

Umalkhayr Abdi

Professor Katherine Milco

Religious Studies 350

23 May 2016

Somalia a small country of roughly 10.5 million people is located in the horn of Africa. The overthrow of the dictator Siad Barre in 1991 was thought to be a time where Somalia can once again gain peace and prosperity. Instead it marked a turning point in Somali politics, economy and society, since then Somalia has suffered from civil war, widespread famine, broken infrastructure, rampant human and civil rights abuses, poverty, human trafficking and corruption at every level of society from warlords, to the merchants on the street selling \$70 AK 47's in Mogadishu. Through all that chaos and instability came the rise of many militant groups throughout Somalia and the most well known is Al Shabaab. While the public has the tendency to view Muslim women as weak and subservient in fact, Muslim women are the forefront of the battle against religious terrorism in Somalia. The objective of this essay is to shed light on the great women of Somalia who are making positive strides to peace in this region despite the threat to extremism. These women have proved that if Somalia is ever going to have long lasting peace then women need to be at the forefront of the peace building process. In this essay we will examine some women led organizations that are working in Somalia and the impact they are making in their communities and how they are combating the extremism within groups like Al-Shabaab.

Before we discuss the important role of Somali women in the fight against terrorism in Somalia, let us establish some permanent facts about recent Somali history. Unlike most African populations, the overwhelming majority of the Somalis are part of a single, homogeneous ethnic group. All Somalis are Muslim and share the same language and culture. Nevertheless, one of the most terrible civil wars in Africa has been waged in this country for more than two decades. Somalia has been trying to rebuild in the last 10 years but there have been the emergence of terrorist organizations such as Al-Shabaab others who have made the rebuilding process more difficult than ever. Al Shabaab is an Al Qaeda affiliated terrorist organization that has risen rapidly in the midst of Somalia's 20-year anarchy rule. Since the group's inception they have had two major transformations. Originally the group was a small militant arm of a relatively moderate Islamic organization that rose to prominence in 2006. (Rob Wise, 2011) Their first major transformation was in 2006 when Ethiopia invaded Somalia in December 2006 and they became a guerilla movement. (Rob Wise, 2011) Two years later they went through another transformation from a nationalist movement focused on driving out Ethiopia through conventional military means to a hybrid movement that has increasingly embraced transnational terrorism and attempted to portray itself as part of the Al Qaeda-led global war against the west. (Rob Wise, 2011) Now before we get into this group let's discuss this word terrorism and what it conjures up in the west. Terrorism especially anti western "Islamic Terrorism", after September 11 has become the major focus of western political discourse. (Cronin 2003) The actions taken in retaliation by states, or to curb such incidents of terrorism have shaped

political dialogue in the 21st century. Al-Shabaab was first a branch of the Islamic Court Union in Somalia. The ICU was an Islamic court system that was formed to combat the anarchy and civil unrest following the overthrow of the Somali government. The United States under the leadership of George W Bush decided that the ICU would be a haven for terrorism and as a result with their backing Ethiopia invaded Somalia in 2006. (Rob Wise, 2011) After that invasion the ICU split and while the moderates went into exile, the extreme branch of the court became more militant. Today Al-Shabaab is considered by the United States and the world as a terrorist organization and has been operating in Somalia since 2006. They are the largest militant group in Somalia right now trying to oust the Somali Government. Al-Shabaab is a terrorist organization that is not only a threat to Somalia and its neighboring countries but also a threat to the stability of the entire region.

Part of what makes Al-Shabaab so disturbing to so many people is its use of religion as a vehicle to drive their violent ideology. The place of women in Islamic society is determined by the Koran, the tradition of the Prophet Mohammad and the interpretations of Islamic law and traditions influenced by social customs and practices. Through the revelation of the Koran and the Sunnah of the Prophet Mohammad (PBUH), Islam liberated women from unacceptable conditions that prevailed in the tribal society of pre-Islamic Arabia. (UNICEF 2002: 8) So as we see from the statement the interpretations of Islam can come only from those sources and not from any individual group like Al-Shabaab or any other group or people. Al-Shabaab's use of violent tactics and imposition of an intolerant interpretation of

