

**CENTER FOR  
STRATEGIC AND INTERNATIONAL STUDIES (CSIS)**

**STATESMEN'S FORUM: SHEIKH SHARIF SHEIKH AHMED,  
PRESIDENT OF SOMALIA'S TRANSITIONAL FEDERAL  
GOVERNMENT**

**WELCOME:  
JENNIFER COOKE,  
DIRECTOR, AFRICA PROGRAM  
CSIS**

**SPEAKERS:  
PRESIDENT SHEIKH SHARIF SHEIKH AHMED,  
TRANSITIONAL FEDERAL GOVERNMENT OF  
THE REPUBLIC OF SOMALIA**

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JENNIFER COOKE: Welcome. My name is Jennifer Cooke and we are just delighted and honored to welcome President Sheikh Sharif Sheikh Ahmed to Washington, D.C., and to CSIS. We're delighted to host you here. I should let you know about this. Channel six is for English.

MR. : Five.

MR. COOKE: Five. Five is English. Six would be Somali. As you can tell from the turnout today, there is a great deal of interest in your perspective. Is that working for you?

PRES. SHEIKH SHARIF SHEIKH AHMED: Yes, yes.

MS. COOKE: Okay, great – a great deal of interest in hearing your perspective today on developments in Somalia and the way forward. I know you understand a little bit of English so I'll keep talking. CSIS has had a series of major conferences over the last three years on Somalia trying to better understand developments on the ground, highlighting the humanitarian dimension of the crisis, which unfortunately often gets overlooked in the focus on security, and exploring the best options for U.S. policy and identifying moments of opportunity.

Let me briefly introduce our guest today. President Sheikh Sharif was trained in law, geography and Arabic. He was a senior leader in the Islamic Courts Union, fleeing to Kenya and then to Yemen after the Ethiopian invasion and the court's collapse in 2006. He was very active in the political opposition to the TFG as it was then constructed and to the Ethiopian occupation – an opposition that includes many of the people that today pose the greatest threat to the TFG's continued leadership.

Following the resignation in December 2008 of President Yusuf, Sheikh Sharif was sworn in as president in January 2009, following an indirect voting process that took place in Djibouti. Let me say that a great deal of hope and expectation fell on his shoulders upon coming to office. We hosted in March, in partnership with the U.S. Institute of Peace, a conference on Somalia shortly after he came to office.

There was debate at that conference whether, over time, Somalia's various power bases would continue to fracture and disintegrate, but there was also a remarkable, I thought, sense of optimism among many of the speakers on the new leadership's commitment to reaching out and forging some common ground with key political and clan factions. Unfortunately, much of that optimism was dashed by the rejection of the new leadership by Shabab and Hizbul Islam and their renewed push for control over Mogadishu and key towns.

Today, from our perspective – and we're going to hear it firsthand, I think – the insurgency is publicly unpopular. It's fractured and fragmented, with reports in our press this morning, for example, of a deepening split between Shabab and al-Hizbul Islam over control of

Kismayu. But while the insurgency may not be strong enough to topple the TFG, it certainly is powerful enough to make Somalia near impossible to govern and impossible for the TFG to really extend its writ over the national picture.

The TFG, on the other hand – and I hope you will speak to this – is also, in a sense, fractured. It does remain weak. And, like its predecessor, one gets some sense that there is a heavy reliance on kind of more of the military options than on mobilizing popular opinion – public opinion in Somalia, building a strategy that various factions can eventually buy into.

I think the key – and we look to you and your shoulders to do this – the key will be building a viable political strategy that builds alliances in an enduring way that are based on common vision rather than political or financial expedience, a strategy that Somalis can buy into and that then the African Union, the international community and the Somali diaspora, many of which are represented here, can throw their collective weight behind.

For Washington – I think for Washington policymakers, the TFG still offers the best option of engagement, and I think that was very much cemented by Secretary Clinton's visit in August and her conversations with you at that time, and that's very promising. So we're looking forward to your thoughts on building this national strategy, for building these critical alliances, prospects for weakening the insurgency, how you see that happening, and how international support can be most productive. Again, welcome. We're honored to have you and we're all looking forward to your remarks. Thanks very much. (Applause.)

(Note: President Ahmed's remarks are delivered via translator.)

PRES. AHMED: In the name of God, I'm very pleased to be here today with you. I want to thank the U.S. government for allowing us to visit in this country. I'm very pleased to be here at CSIS and its leadership allowing us to have this great opportunity.

