Eritrea joined in 2003.

In 1996 the organization was re-launched under its current name, with conflict prevention, management and resolution as one of its three pillars. IGAD endorsed member state initiatives on Somalia such as the Ethiopian-Sodere peace process (1997) and Djibouti’s Arta process (2000). Its leadership role in the Somali National Reconciliation Conference held in Kenya from 2002 to 2004 marked a step change in IGAD’s institutional role in the Somali crisis, although Kenya led the process of facilitation and mediation.

IGAD remains a staunch supporter of the TFG in Somalia and played a key role in the developing the concept of the AU Mission in Somalia (AMISOM). Eritrea has suspended its membership of IGAD because of the organization’s support for Ethiopian military action in Somalia.

**League of Arab States** The Arab League backed the Arta process of 2000 and the TNG that emerged from it. The organization tried unsuccessfully to mediate between the ICU and the TFG in the months before the Ethiopian intervention in support of the TFG in December 2006.

**African Union** The AU comprises 53 member states – all African countries except Morocco. Somalia was a founder member of the Organization of African Unity (OAU) in 1963. The OAU was transformed into the AU in 2002 and the TNG signed the new AU Charter. In 1992 the OAU assigned Ethiopia as the lead nation to deal with Somalia. After 1996 IGAD gradually took a more prominent role. Today the AU looks to IGAD for the political lead on Somali issues. The AU’s Peace and Security Council, which leads the organization’s security and peacekeeping activities, has consistently endorsed and supported IGAD positions on Somalia.
After Ethiopian forces had installed the TFG in Mogadishu, the AU agreed in January 2007 to mount a peace support operation – the AU Mission in Somalia (AMISOM) – to protect the TFG. AMISOM was authorized by UNSCR 1744 (2007) with a planned troop strength of 8,000. Ugandan troops established AMISOM in 2007 and were later joined Burundian forces.

Because of the difficult operating environment and the lack of troop contributors, AMISOM has remained significantly under strength. As of 10 September 2009, AMISOM stood at 5,217 troops (65 per cent of mandated strength). In 2007-08 Ethiopian troops contributed to the purpose of AMISOM, while remaining outside its authority. Since 2009 AMISOM has provided the only external protection available to the TFG. Financial and logistical support is provided by the UN.

**United Nations** Somalia was one of the first instances of post-Cold War ‘humanitarian intervention’ sanctioned by the UN Security Council in the early 1990s. In January 1992 the Council imposed a blanket arms embargo on Somalia (UNSCR 733). In April that year UNSCR 775 established the first UN Mission in Somalia (UNOSOM I), which was mandated to monitor a ceasefire in Mogadishu, protect UN personnel and logistics, and subsequently to support and protect humanitarian assistance.

In December 1992 UNSCR 794 authorized deployment of a US-led Unified Task Force (UNITAF) under Chapter VII of the UN Charter, to ‘use all necessary means’ to secure major population centers and deliver humanitarian supplies. Then in March 1993 UNITAF was replaced by UNOSOM II (UNSCR 814), which was further tasked with disarmament and reconciliation responsibilities. UNOSOM II was withdrawn in March 1995 (UNSCR 954).

In April 1995 the UN Political Office for Somalia (UNPOS) was established to help advance reconciliation. For security reasons UNPOS continues to operate from Nairobi, Kenya. UNPOS is led by the Special Representative of the Secretary-General (SRSG) for Somalia. In June 2006 selected UN member states and other interested parties established an **International Contact Group** (ICG) at UN HQ in New York to support international engagement with Somalia.

In January 2009 the Security Council agreed to set up a trust fund to provide financial assistance and a UN logistical support package to AMISOM ‘until a UN peacekeeping mission is deployed’ (UNSCR 1863).