Islamic law (*shari'a*) have spread fear in Somalia, particularly in the south central region. Clothing regulations are required of both men and women in Al-Shabaab controlled territories, and music, television (except its own and other approved Islamic channels), musical ringtones, and public sports have been forbidden. It uses educational campaigns to lure young Somalis into its ongoing militant conflict, which is framed as a religious war (*jihād*), and has indoctrinated children into a culture of violence through psychological manipulation and direct intimidation. (Harvard Literacy Project: Divinity School) Emilio Durkheim wrote in his book *Elementary Form* about how religion unites people in the form of religious services and without a society religion in essence wouldn't exist. (Durkheim, 1912) If people were to be left alone to their own devices for very long periods of time then they would be lost. He recognized the social origin of religion; Durkheim argued that religion acted as a source of solidarity and identification for the individuals within the society, especially as part of mechanical solidarity systems, and to a lesser, but still important extent in the context of organic solidarity. (Durkheim Studies, 2005) Although Al-Shabaab is viewed as an "Islamic group", according to Durkheim's *Elementary form* this explanation doesn't really describe this group. Their inception was due to political unrest in Somalia and not from religious circumstances. They claim to want to create an Islamic state in Somalia but their ideals are not ones that bring the society together. On the contrary, most Somalis do not agree with their ideology and fear them.

Now I would argue that Al-Shabaab not only uses intolerant interpretation of Islam but that they go against the teachings of Islam all together. In the Holy Quran

Allah says; "Let there be no compulsion in religion, truth has been made clear from error. Whoever rejects false worship and believes in God has grasped the most trustworthy handhold that never breaks. And God hears and knows all things". (Quran 2:256) So in this verse it clearly states that God dislikes forceful conversations as well as any type of force within Islamic teachings and that if Muslims reject falsehood then we will have a bond with God that will never break. The Arabic word Jihad has been often interpreted as "holy war" but from a purely linguistic sense Jihad means struggling or striving. (Islamic Supreme Council of America, 2016) But we are very familiar with the notion Jihad means holy war and most of these extremist organizations have hijacked this word to further their causes. In most cases with these political and "religious" groups use this interpretation to justify various forms of violence against Muslims as well as Non Muslims. Scholars in Islam across the globe reject this interpretation and say this goes against the established Islamic order. (Islamic Supreme Council of America, 2016) Jihad never had any connection to violence in its inception and was used in the Quran as well as in practice about the inner struggles all human have to practice and remain faithful to God and worship Him in pure way. Jihad also deals with the outer struggles to try to live a Muslim lifestyle while living in the west and trying to keep your Islamic identity while trying not to conform to western ideals. So this is the greater Jihad in Islam and the minor jihad is military Jihad. This type is to be a last resort if you are being attacked and you have exhausted diplomatic, legal and economic pressures. What Jihad isn't a declaration of war against other religions. The Quran as well as the practices of the Prophet Muhammad emphasize the

importance of protecting Jews and Christians. In 628 AD a delegation from St. Catherine's Monastery came to the Prophet Muhammad asking for his protection. He responded by giving them charter rights. (Muqtedar Khan, 2009) The charter was a covenant made for the protection of the Christians living under Islamic rule. It stated that there should be no compulsion upon them and neither are their judges to be removed from their jobs nor their monks removed from the monasteries. No one is to destroy a house of their religion, to damage it, or to carry anything from their house to a Muslim's houses. And if anyone takes from them then they are breaking covenant with God and displeasing to the Prophet Muhammad. (Muqtedar Khan, 2009) Also in this charter was the refusal of forcing Christians to fight and Muslims should actually fight for them to protect them. Their places of worship should be respected and Muslims should continue this covenant until the last day. (Muqtedar Khan, 2009) So this covenant although written in 628 AD it states that Muslims are to adhere to this until the end of the world and that if they break this agreement then they are in essence going against Islam.

So when we see images on the news from Al- Shabaab bombing places of worship and killing innocence civilians across Somalia as well as neighboring African nations, then we know they are going against the teachings of the Prophet. The holy Quran and the teachings of the Prophet have endless verses that condemn this group and other "Islamic extremist groups" but most of these organizations have political aspirations rather than religious aims. Yet in the west we like to believe this idea that these groups are radicalized due to teachings from their Holy Book. Yet this doesn't apply to other faiths such as blaming the bible for groups like

IRA and others. We buy into the radicalization hypothesis because we want evil to be mysterious and other; something that has nothing to do with us. We want to tell ourselves that we are secular and enlightened and so have no part in all of this bloodshed. It's what people commonly do with evil we conceptualize it as being as far away from us as possible. But if Islamic terrorism is really all about politics, then we have to admit that the long history of disastrous western interventions in the Middle East and Somalia is a part of the cause of the horror that continues to unfold. (Guardian, 2015)