First, I want to share with you warm greetings that I have from the Somali people, both myself and my delegation, and this is encouraging. I'm particularly pleased, both myself and my delegation, to meet with the Somali community in the diaspora, which is working hard to find a solution for Somalia.

I want to take this great opportunity and this meeting to thank the Somali – to thank the people and the government of the United States, who have accepted to bring peace to Somalia. Somalia is a large country with neighbors in a strategic location on the eastern Horn of Africa. When the Somali people earned their independence, they have chosen the democratic way and elected a democratic government for themselves.

The military coup that – after the military coup, Somalia was ruled by the military for some time, for a long time. That ended in civil war and destruction. Many organizations came out with different names and titles but all based on tribal and clan allegiances. This resulted in the destruction of the country and a lot of displacement.

Over the 18 years that this civil war continued, there was a number of other difficulties. Aided by the international community, there were many opportunities that could have saved Somalia but were not taken advantage of. The many governments that came out of these peace processes, we can't say they were all bad, but they didn't get the aid they needed to succeed. In 2006, when the Islamic courts came to power, it was a great opportunity to find lasting peace if the international community put its efforts to bring peace instead of fighting the Islamic courts. I'm sure many people believed that and many in the Islamic courts were against it.

I believe the Djibouti peace process early this year was a great opportunity for the Somali people, at which place they made peace. The government and the opposition reconciled. The parliament was enlarged and the national leadership was selected and the government was put together. The Somali people welcomed this very much and the international community took part in this strongly.

If I talk about the organizations which the Somali government belongs to, the United Nations, the African Union, the Arab League and the Organization of the Islamic Conference, all these organizations always declare their effort and their intentions that they are ready to do good for Somalia, but there is always this feeling that they didn't deliver what was needed. This resulted in the wars in Somalia extending and new problems surfacing every day.

The peace process, including the one in Djibouti, was handled by the United Nations, which put a lot of effort – the U.S. government was part of this, the European Union, Arab League and African Union – but the only people who were willing to shed blood for Somalia is the African Union. And the presence of AMISOM is an opportunity for the Somali people and government that a Somali government can be built – a viable Somali government that can take care of its country and its people.

The insecurity that exists in the world and the economic collapse that happened, the climate issues all have an impact on the issues of Somalia. You may know that East Africa, for example, the condition in East Africa in general between Ethiopia and Eritrea, for example, between Eritrea and Djibouti, the long war in Sudan, the problems in Yemen – all of these issues create problems for Somalia.

The world, the national community, seems not to be ready to do something serious about Somalia and that adds to the prolonged suffering of the province in Somalia. The Somali people, in reality, don't have many differences, and even when people have differences, it's relatively easy to make peace between them if somebody pays attention to this. And I believe the different agreements that took place in Somalia are a witness that people can come to a resolution, even though in later times, the people opposing the government have an ideology that does not accept other people.

They believe that the only acceptable solution is for everybody to surrender to them and to follow them. Otherwise, they have to be killed. But I believe the Somali people have the capacity to find a solution, even to this problem, if they support the government – if the Somali people and government get support.

If I look at the humanitarian issues in Somalia, the Somali people have suffered a lot of death, injuries and displacement, and you know that inside Somalia and outside Somalia people are refugees and they have problems in both. We were talking about, recently, just a little while ago, with you about the Somali refugees in Kenya and the problems they're facing. This similar situation exists in the Somali refugees in Yemen and other places where many are in jail. And the basis – the reason behind all of this is the insecurity that exists in Somalia.

This government, as you know, existed for a short period of time and has paid a lot of attention to the security, the humanitarian issues for the refugees and the reconstruction of the country. In order to be successful in these, the government immediately moved to Mogadishu even though there was no reliable security situation. And in Mogadishu now, you have the parliament and the rest of the government. You know there are many members of parliament and ministers have died or got injured while doing the national service.

The assistance that the government receives is very limited. You can imagine the costs or the needs for resources for war, and the resources we have, have always been limited. There have been many promises and pledges, but unfortunately the government did not receive the fulfillment of these pledges and this resulted in slowing down the forward movement of the government and the difficulties faced in making progress.

Sometimes when there is blame to be shared, usually the weak party ends up with the blame. And that I think resulted in the collapse of many previous governments. I want to tell you that in the last few days there was discussion that there is differences within the government, but I want to tell you there isn't any differences between the government, and I may have heard it now.

