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Chair

Mr. Michael Levitt

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● (1305)

[*English*]

The Chair (Mr. Michael Levitt (York Centre, Lib.)): Welcome, colleagues, to the 83rd meeting of the Subcommittee on International Human Rights.

Today is the first of two meetings on the human rights situation in Somalia. We were all shocked by the horrific October 14, 2017 truck bombing in Somalia that claimed the lives of 358 people, and the October 28, 2017 bombing in Mogadishu that claimed 27 lives, perpetrated by the terrorist group al Shabaab.

For decades, the Somali people have endured awful violations of their fundamental rights and freedoms and lived in a perpetual state of insecurity, including famine. With the 2016 elections and the international community's re-engagement, there is a sense of hope for a more peaceful future in Somalia, but clearly the situation is still extremely precarious. It is in this context that the Subcommittee on International Human Rights is holding these hearings.

Before us today are Professors Ken Menkhaus and Ian Spears. Professor Menkhaus is from Davidson College in Davidson, North Carolina. He has published extensively on Somalia, including on conflict analysis, state collapse, terrorism, and humanitarian access.

Professor Spears comes to us from the University of Guelph. He has examined civil wars in Ethiopia, Somalia, and Angola. His book, *Civil War in African States: The Search for Security*, examines conflict resolution techniques and their prospect in the context of the war-fighting strategies of belligerents.

Gentlemen, I invite you to make your opening remarks, beginning with Professor Menkhaus, and then we will proceed to questions by members of the subcommittee.

Thank you very much.

Dr. Ken Menkhaus (Professor, Political Science, Davidson College, As an Individual): Good afternoon, and thank you for including me in these proceedings.

I'd like to make a few opening remarks underscoring some of the broad trends and patterns of human rights violations in Somalia.

The first observation is that human rights violations remain a major chronic and widespread threat that touch almost every Somali household. It is difficult to be fully protected from human rights violations in the country. Impunity is one of the greatest problems in Somalia. It is a country where human rights violations of all sorts are routinely perpetrated, and rarely are the perpetrators held to account.

State authorities are weak. The federal government of Somalia is still nascent. Its capacity to provide protection to its population is very limited. Worse, some state authorities, particularly in the security sector, are sometimes a major source of human rights violations perpetrated against some members of the population. These violations include assassinations, rape, looting, and torture.

Al Shabaab is the single greatest source of human rights violations across the countryside. It engages in major terrorist attacks that are indiscriminate in their targeting. It engages in daily assassinations. It engages in forced conscription, forced marriage, and imposition of draconian interpretations of sharia law on the populations under its control.

Assassinations are not the sole domain of al Shabaab. One of the major human rights problems in Somalia today is that clan and political actors are also engaged in a dirty war against one another. This includes assassinations. It includes threats. One of the most disturbing patterns we've seen in Somalia in recent years is the degree to which political, clan, and business actors will play out their rivalries through the use of lethal force against one another, often outsourcing that violence to al Shabaab itself. That makes it quite difficult in some circumstances to know exactly who is behind some of the human rights violations that we see in the country. This points to another related problem of collusion. These actors who are ostensibly fighting one another, the government, and al Shabaab are in fact colluding in a variety of ways. Again, this makes it very difficult to pinpoint who is to blame for specific acts of terrorism and violence.

Certainly included among those vulnerable populations in Somalia are the 1.1 million internally displaced persons crowded in slums in the major cities of the country. They are not only without power socially and economically, but are also often very weak in terms of their clan affiliation, and, hence, very vulnerable to routine human rights violations and predatory behaviour, particularly against the women.

Other groups of real concern in Somalia continue to include journalists. Somalia is one of the most dangerous places in the world for journalists to operate. Many have been killed, many more threatened. Anyone who speaks frankly and critically about the government, or about the business community, or about al Shabaab runs the risk of retaliation. Prominent citizens are often also targeted in retaliatory attacks. Thus, despite the fact they can protect themselves reasonably well, they are among some of the most vulnerable. Anyone who refuses to pay extortion money to the armed groups, especially al Shabaab, is at risk of attacks.