Muslim women in general have always been seen in the media outlets as voiceless and being submissive to the men of their communities. And Somali women are not an exception to that and have been portrayed in the news and media mostly as victims of the conflict. Yet insufficient recognition has been given to their role and contribution as transformational agents. My point is not to downplay that too many times women are the victims of conflicts in Somalia as well as other nations where there is civil unrest, but it is to show that Somali women are the backbone of their societies. Somali women have always been at the center of their household and have played key roles inside and outside of the home and they continue to play that role until today. They have been very instrumental in combating some of these negative stereotypes using their power and influence in their societies. The famous Anthropologist Margaret Mead once said "never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has." -

Currently there are 20 plus women led organizations that are operating in Mogadishu to promote peace and reconciliation between the two warring factions that control the south and northern part of Mogadishu divided only by a green line. Even before the rise of terrorism, women played important leadership roles in Somalia as mediators of disputes between clans. Clan and sub clan structures are central to Somali Identity. From a young age, children are traditionally taught to memorize and recite their clan-based kinship genealogy sometimes naming 20 or 30 of their patrilineal ancestors. Although most Somalis self identify by clan first, they still blame the clan system for the violence and chaos in that region. Somali system of kinship (clan system) and customary laws has been responsible for indiscriminate killing, ethnic cleansing and subjugation of ethnic and occupational minorities. Despite all that women have always played a crucial role as the link between clan, lineage and kin but their role has always been marginalized to private domain and domestic confines. Under president Siyad Barre, in the 1970's and 1980's more women were involved in the political spheres, with Barre's wife heading the Somali Women's Democratic Organization. Among the issues the organization dealt with were equal pay for equal work, equal rights between men and women in marriage when it came to inheritance and divorce issues. However, all this was brought to a halt when the war broke out and clan antagonism increased. The clan structures made it difficult for women to participate in the political life because women were no longer allowed to participate in political spheres.

Yet these organizations are helping to change that in Somalia and bring Somali women to the forefront of peace building and reconciliation. Their goals and aims are to work for the social, political and the economic empowerment of Somali women through peace promotion, women's rights, capacity building and information sharing and networking.

These organizations share a commonality in that they focus on the youth of the country because they are the ones who more likely to join warlords or terrorist organizations. Also these groups are focusing on the women as well since they are exposed to violence and discrimination. I will shed light on a few of these 20 women led organization that are worthy to mention. One of these organizations is the Somali youth Development Network that was established on October 17th 2002 and exists to promote peace and human rights in Somalia through youth development by education and awareness creation. (Soyda.net) Somali Youth Development Network was created out of eleven non-governmental youth organizations that organized informal forums to discuss the most pressing concerns prevalent at the present time in Somalia. (Soyda.net) The successive meetings and conferences that took place illuminated the problems of existing clans, attitudes in an urban setting and with the current insecurity, the lack of central government and peace building barriers. (Soyda.net) The Somali Youth Development Network is non-profit, charitable organization dedicated to meeting the humanitarian needs of the youth in Somalia. Their mission is ensure the nation's youth acquire skills and mindsets that will help them maintain their dignity and fortitude by providing a social atmosphere

conducive to a positive national psyche. The Somali Youth Development Network has implemented many programs all across Somalia and some of those programs include a Life skill training program, community safety and security and training young future religious leaders. (Soyda.net) There are far too many programs that this organization spearheads in the region to list but one of the most significant programs that have been implemented throughout the years is Youth 4 Change initiative. This initiative enables 65 youths who were at risk for militia activities to lead a road of opportunities and to enable them to look for an alternative life. This initiative has been so successful in the different regions of Somalia that it has caught the attention of Somali high cabinet government officials. (Soyda.net)The state Minister as well as many of the other dignitaries stressed how important work like this is to enhance trust and provide a platform to reconcile the communities. It's very important to stress the work this organization and others a doing is not only essential but also vital to have any sort of lasting peace in this region.