There is no disagreement between the leadership in the government. We have the same goal. So the upper leadership – the prime minister, the speaker of the parliament and myself – have regular meetings and consultations, and we have no differences and never had any, and the people saying this are trying to undermine the government.

And we have – as I mentioned, a priority is security, and that requires a force that's well-trained, well-equipped and has the other resources it needs – health and other services. Similarly, since the country has been destructed, it's important that the forces find the salaries they need. You know the weapons that our forces have and the assistance they get is very limited. This causes them not to be able to fulfill their duties, and we always need new people to be trained and to join the forces because there are deaths and injuries among our forces.

Similarly, the weapons available to our forces are not government weapons. It is more like guerilla weapons. I think people all know what government weapons are. But still, the government is trying to count on what it has. On the other side, we're not relying only on forces and weapons. We are working hard on the reconciliation issue and we have tangible results. And you may know that many on the other side have made peace with the government.

Initially, there was a portion of Hizbul Islam who joined the government, and while we were traveling now, another part of Hizbul Islam joined the government. We have an agreement

that we signed with al-Jinoyl Jamaat (ph) and we are in the middle of implementing that agreement. We have different negotiations with our opponents and the purpose is to convince them to join the government.

When you look at the world, they look at it with an eye towards security only, and we think it's appropriate to look at Somalia with a complete program that includes reconstruction, humanitarian and helping refugees to revive the economy. That would result in the revival of the hope of the people and empower people to solve their problems, the small problems that came out of the destruction of the country.

This government, as you all know, has an open policy that allows a common policy. We revived the relationship between Somalia and the rest of the world. You know the last 20 years there have been many problems in Somalia. The meeting we had with the Secretary of State Hillary Clinton in Nairobi was a translation of the effort to have good relations with others.

Today we have great hope. Both the Somali people and the international community have hope that we can pass this difficult state. The question is, how do we get past this difficult stage? It's not easy. We have to work hard. We have to have a common understanding and cooperate together.

The problem is, Somalia is not something that should be left to the Somali people alone. The entire international community have to take part in this. So if there is no cooperation and the government is not assisted fully in this, it is certain – it is certain, if it's not supported, that we cannot achieve the goals that we have.

I want to take an example of the people who are fighting us. You know they claim – our opponents, they claim that they are part of al-Qaida, and there are foreign fighters inside Somalia. There are countries in the world like Afghanistan and Iraq that the international community spends a lot of resources in that still are reeling from the problems of al-Qaida.

It's not only that their problems are limited in Afghanistan but even neighboring countries like Pakistan are suffering from al-Qaida. It seems that if there is a problem that it's easy to point a finger at the TFG, to blame it for lack of progress, but the TFG is leading a group of Somalis that have come past a difficult situation. But if you look at the government's program and how people work together, you can say the government put a lot of effort in a short time.

When you look at the pledges that were made for the TFG, the meeting in Brussels, a lot of funds were pledged. There is not much tangible results from these pledges – not much has materialized – which is an indication of the commitment of the international community is slow in coming. It is appropriate that in the current stage, that the implementation and the fulfillment of these pledges in a timely manner.

I want to point to the fact that collaboration requires confidence between parties. We are confident that the difficult situation in Somalia can be overcome if the following steps are taken: The first step is to find the necessary resources – financial resources for the four military forces for training and equipping. Second, to expedite and reinvigorate the reconciliation process

between the government and its opponents and to have a unified vision to reach success in this reconciliation, which is to help the government in the progress and the reconciliation its involved in, not to start other negotiations on the side because many governments like to do that and that will undermine the government's efforts.

So this is a danger that we would like people to avoid because since the government is prepared to talk to the people, there is no need for other governments to start new negotiations on the side. The second issue dealing – since there is a legitimate government in the country, all dealings – and it should be consulted on all steps that are to be taken. What happens is every government may talk to whoever it wants to talk to and may have a debate or ask for the opinion of different players, and this will undermine also the unity and the governance structure we're trying to make.

We believe that the Somali people, if they find the resources needed, they are capable of taking responsibility and ensuring security. Since there is no convincing reason to shed blood because we are all Muslim, we have reconciled politically, we are willing to talk to anyone who has issues still. We are willing and ready to have a discussion with anyone who has religious arguments.

You know the Islamic Shariah was adopted by the Somali government, so this means anybody who wants to spill blood in the name of the religion, then no basis – there is no basis. So there might be political goals far from religion, far from the interests of Somalia. The Somali people have reached the conviction that this is unnecessary.