All this points to an unpleasant reality when it comes to citizen security in Somalia in the context of a still very weak, semi-collapsed state. Security has been thoroughly commoditized in Somalia. Those who can pay for it, generally are able to afford greater protection from human rights violations. Those who can't must find alternative measures, whether through neighbourhood watch groups or the patronage of a more powerful clan nearby, or whatever they can can find to protect themselves.

● (1310)

The UN Human Rights Council's recent report, issued in September, did note some progress in Somalia, but continues to note major challenges to the human rights situation there as well. The progress they flagged had to do with the successful indirect elections that took place earlier this year, which held the promise of a new administration coming in that was committed to combatting corruption and improving good governance. That has not been very effective to date. The government has struggled with a lot of internal problems. The challenges that the report articulated included drought, al Shabaab, and the African Union peacekeeping force's planned redeployment. I'd like to reflect on this for a moment.

The 22,000-man African Union peacekeeping force that has been in Somalia now for 10 years has been both a source of protection and human rights violations. We have documented cases of African Union forces engaging in predation, sexual assault, and other crimes against the Somali people. Those have been flagged. Promises have been made to investigate them. That's been a very unfortunate part of that long peace operation.

Now that we know that the African Union peacekeeping forces are going to withdraw in a phased way over the next few years, and are already beginning to withdraw from some strategic areas of the country, the new concern is that this is going to create a political and security vacuum that al Shabaab will exploit. It will conduct, as it routinely does, retaliatory measures against anyone they suspect of having colluded with AMISOM or with the federal government. As al Shabaab advances in some of these areas, we can expect to see human rights violations grow in those places.

I have a couple of final points to make. To the extent that human rights violations are sometimes orchestrated at fairly high political or economic levels, we have to acknowledge the unfortunate reality that many of the political and commercial elite in Somalia are holding multiple passports. They are citizens of second and third countries, including Canada, Sweden, the U.K., and the U.S. One of the important topics that I think needs to be pursued when we address the issue of impunity is to hold accountable to the laws of these countries people who hold citizenship in other countries. They must not go back to Somalia as Canadian or U.S. citizens and plan and execute assassinations of other Somalis. To the extent that we can use the reality that many of the political and social elites in Somalia are diaspora members, and remind them that they are beholden to the laws of the countries to which they have become citizens, we may have an angle or some leverage to try to reduce some of the human rights violations.

My final point is to remind all of us of something that I think most of us who work on Somalia know well, which is that while we see the state of chronic instability, state weakness, and impunity as a problem to be solved, important constituencies in Somalia see it as a desirable condition in which they can continue to profit from illicit behaviour. We don't always have partners in all quarters in Somalia to combat this, and identifying the spoilers and cartels that work in these conditions is a very important first step toward any action to address it.

Thank you.

● (1315)

The Chair: Thank you very much, Professor Menkhaus.

Now we will move to Professor Spears.

Dr. Ian Spears (Associate Professor, University of Guelph, As an Individual): Thank you for having me here today.

I'm going to speak in a little more general terms about some of the issues that have been raised by Professor Menkhaus.

Somalia is an extreme, extreme example of the problems faced by many, if not all African countries: multiple political traditions, regimes that are unable to manage the Procrustean task of extending authority to all corners of their territory, and the absence of infrastructure that can unite the country.

More worrying is the fact that the solutions to the challenges confronting Somalia are not readily apparent. It cannot be said that Somalia's problems are merely a lack of international attention or resources, since Somalia has been the focal point of international attention at various times and has been on the receiving end of billions of dollars in foreign assistance.

To be sure, as Professor Menkhaus and others have identified in their own work, there have been errors in strategy and tactics, and perhaps if things had been done differently earlier on, Somalia's current situation would be better.