Another organization that is operating in Mogadishu is the Coalition for Grassroots Women's Organization. COGWO was established in1996 with the intention of protecting the human rights of Somali women, which had been severely undermined in the wake of the collapse of the Somali Government as well as the civil war that followed. (Cogwosomali.org) It's an umbrella organization that comprises of 30 local women's NGOs, drawn from different clans in Somalia. (Cogwosomali.org) COGWO works for the social, political and economic empowerment of women through peace promotion, women's rights, capacity building and information sharing and network. One of the visions of this organization is to see women feel

empowered in a socio-economic and political context in an environment free from violence. (Cogwosomali.org) One of the services COGWO provides for the community is a legal aid provision. COGWO has been involved in human rights and humanitarian based interventions for both women and children. The project seeks to provide free of charge legal aid to deprived and economically poor families and vulnerable groups in the community, raise awareness among key criminal justice stakeholders and civil society on legal aid and access to justice. (Cogwosomali.org) The project aims settling down the foundation for the development and maintenance of a just and fair criminal justice system. (Cogwosomali.org) This group put together 5-day workshops where they invited public officials in the region to promote the development of human rights standard applicable to law enforcement and police management. They wanted to bring to light international human rights standards when it came to policing and other public servants so that they could better serve their communities. COGWO is heavily involved in the promotion of healthcare issues facing women and children in Somalia. Every year they help and pay for many women to be treated for many rare conditions that wouldn't otherwise wouldn't have access to doctors or healthcare of any kind. (Cogwosomali.org) For instance they have helped 15 women get the emergency treatment they needed to treat Fistula cases. Also they help many parents who their children are born with child abnormalities, which wouldn't ever have access to receiving medical treatment in Somalia.

The next organization that is impacting and contributing to the rehabilitation of Somalia is the Somali Women Development Center. The Somali Women Development Center is a non-profit and non-governmental making that established in the 2000's. (Swdcsom.org) SWDC is working to improve the situation for women in Somalia through support. SWDC vision is that if women are given enough support that they can be empowered by making positive changes in their lives.

(swdcsom.org) SWDC tries to minimize the number of women who subjected to violence by empowering through access to knowledge and greater economic independence. Some of the programs this group spearheads are very important to the safety of the community because they focus on working not only with the community but also safety officials. (swdcsom.org) From December 2011 through May 2012 SWDC implemented a program where they recruited 500 women from five different districts in Somalia. The aim of the program was strengthening neighborhood peace and security through community policing in five districts. The Women Civilian Protection Unit perform patrolling activities and incident reporting to the police departments in order to restore basic rule of law at district level.

(swdcsom.org) Currently SWDC started the second phase of this program because the first phase was very successful. This organization has partnered with many of the international NGOs including UNHCR, which is the UN Refugee Committee as well as UNCEF to name a few of the many partnerships they have developed. These partnerships have enabled them to engage in human rights advocacy with a focus on vulnerable groups. (Swdcsom.org) SWDC is able to advocate for the most vulnerable groups through lobbying and advocacy as well as peace building and community

security through providing free legal aid service in collaboration with the relevant stakeholders in order to reduce all kinds of violence in Somalia. (swdcsom.org) In the rural areas Al-Shabaab controls today they enforce strict Islamic dress code, which includes the Niqab. Now these women-led organizations are advocating for women in these regions and the entire Somalia by educating people about what Islam says about modesty for women and men. (Swdcsom.org) Before the emergence of Al-Shabaab women traditionally wore a Somali dress called Guntiino, which are a loose, light fitting dress and a headscarf. Since Al-Shabaab has been in control of some parts of Somalia they have enforced strict dress codes and punishment for the women who don't obey the new laws. SWDC as well as other organizations have highlighted the importance of preserving Somali culture, which includes Somali traditional clothing. (Swdcsom.org) The Quran addresses the cultural differences and that He created us in different colors and ethnicity so that we could get to know one another and appreciate each other's cultures. God says in the Quran; "Among His signs is the creation of the heavens and the earth and the variations in your languages and colors. Certainly, in that are signs for the worlds. (Quran 30:22) And in another chapter in the Quran God tells us; "Oh children of Adam, We have sent down to you garments to cover your nakedness, and as a means of adornment, but the best garment is the garment of taqwa. This is among the signs of God, so that perhaps they may reflect. (Quran 7:22) Taqwa is an Islamic term for being conscious & cognizant of Allah, of truth, of the rational reality, "piety, and fear of God". It is often found in the Quran. It is clear from these verses that variations color, language, and even clothing styles are divinely ordained. The Qur'an also

makes it clear that such variations should not be a source of discrimination or derision in a later chapter. (Quran 49:11) Women in Somalia find it detrimental to educate the public that these ideologies that Al-Shabaab has does not have any basis in the Quran or tradition of the Prophet and that is evident from the above-mentioned verses. Somali Women and Development Center is involved in educational seminars to educate the public and have invited various women in the community who are either members of government as well as the military to showcase the strength and resilience of women in Somalia.