So what we need is to organize strongly within the Somali people, including the diaspora – Somalia is in the diaspora, as you know. Many people left Somalia for lack of security and now many of them have their children coming back to Somalia becoming forces for those opposing the government. I think the reason for this is lack of information, both inside and outside the country.

The other important issue that we need to do something about is the issue with regard to humanitarian assistance. It's estimated that the people who are displaced in Somalia are about 4 million. These people – many of these people are inside the country and others are in neighboring countries, and others yet in different parts of the world.

All of these people believe – I believe they have different challenges – economic, social – and we need to do something about that as well, especially those who are inside the country who are displaced and those who are in neighboring countries in refugee camps. The humanitarian assistance reaching this in an effective manner – these people in an effective manner can bring back hope and can create hope inside Somalia.

The other important issue that I want to point out is the reconstruction of the country. As you know, over the last 18 years the educated people and intelligentsia have left the country. The services have collapsed – hospitals, education, roads, airport and seaport. To revive all of these services is part of the security issue because the more you create a peaceful – hope for people, it will strengthen the peace process.

If I look at little to the experience we had from the six months of the Islamic courts, it was not that people were united because of force, military force. No, it was the services that we were able to start with very little resources. We think that since the international community is prepared to help Somalia and the return of services, it can help peace and it can bring back hope.

All these issues that we mentioned, the government has a plan. The council of ministers came up with a plan. They came up with how this will be implemented. Unfortunately, the government doesn't have the capacity to implement this on its own. We need assistance from the rest of the international community. And we need the U.S. government to lead this effort because it has a special responsibility on this.

The peace process that we mentioned, if the items we mentioned is fulfilled – the reconstitution of the Somali forces, the humanitarian assistance for the displaced people, the return of services for the public – these issues collectively will create hope and encouragement. As you know, human beings live on hope for the most part.

So all of these things collectively we believe will bring about, or can bring about, the strengthening of the hope and optimism of the people. I cannot forget the AMISOM forces who, which I mentioned, are important in their presence. We have been hoping for some time that they will reach earlier than now the 8,000 strength of their force.

Their presence, as we mentioned, can be more meaningful and more effective when they are present in full force and they can fulfill their mission. You know that their headquarters was attacked recently with a suicide bomber. That is an indication that they do not have all the legal and economic needs that they have to fulfill their program. This is an important part of their program towards peace.

We mentioned the human capacity – or the people who left the country, including trained officers, and their absence lowers the capacity of the military forces to do their duty. The return of these skilled professionals – military or civilian – will give the government's program weight. And you know part of the program includes finding ways to return the professionals in different ministries and the military officers, and have them return to the country.

Similarly, during the time that Somalia was in a state of collapse, there were many people who have graduated with high degrees from different universities and we believe can do a great deal today, and a great deal today in their country. It would have been a great opportunity for us if we can get all of these people to return to the country and to participate in the reconstruction.

With regard to the economy, as you know, Somalia has a lot of natural wealth, including livestock, including maritime wealth – marine wealth, and products – farm products. It is unfortunate that a country with all this natural wealth is still waiting for assistance from the outside. Given an opportunity, we believe the Somali people, if they have peace, they can reach self-sufficiency and we can have a vibrant economy based on a free market.



The Somali people are known to be very enterprising and good in commerce, and they're well-known historically in East Africa. So to make it possible for them to find peace so they can be productive can result in their passing – overcoming this situation quickly – this difficult situation.

I want to point out since the Somali people are Muslim people – and there are many problems in the understanding of the religion – the Somali people have always been a peaceful group. Islam reached Somalia peacefully and the Somali people have always been away, as we know from history, from violence. The ideas in Somalia now are not native to Somalia. They are foreign ideas. To confront them requires a lot of effort. I believe that the misunderstanding that took place between Islam and the West was part of this problem. And what we need is to take two steps.

The Somali people and government should take the responsibility to find a peaceful way, based on our religion, and to confront this alien idea using the Somali scholars who are well-educated and the educated people and everybody else who have weight on society. On the other side, the Muslim countries and the West, there should be a discussion to have a clear understanding of the – correct understanding of the religion and how to find – create a peaceful world. As we know, Islam – the name Islam means peace. Allah, God, his name is peace. And the location that the message started in Mecca was a place where fighting was forbidden, so it was a religion around peace.