The challenges confronting Somalia are structural, to my mind, and are not readily remedied by a peace process that is merely inclusive, better resourced, or more technocratically appropriate. While there are promising signs of governance at the local level, Somalis will sooner or later have to confront and reconcile the gains that are made there at the local level with the assumption that some sort of national state structure needs to be established.

I'm not sure that we can speak of human rights in the sense that we can think of it in other countries. During the 1980s, it was possible to speak in terms of a brutal government that, in its last years especially, did not hesitate to use extraordinary force against populations it regarded as hostile, especially in the north of the country. My colleague Matt Bryden described Somalia's Siad Barre government as a “toxic state”.

Somalia's problems, since Siad Barre's overthrow in 1991, however, are not that the government is oppressive and brutal, though in some circumstances that may be true; rather, it is profoundly weak, dependent on outsiders to survive, and having to contend with a political movement that regards it as foreign and a proxy for other regional or western interests.

Nevertheless, we can speak to several sources of human rights abuses in Somalia, and Professor Menkhaus has already noted some of these. Troops associated with the African Union Mission in Somalia, AMISOM, are accused of the things that he has already pointed out, yet AMISOM is also the reason why the current government in Mogadishu continues to exist.

Two al Shabaab and al Shabaab-related organizations have been accused of targeted killings, beheadings, and executions—again, things that Professor Menkhaus had mentioned—most notably, the October 14 truck bomb in Mogadishu, as well as other attacks. While many despise al Shabaab, some Somalis also benefit from its presence, seeing the territory that it controls as more secure, orderly, and predictable than government-controlled areas that are often run by greedy and corrupt soldiers.

In Somalia more generally, there are other human rights abuses that may already be familiar to you, dealing with gender issues and so on. Like many new or fragile governments in the region, the Somali government's ways have allowed it to be accused of various human rights abuses. However, perhaps the biggest problem is the impunity that allows government officials to do things without any sort of prosecution.

In spite of its troubles, Somalia is not necessarily anarchic, as that is sometimes understood. Within Somalia, an individual's identity is related to clan. In the absence of a state, clan is often said to serve as a sort of insurance. Even during some of Somalia's most turbulent years, Somalis have demonstrated a remarkable capacity to conduct business in their country.

● (1320)

Alongside the significance of clan come other problems that make the formation of an effective and democratic state difficult. Westerners tend to regard all states as the same, differing only in their levels or degrees of development. Things like conflict resolution, development, and human rights are often assumed to be technical problems that can be remedied with technical fixes. But the elements that are regarded as foundational to peace and human rights, which include democracy, inclusion, and legal sovereignty, can be problematic in countries such as Somalia that have such profoundly weak institutions. Let me just run through a couple of those things.

The first is building an inclusive government. Outside efforts to build an inclusive government have been fraught. A truly inclusive government is not only elusive, it may be illusive. Efforts to be inclusive have inevitably drawn accusations from clans that have been left out. Subsequent efforts to remedy that exclusion invite more accusations by others that they too have been excluded.

As has been the case in other places, Iraq and Syria most notably, efforts to be more democratic and inclusive have also generated resentment among those who regard themselves as the historic or natural rulers of the country. In the past, even sincere efforts to establish an inclusive government in Mogadishu have been interpreted by other clans as seeking to establish domination by rival clans. The emergence of al Shabaab is, in some respects, linked with this sense of disillusionment felt by those who believe that they have been disenfranchised. The view that the government has been captured by one clan at the expense of all others allows al Shabaab to maintain a base of support among the many clans that believe that they are threatened or disenfranchised by its existence.

On the other hand, efforts to be inclusive can also be exploited by belligerents. A well-founded peace process hosted in comfortable hotels may be a sensible path to peace, since peace processes and government are regarded as means to access scarce resources. However, it can be costly, insofar as it leads to an ever-expanding list of delegates who claim to be representative of various communities. The result, as Ken Menkhaus has pointed out, can be bloated, unwieldy, and often paralyzed government.