Due to the work of these women-led organizations we are beginning to see real changes taking place in Somalia. Today Somalia is beginning to make a comeback and the 20-year gruesome civil war looks to have an end in the horizon. The militant group Al-Shabaab has been pushed back last August by African forces in the region. They once controlled most of Somalia but now they seem to be in control of a very small region of the country, now clearly they have a long way to go. There have been several suicide bombings on the presidential palace and restaurants and cafes in the news lately. Also a few warlords are still lurking in the region and clan based militias have reared their heads in some neighborhoods, a reminder of clan based chaos that dominated Mogadishu in the past. While suicide attacks in the country are still carried out by Al-Shabaab their power is still weakening in Somalia. And although Al-Shabaab and other terrorist and warring factions are huge obstacles to peace, there is one other huge obstacle to the peace and stability of Somalia. Ethiopia's meddling is the most important and persistent factor in the perpetuation of the Somali conflict. In other words, Ethiopia, a powerful

and well-positioned state, is a hostile neighbor that aims to maintain a weak and divided Somalia. (Afyare Abdi Elmi and Abdullahi Barise) Now this isn't to say that these organizations are being met with applause from Al-Shabaab. They have encountered some real danger from this group whether that means their offices have been targeted or having members of these groups be targets themselves. Yet these groups continue to persevere through all those dangers because they know the work they are doing is what's going to help make an impact. (Swdcsom.org)

Now to a lot of westerners looking in might say women are disenfranchised in Somalia and if Somalia is going to have any real chance of gaining peace then women need to be respected and supported. Consequently, the West has formed "monolithic image of Islam as a 'fundamentalist' religion that by default 'submits' women". This has led to extensive coverage by the media on the Islamic veil, ignoring crucial aspects of Muslim women such as their hopes, aspirations and expectations. (Silvestri 2008:17) This image is exacerbated by the post 9/11 context that gave rise to the eyes of the world being steadfastly focused on Muslims along with a rise in the media coverage on Muslims. Suddenly, the veil was equated to terrorism, which fueled the need to report on women such as in Afghanistan and Saudi Arabia where women are expected to adhere to strict dress codes (Silvestri, 2008:18). At the same time, this research suggests that while marginalization is experienced in extreme forms, some Somali women are refusing to occupy positions of exclusion, both in their households as well as Somali communities all over the world.

Now looking at the work of these organizations our preconceptions of the feminism perspective has probably changed. Feminism is the belief that women are and should be treated as potential intellectual equals and social equals to men. Now within Somali societies as I have exemplified in my paper Somali women were and always have been the leaders of their communities, yet with the groups like Al-Shabaab now in the region and as seen in the news that doesn't seem to be the case. There seems to be tendency by men that Islam and Feminism are contradictory terms, but this isn't limited to only men. In most under developed nations women are often times the most marginalized group in the society and suffer all types of injustices yet when you speak of Somalia the reality is not so stark. In the Somali tradition, which is heavily influenced by the nationally dominant Islamic religion, women were and to some extent are still seen as being equal but different. This is a complex idea that the Somali people have adapted to suit themselves and although from the outside it may seem an explanation for oppression and sexual discrimination, it is one, which privately most Somali women agree with and rarely challenge. (Hiiraan.com) Somali society has always valued its womenfolk. They have always been the backbone of society and although many are proud mothers and wives they have always enjoyed visibility in public life. Somali women were never restricted from working, education and are not second best to boys. In fact in today's Somalia more women arguably, in the absence of reliable data, are entering universities than men. Many more are successful business managers and owners, teachers, doctors and work with international NGOs. The self-declared independent state of Somaliland's prosecutor's office has more female prosecutors than men and

the key Somali government posts of today such as the Foreign Ministry, Department of Education and now the Central Bank of Somalia are held by high powered and effective Somali women who command respect both at home and abroad. So although Al-Shabaab oppresses women and that fits the Feminism perspective, it isn't the tradition and reality of the country. (Hiiraan.com)

Yet there are many obstacles facing Somalia to gain peace and prosperity but hopefully with the work that Somali Youth development Network Organization is doing and others like them we can one day have long lasting peace. Having women led initiatives and peace building talks is very important and a step in the right direction. Somali women-led civil society organizations have achieved much in the past two decades. They have helped to disempower the warlords, reduced the significance of clan affiliation, ensured civil society representation is essential to any peace and reconciliation process, and made progress on the participation of women in politics. (Faiza Jama, 2010) I hope to see more courageous women and men taking part and contributing to the betterment of their people. But Somali women still face constraints in breaking through gender-based inequalities and cultural and practical barriers to equal political participation.