The Prophet Mohammed – peace be upon him – the first government he built was participated by Muslims, Christians and Jews and pagans. And everybody knows and they were all defending the city of Mecca. If we remove that idea from the equation, it gives an opportunity to those who want to use the religion for political gain and to harm the rest of the world. The problem, we believe, now is not limited to the West and Islam but it reaches the world of the Muslims.

You may know how many people were killed in Somalia by terrorists in the name of religion. I want to mention in particular the name of a member of parliament and Minister Omar Hashi, our minister of security. And the two people you heard while we were in New York were killed in Somalia.

All these people are dying because – not because the people killing them have a correct understanding, so we have to find a way to have an argument or discussion with these people and find a solution based on the – since God Almighty has given us human beings wisdom and intelligence, we should be able to find a solution to every problem. But it is necessary to find the willpower and good intentions. I believe that it's necessary to find those two. We have to. We have no choice.

Every difficult situation in the world, the more the solution is delayed the more the suffering is prolonged. I want to take the example of Somalia. In 1991 it was – to resolve the Somalia problem in 1991 or in 2000 it was easy. It's easier to resolve in 1991. What happens each time is a solution is attempted but no effort is taken to resolve it fully. As you know, the

Somali problem – the duration, Somalia was in collapse and many difficult things happened. We have to have the courage to get past these problems. Otherwise we will remain in that difficulty.

Of course, I want to point out in 1993 the American forces in Somalia – there was fighting and many politicians may still have this in their mind. And Somalia also, may be emotionally exploited as to what happened. So we have to have the courage to get past this and find peace for Somalia. If we avoid the problem it's not going to bring a solution, so we have to face it head on and find a solution.

I believe we have a great opportunity now and we can take advantage of it. People can look at it from different angles, but I believe it's a great opportunity that will allow us to do something. Because of that, what we're waiting for is for the world community to come to the aid of Somalia and for the U.S. government to do its responsibility.

Before I conclude, I want to thank everyone who wishes and – helps Somalia, wishes good for Somalia, everybody who feels with Somalia, including the ambassador, the representative for the U.S. government in Somalia, and this institution that gave us an opportunity that gave us an opportunity to say something about the problem of Somalia. I'm very pleased to be here with you today. Thank you very much. May peace be with you. (Applause.)

MS. COOKE: Mr. President, thank you very much for that extremely thoughtful address, and particularly your remarks at the end on hopes for a way forward. I've spoken enough. I think we'll open it directly up to questions. And I think we'll take a few at a time if that's all right with you, and then turn back to you.

We can go a little beyond our – the president has said that he can spend a little more time with us than ending promptly at 2:30. But I do ask that when the session is over, everyone remain seated until the president is able to leave the room. And I'll remind you when we conclude. So why don't we take an initial round of questions? Again, I don't have my glasses so it's going to be difficult. There is one in the very, very far back. I think that might be Joel.

Q: Joel Barkan, CSIS. In a number of times in the course of your remarks, Your Excellency, you talked about the need for the international community in the United States in particular to assume its responsibilities. Would you please outline what those would be in very specific terms? Say, name three?

MS. COOKE: Okay, let's take – you want to take – we'll take a couple. Yes, Mr. Donald, I believe it is.

Q: Thank you very much. Sir, obviously Somalia has different levels of governance. In the South, we've got al-Shabab and Hizbul, and then there is the area of the Transitional Federal Government. I wonder what you might be able to say about your intentions for how to reach out to those areas that lie between the two, that are you not yet committed to one side or the other? Thank you.

MS. COOKE: Okay, we had a question over here. Please identify yourself, too, as you speak.

Q: My name is Mr. Hyshtid Abde (ph).

MS. COOKE: A microphone is coming.

Q: My name is Mr. Hyshtid Abde. I want to just say to the president here, welcome to the United States. I want to thank Jennifer Cooke. It is not the first time that she – (unintelligible) – a conference like this.

I want to ask two questions of the president. The first one is, what are the three critical or four critical issues that immediately, you government right now, that you are asking for the international community? The second question is how are you going to implement those four or three critical issues that you need right now?

MS. COOKE: Okay, shall we start with those? First, I think that the first overlapped a bit with the second on the top three priorities for U.S. assistance or support, the second on reaching out to those areas that fall between al-Shabab, al-Hizbul and the TFG control. And then top priorities for how you'll implement those visions.