Democracy too, related to inclusion, will continue to be problematic in Somalia. The recent election of Somali President Mohamed Abdullahi Mohamed Farmaajo has been welcomed in many quarters, though it is not clear that his presidency can make a difference, given how dependent it is on outside assistance and the fact that his election involved a profoundly corrupt and limited process.

In the abstract, Somalis welcome democratic government. It is also true, however, in a general sense, that ethnically diverse societies are not always disposed to pursue the common or national good over narrower class interests. There is compelling evidence that democracy can be developed in only established states, where governments are capable of exercising authority over all of their territory. Democracy, and especially the majoritarian democracy that the international community favours, demands a population that shares a common identify, not one that is divided along lines of ethnicity or clan. Neither of these characteristics obtain in Somalia.

A significant obstacle to the establishment of democratic government in Somalia is that voters make their choices not on the basis of changeable political preferences but on the basis of group or clan identify. That is to say, voting preferences are essentially fixed by clan. Since clan is the means to advance one's interests, to vote against or advocate against one's clan would be unthinkable for most Somalis. The effect of these fixed voting preferences, however, is to subvert the democratic process.

● (1325)

When voting preferences are fixed, minority groups will resist democratic rule because they fear being dominated by the majority. It becomes extremely difficult to protect the rights of minorities. For the west, this means that elections are relatively easy to make happen in a procedural sense, but it's difficult to have them mean anything more than the domination of one clan over another.

Why don't I stop there?

The Chair: Thank you very much to you both for your testimony.

We will now move straight into the first round of questions.

We're going to begin with MP Anderson.

Mr. David Anderson (Cypress Hills—Grasslands, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I want to thank our guests for being with us today.

Mr. Spears, I just want to follow up on what you were finishing off with here. How many clans, or how many groups, are we talking about in the country? I mean, we have these issues throughout Africa where border lines are not tribal lines. How many significant tribal clan groups are in play in Somalia?

Dr. Ian Spears: That is a terrific question, and it's almost impossible to answer. There are major clan families, and depending on how you call them, you could say there are four or five. However, each one of those clans is divided into an almost infinite number of clans and sub-clans. If you were to have them all charted, it would be like a Christmas tree extending downward almost forever.

Mr. David Anderson: Maybe this has been covered by what both of you said, but what institutional strength is there? A good, strong national government needs national institutions, but it sounds like the only strength is in those local governments that are provided, I assume, by clan authority. Is there any national institutional strength that we can build on? You have parliamentary elections from 2012 through 2017 that established a sort of government, but where do we look for justice, education, and governance strength?

Dr. Ian Spears: I'm trying to think of who's the best person to answer this question.

Mr. David Anderson: Either one of you can answer it; that's fine.

Dr. Ian Spears: The first thing I will say is that, historically, Somalia has had a profound sense of identity. I tell my students that the Somali flag is a five-pointed star. It has five points for Somalis in all the regions of the Horn of Africa: the two colonial states that now make up Somalia, Djibouti, Ethiopia, and the Northern Frontier District of Kenya.

Beyond that, as a skeptic, I would say there is nothing national that persists. In fact, I would say this extends even to the clans. Getting clans within a clan family to cooperate can be difficult. The two warlords who were fighting over Mogadishu in the early 1990s were both from the same clan family. To say that something is national, it would probably only exist because there is funding on the national level.

I think Professor Menkhaus—

● (1330)

Mr. David Anderson: Professor, do you have something to add to that?

Dr. Ken Menkhaus: Yes, thank you.

Somalia does have a number of regional states in the federal system, a few of which are pretty functional and have been for some time. Setting aside the unrecognized, secessionist state of Somaliland in the northwest—which is another conversation, but has had a pretty functional government on a variety of levels—in the rest of Somalia, the state of Puntland has been in existence now for close to 20 years and has modest, but real, governance capacities. More recently, Jubaland, a state of Somalia in the southwest, has exhibited, at least in the area of the capital, Kismayo, a pretty robust capacity to provide security and some basic government services. In the rest of the country, the sub-state authorities are pretty nascent and really aren't able, at this time, to deliver a whole lot.