I would like to make a few recommendations concerning further steps the Somali Youth Development Network and the other groups can take in the future. The importance of women being in the forefront is not only limited in women in Somalia but also Somali women in the diaspora. Somali women in the Diasporas have also played an important role and have helped set up NGOs and advocated for

women's rights in Islam in Somali culture. This has led to conflicting traditional roles of women and what Somali needs from women in they're nation building efforts. (UNICEF 2002:6) Today, women play a significant role in nation- building efforts. This has increased the conflict between the traditional roles of women and the real demands of today's daily life in post war Somali society on the one hand and their expectations and opportunities on the other. The conflict between the role they are expected to play, and that which they seek and in reality perform, can only be reconciled through the elimination of the discrimination against women. Seeking to achieve this will in turn strengthen the effectiveness of their participation in the ongoing reconstruction efforts. (UNICEF 2008, 7) This is especially important due to the fact that Muslim women have always in Islamic history played significant roles outside of the home and were pillars of knowledge for their communities. We saw this particularly at the time of Prophet Muhammad. His first wife was a well-known businesswoman and later after her conversation to Islam became very versed in the Quran and even educated men because she was literate and many were not. (Jennifer Heath, 2004) The only suggestion that I might have for these women-led organizations to have better international attention is they need to start unifying all in women in Somalia, building and sustaining international alliances and educating society about their own contributions so as to increase their membership as well as political impact. Also, it is important that they communicate to donors what type of feminism they are promoting and not be bullied into driving forward a donor's agenda at the expense of their culture, their core group needs and their religious convictions which they value highly.

Also another suggestion I see being beneficial is since the overwhelming majority of Somalis are Muslims, any peace education efforts should draw upon Islam, which revolves around peace. According to the teachings of Islam, a Muslim consciously submits to the will of God and subsequently gains internal and external harmony and peace. Islam-informed peace education would stress the kinds of values and behaviors that would unite the Somalis as Muslims in a bond of brotherhood, mutual love, sympathy, help, care and fellowship feeling. These are some of the important social rights among Muslims. Being a Muslim thus obliges one to avoid transgressing boundaries and infringing on the rights of the self and others. The rights of women in Somalia in accordance with the Islamic principles have not been fully implemented, due to the fact that the knowledge of Islam has been limited, and the governing institutions were not in a position to carry out the realization of such principles for many reasons. Also culture must be incorporated within the teaching of religion because Somali culture because many parts of Somali culture is compatible with Islam. Women's rights are integral part of Islamic and Somali culture. Efforts to advance women's rights must take into account both Islam and the culture. Otherwise, these efforts will backfire due to resistance and negative reaction. (UNICEF, 2008 30)

After all Islam unites all of the different factions and also it has conflict resolution mechanisms that resonate with the conflicting parties. Yet although these are viable solutions and could make an impact, I can't help but not address the big elephant in the room. The role of the West especially the United States is the biggest hindrance to peace in Somalia. Foreign policy of the United States as a driver of

international terrorism is a contentious but well-researched topic. Drone strikes, foreign invasions and occupations, and the support of oppressive governments and states are among the main causes of terrorism. (Cronin, 2003) The United States needs to be a broker for peace in Somalia as they have an interest in the region. Washington and other governments and international organizations should engage leaders from across the Somali community as they search for ideas and channels to promote peace. Admittedly, it is very difficult to fathom that Washington having been the propelling force that made the Ethiopian invasion possible, and concurrently staging ferocious air attacks by AC-130 gunships in areas around Ras Kamboni that killed hundreds of Somali villagers and countless livestock could actually bring about a positive change. (Council on Foreign Relations, 2007) Ras Kamboni is a town in the southern part of Somalia that shares a border with Kenya. In 2007 Ethiopian forces along with the United States and Somali Transition Government fought a battle in the town of Ras Kamboni. The result was not only the ICU (Islamic Court Union) and other militias being killed but also hundreds of Somali civilians were killed along with scores of livestock. America's most visible response to the crisis has been a series of air strikes against terrorism suspects that have mostly killed civilians. The air strikes and the way in which US officials have ignored overwhelming evidence of Ethiopian and transitional government war crimes have fueled anti-American sentiment. (Human Rights Watch, 2009) US policy has not only violated human rights in Somalia but as a result is breeding the same extremism it is trying to get rid of. Yet to deal with these issues, the US

administration will have to break with failed policies that have helped push Somalia into calamity.