PRES. AHMED: Thank you. The first issue we need assistance with from the U.S. government is the security issue, which is necessary and would be the basis for finding peace in Somalia. So you know the Somali military has collapsed in 19 years. There was no organized force in Somalia. And to reconstruct a force requires a lot of resources. I believe the U.S. government has started towards this goal but can do a great deal more.

The second issue is with regard to the displacement of the people and the need for humanitarian assistance. People are starving and are suffering. As you know, the last three years there was a huge drought. That resulted in the livestock dwindling and not much harvest. In 18 years there was a continuous decline of the political and the economic collapse caused difficulties for the people.

In addition, the economic collapse at the global level is affecting a lot of us too. Many people in the outside who use to send remittances to their relatives inside have also suffered. So the humanitarian service is an area that the U.S. government can do a great deal about as well. The third one that the U.S. government can do something about is the reconstruction issue. If there are no hospitals, no universities, no roads, no schools, you can imagine the level of difficulty. So to do something about these is part of our priorities and it is something we're waiting for the U.S. government to do something about.

If I go on to the question of the people or the areas in between the different administrations, first, we believe the unity of Somalia and the solution of Somalia and the interest of the world – some may disagree with us but we underline the difficulties of Somalia is based on the division within the country.

The Somali people believe that they are one large tribe, to tell you the truth. They speak one language; they have one religion; they look alike; they intermarry. This brings the – strengthening their unity results in them taking their responsibility. So any view that is based on the division of Somalia is not helpful to the best interests of Somalia.

The current situation and how we deal with it – you know the Somali people. Nine-five percent of the Somali people supported the TFG, the transitional federal government. The challenge we face, we have to deal with them each in its own way. So, dealing with Hizbul Islam is dealing one way it, and we need another way to deal with al-Shabab.

The other areas of Puntland and Somaliland, we have a plan for each one of these issues. As you know, the government's priority is to avoid spilling blood and to avoid war as much as possible. But you know that the current fighting is imposed on the government – imposed on it by extremists who are not interested in having a government. They are removing the Somali flag and replacing it with a black flag.

The issues of Puntland and Somaliland, we believe reconciliation and talking is the best solution. You know our prime minister went to Puntland and had a discussion with them, which resulted in strengthening and agreement and strengthening – which is the best solution.

MS. COOKE: Your priorities that you laid out, kind of in the immediate term I think, as I understood it, was the next question, but we can meld that with the next round if you'd like.

PRES. AHMED: Okay.

MS. COOKE: Okay, the question there. Yes, the gentleman in the blue shirt at the end.

Q: Hi, sir. Excuse me. My name is Jesse. I'm from the George Washington University. And I'm curious as to whether you feel that United States aid to Somalia will perhaps alienate many of the people in the diaspora and many of the Somalis themselves. The U.S. isn't looked at generally very favorably in that region as a whole, and I'm wondering about your thoughts on that.

MS. COOKE: Okay.

Q: My name is – (inaudible, off mike) – Hassan (sp) and I work for the Congressional Research Service. But my opinions are just my own. The U.S. Congress has nothing to do with it. (Laughter.) Going back to the al-Shabab, Sheikh Sharif, you were, during the ICU in 2006 – al-Shabab was established while you were one of the prominent leaders within the ICU group. As of today, as we speak, al-Shababs are into three categories.

They are very feared in many corners within Somalia, and even within the diaspora they are also respected. And within also the other groups – other corners they are also despised. Whether we agree or not, they are a factor, and in order for the stability of Somalia to be permanent, you must – well, your administration must include them.

We've been hearing that you opened your dialogue for them, but from various sources, nothing is, you know, coming out of that. Can you tell us the status? Since you yourself knew much about the al-Shabab, can you tell us, the cells, how they were formed, who to contact? Why did you fail to actually deal with them?

We must – I follow the country – I'm Somali. I was born a Muslim; I will die a Muslim. I will always – you know, I am a U.S. citizen, but I would like also Mogadishu to be place where I can go and my mom and dad could live peacefully. And unless we really deal with the Asmara (ph) group – like, you have some very good Somalis up there. You visited them despite the proxy war Eritrea and Ethiopia are playing. What happened to dealing with opposition? And certainly, once and for all, the al-Shabab – (inaudible) – which is getting the momentum.

MS. COOKE: Thank you, Hassan. We have a question there.

Q: Assalamu Alaykum. My name is Omar Mohammad (sp) and I am the imam of – (inaudible) – City Mosque in Washington, D.C. First I welcome our President Sheikh Sharif, and I want to assure you, Mr. President, that the diaspora of North America is supporting you 100 percent, and you will have our support completely.