At the national level, as you've pointed out, the country has had a parliament, but the parliament has been paralyzed. It does have a civil service replete with ministries of everything, including tourism, but those ministries are generally not functional. One of the most important sets of government agencies at this time, the security sector, is in complete disarray. It has been in disarray at the grassroots level, at the bottom level, because soldiers have been frequently unpaid due to massive corruption, so they defect or desert. Just in the past month and a half, we have seen either the resignation or the firing of four top members in the security sector: the minister of defence, the chief of the army, the head of the national intelligence service, and I'm forgetting the fourth one that just happened. It's in a state of disarray right now.

Mr. David Anderson: Can they be replaced by competent people at all, or is it just wide open with basically no protection in those areas?

Dr. Ken Menkhaus: At this point, I can't speak to the competence of the individuals who have stepped into those positions. I will repeat what Ian said, which is that I think we have to be really careful about counting too much on individual personalities overcoming really structural problems in Somalia. The political cartels that profiteer from the current situation are very powerful and have been able to outmanoeuvre and/or co-opt some pretty good people who have tried to right this ship, which a lot of Somalis have really tried to do, but to date have not been able to outmanoeuvre these political cartels.

Mr. David Anderson: I want to come back to this afterwards, but I want to ask another question before I lose my time here. Both of you talked about issues of impunity, but I think you said specifically that dual citizens need to be held accountable. One of you talked about that.

Professor, they need to be held accountable to the laws of the countries they are citizens of. Do you have any specifics for Canada that this committee should be paying attention to in terms of individuals or activity that we should be noting?

Dr. Ian Spears: I don't in terms of specific individuals, but you should definitely note that Canadian Somalis are a significant portion of the diaspora that goes back. Many of them are doing fabulous work. They're going back and playing very positive roles in Somalia. I want to underscore that. But it's also the case that some of the trouble that's happening in Somalia, some of the acts of egregious violations of human rights, the stoking of communal violence, are being done by diaspora members.

My own feeling is that one of the major angles or pieces of leverage we have is the fact that there's massive corruption going on in Somalia and we have tax codes that those individuals are beholden to in their newly adopted countries. If we can use those as leverage to convince them to behave in Somalia, we might see some improved behaviour, at least among a subsection of the trouble-makers.

Mr. David Anderson: Thank you very much. Sorry that we ran out of time.

The Chair: Thank you, MP Anderson.

We're now going to move to MP Hardcastle, please.

Ms. Cheryl Hardcastle (Windsor—Tecumseh, NDP): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Along the lines that MP Anderson just left off with, talking about the issue of impunity and about how Canada as a country is structurally set up to help identify and investigate people who hold multiple passports. It's been mentioned that we know some of the troublemakers. What would you see as the next best steps for Canada to take to help address the issue of impunity and identify more of these people who hold these passports whom we could be holding accountable? I'd like to leave that with both of our witnesses here.

● (1335)

Dr. Ian Spears: I think that's one Ken should address.

Dr. Ken Menkhaus: Okay.

There are a couple of different strategies that one can adopt with regard to the diaspora. One is simply to issue a warning. We did have this happen a number of months ago. Almost a year ago several of the embassies in and on Somalia made statements to the effect that citizens of their country who were also holding public office in Somalia were accountable to its laws. They made that very clear. That was just a kind of a reminder that they hoped would send the appropriate message.

One could certainly go further and start to investigate and collect enough information that some individuals could be indicted for anything from tax evasion to murder and everything in between. At that point, you as a government would have the choice of either acting on that or using that as leverage to try to encourage behaviour change on the part of those individuals.