And I know you are facing a very difficult task in Somalia right now, but my question to you, Mr. President, is that why can't you concentrate to create peace in Mogadishu before any other region? Why your government is not putting enough effort to really concentrate on how to bring peace in Mogadishu – (inaudible)?

MS. COOKE: Those are all big questions. Why don't we start there and then turn back for yet another round? The question of U.S. assistance and whether that alienates as well as perhaps helps but can alienate some elements; how to engage the Shabab; and then the focus on Mogadishu.

PRESIDENT AHMED: It is possible – the thinking that U.S. aid can create – can upset people is based on emotion, not on reality. If we speak as a government, a big part of the government is relationship, and the relationship is between the Somali people and the other peoples in the world. The U.S. government is the largest, most important government in the world, and that relationship is needed by all governments. Part of our priorities is to have a relationship with all governments, including the U.S. government.

With regard to Islam, Islam always was based on good relations with others. It's one of the basic tenets of our faith. Therefore, our argument is that if we want a government, we want to have good relations with other people. If we want to practice our religion, then we have to have good relations. And anybody who disagrees with that, we have to sit down and explain to them. I want to leave this question there.

The second question, with regard to the Shabab, the movements that take extreme positions, they come out at different times but don't last very long. It is possible that many people in al-Shabab were of the belief that they can capture Somalia quickly and do what they want to do. Once they have failed in this, it also creates some change among them. You should

know that the people in Shabab don't have a single vision, and we're putting our emphasis to deal with their leadership, whose opinions are to either capture the county or perpetually continue the fighting.

So this opinion is now an international one. This book called "Managing Chaos" has a strategy and basis that these people use, but the government and the Muslim scholars and the Somali intellectuals collectively can bring back some people. And we have actually succeeded in convincing others – some of them to leave this. We have hope and we have many discussions that are ongoing now to target these individuals.

MS. COOKE: Why not make a priority the security in Mogadishu?

PRES. AHMED: With regard to Mogadishu, there is a priority for us and a priority for the enemy, so these two priorities are clashing. We are in the process of finding a solution and we are working on this.

MS. COOKE: Okay. Yes, the gentleman against the wall there. We'll get some gender balance here with the lady by the camera.

Q: Thank you very much.

MS. COOKE: And then we'll return to David Shinn. Okay.

Q: Thank you very much, and welcome. Your courage is an inspiration to the whole world. My name is John Simon from the Center for Global Development. Until January, I was the U.S. ambassador to the African Union, and at that time we were heavily focused on trying to encourage the United Nations to step into the shoes of the African Union, the AMISOM mission, and set up a U.N. peacekeeping operation in Somalia.

That attempt was ultimately proved futile. I'm wondering if you could comment on the prospects of an effort to get the United Nations to send a U.N. peacekeeping mission to Somalia now. And if not, are there other alternatives to buttress the AMISOM force and to give it the resources they need to do the job at hand?

MS. COOKE: Thank you. Yes, the lady.

Q: Good afternoon, Your Excellency. Marian Douglas-Ungaro. And I was an observer at the Eldoret and Mbagathi talks in Kenya when my husband, Carlo Ungaro, was the Italian diplomatic representative for Somalia.

As you probably know, October 24<sup>th</sup> will be the seventh anniversary of the shooting death of Starlin Abdi Arush in Nairobi. And there's a lot of people in this room who knew Starlin and what she contributed to trying to claim peace for Somalia again – the progress that they made in Merca and Shebelle Region.

I have visited Mogadishu and Shebelle and I want to know about the role of women. I was very supportive, my husband and I, of women's participation at Eldoret and Mbagathi. And it may have been the largest contingent of women representatives in any African peace talks or in any peace talks anywhere, and we want to know, what role do women have right now and in the long term? They suffer the most, as you well know. In the last U.S. administration, Jendayi Frazer spoke often about the importance of women's participation – (inaudible, laughter, applause).

MS. COOKE: Amb. Shinn.

Q: I'm David Shinn, George Washington University. Mr. President, you have mentioned on a number of occasions the foreign fighters who have joined with al-Shabab. Could you be specific as to the approximate number of foreign fighters that there are with al-Shabab, and also how it breaks out? Roughly, what percent come from the Somali diaspora and what percent are non-Somali?

MS. COOKE: Okay, because of time I'm going to take one more question. This is a tough one. I'll take the gentleman in the first row here. I'm sorry.

Q: (Via translator.) First, Mr. President, I want to welcome you and – we welcome you. You have explained the Somali situation well. I have two questions. You brought up the issue of the African Union. I want to ask – I want to add something. First I want to ask, have you discussed with the secretary general of the United Nations – there were many decisions in the United Nations: the change of AMISOM to international forces.

I wanted to know if you had this discussion with the secretary general of the United Nations. If you can give us a little detail, and the other meetings you had with the many leaders that you had in New York – the meetings with them in New York. I'll keep my second question.

MS. COOKE: Okay, and the last one – (inaudible, off mike).

Q: Thank you, Jennifer. (Inaudible, off mike.) I have been a staunch supporter of Sheikh Sharif. I am not hiding that. We struggled to help the cause, to evict the Ethiopian soldiers, the brutal Ethiopian soldiers. But I don't want to be intellectually dishonest and say everything is milk and honey.

I feel there is some neglect. I would like to ask Sheikh Sharif to pay attention to the serious humanitarian crisis, the 3.8 million on the verge of starvation, 1.5 million displaced, and also not to be silent about the Ethiopian soldiers going in and out of Somalia, violating Somalia's integrity – territorial integrity. Otherwise that would provide more ammunition to the opposition forces. Thank you.

MS. COOKE: Thank you. Another set of questions – the prospects for the U.N. or strengthening – (inaudible, off mike).

PRES. AHMED: I want to start with the question of the ambassador. We don't have exact numbers but we can give you the information from different sources, from the people who provide us with such intelligence.

If we look overall, al-Shabab and the people from the diaspora, the foreign fighters include Somalis with different nationalities from the West, and people from other nationalities, non-Somalis, Arabs and Africans and other places. So the foreign fighters include those two groups, and the estimates go anywhere from 800 to 1,100. To get overall numbers for Shabab is difficult, but they are in the thousands. That is a fact. I want to leave this question there.

With regard to the question of participation of women, first, the Somali women in our society are very active. Many families rely on the efforts of women. When you talk to Somali people with regard to the role, that his mother and his sister and other female members of his family took in their life, it's very significant.

Somali women are also known to be very active and they are needed both in peace and in war. I know you wouldn't want me to include them in a war. With regard to our government, there are many women in parliament, in our cabinet, and many women work without official titles, including this young lady who mentioned that she used to support us, and I hope she will continue the support.

Of course, human beings have limited capacity, but it is important that they have to be convinced of what they're doing. The challenge we face and our capacity are very different, but we're confident that we can solve these issues and we will succeed. I want to go to – you want me to talk about the Ethiopian issue. Yes, and the challenge – the difficulty between Somalia and Ethiopia will bring a continuation of the difficult. So we take upon ourselves every avenue to find peace. The need for peace is universal but ours is particularly acute.

If we think like normal people – if the leadership thinks like the regular people, many things will go wrong. And when you think – when we talk about Islam, we have to think about the results that can come out of every step we take. Since Somalia and Ethiopia have a long-term enmity, we have to look towards finding a solution between them, and if there are things we dislike, we have to find a solution that we can discuss with them and say, this is not appropriate.

But what we cannot do is come to the microphone to win the emotional argument and just say whatever we want because that can bring unnecessary difficulties for us. We have the same feeling as you do and we have the same struggle but where you are, the position of leadership, we have to think in the best interest and not with our emotions.

I want to move to the United Nations. They put a lot of effort with regard to the AMISOM forces. They're doing a great job, but you should know that the U.N. is very bureaucratic and it takes a very long time to accomplish things that many governments have a say in these things. They have to agree on things. They have a lot of difficult rules.

So I want to assure you that the secretary general, in our meeting, worked very hard on Somalia and the worries about Somalia and had meetings with us when we were here. I want to



tell you that the international community is very, very keen on finding a solution to Somalia. All we're saying is speed up this assistance to end this problem. Thank you. (Applause.)

MS. COOKE: On behalf of CSIS I want to say a very warm thank you for your generous time with us today in answering that range of questions. I think we all – okay – we are all very eager for you to succeed in the ambitions that you lay out, and we do hope that you will come back to Washington.

As you see, there is a tremendous appetite here to hear your perspective, a great deal of support for you as well and in what you're trying to do. So thank you very much. Again, I'm going to ask people to remain seated until the president takes his leave. (Applause.)

(END)