I can't stress enough how diasporized the Somali government is. Most of the top figures—not all, but most—are citizens of a second country, which is actually a source of tension in Somalia itself. Some of the Somalis who, as they put it, stayed under the sun—that's their expression for those who don't have a passport—resent the extent to which the government and the private sector appear to be dominated by people who are coming back from other countries.

I'll reinforce the message I gave before: the vast majority of Somalis coming back from the diaspora are doing great work. They're good people trying to make a difference, but for the ones who aren't, we do have that leverage.

Ms. Cheryl Hardcastle: Okay. I guess my other question is maybe less tangible or specific. It's on the danger for journalists.

We know that journalism is one of the fundamental ways that a country has to build its democracy and to share that information with the international community so that we can have an effective response. What should we be doing to fortify journalism in the area? What can we do as a presence? Or is that something that's an unrealistic notion for us as a committee to be considering as a government role?

Dr. Ian Spears: I would not want to be a journalist in Somalia, so to ask if that is unrealistic, yes, it's pretty close. It's probably something that has to be handled by Somalis themselves, to some extent. The problem is that al Shabaab is likely to take you down if you are saying anything that is remotely critical of them. They're literally pulling people out of cars in some cases and looking for any indication that someone is a journalist.

In that sense, al Shabaab has to be contained, but I don't think it's clear how al Shabaab is to be contained, except to the extent that al Shabaab is a response to a western presence, or what they perceive as being a government that is created by the west or supported by AMISOM. There is another scholar who says that's the real problem, and that al Shabaab would disappear if it didn't seem to be fighting against the west.

Ms. Cheryl Hardcastle: Mr. Menkhaus, do you want to add to that? I saw you agreeing a bit, so I'd like to hear you.

Dr. Ken Menkhaus: Yes. I would just add that, in addition to the existential threat that al Shabaab poses to journalists, state laws, at both the national and the federal level, the regional level in Somalia, have really cracked down on journalists. We've seen some serious backsliding in parts of Somalia that used to have a relatively robust, vibrant, and free press but now are much more restrictive.

Somalis are increasingly relying on reporting from remote news sources. We have Somalis abroad in the diaspora who essentially run stringers or informants. They can write safely online from Toronto or London, but not so safely from inside Somalia itself.

● (1340)

Dr. Ian Spears: If you'll allow me, I'll add just one more thing, one interesting dimension about this. Professor Menkhaus has talked about Somaliland, the self-declared “Republic of Somaliland”, which in a comparative sense is much better than Somalia—or at least to the south. There's a lot of promise there.

Ironically, because it has not been recognized, I have had Somalis tell me that there is pressure on them not to disagree and not to have anything that becomes too public, because they are trying to sustain this relatively peaceful and united region and they're quite desperate for the international recognition that comes with that, so the fact that it hasn't been recognized also has the effect of keeping everybody in line, for better or for worse. I think that probably saves Somaliland from becoming more violent than it is, but it also probably has an effect on freedom of speech and a free press.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

MP Tabbara.

Mr. Marwan Tabbara (Kitchener South—Hespeler, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

To both our witnesses, thank you for coming in today and sharing your experiences and expertise on this file, which needs some attention at this moment.

Mr. Spears, you mentioned in your earlier testimony errors in strategy and tactics that could have led Somalia in a different state. I want to go back a bit to the time of independence, which was in 1960, when you could see early signs of the crisis that Somalia would be facing very shortly; it showed signs of a fractured state. Then we can fast-forward towards the 1990s, when we saw a bloody civil war, with the U.S. invading and then withdrawing. Can you elaborate a bit on the errors in strategy and tactics that you mentioned earlier in your statement?

Dr. Ian Spears: I'm probably more cynical than most. What I am acknowledging is what others have said, that there have been errors. To be more cynical than most, I would say that I'm not sure. A lot of the time with issues of conflict and conflict resolution, the way forward is always doing what wasn't done the last time. There have been people who have said that some things should have been different and that there should have been more patience.

When I talk about the state in Africa having problems, or at least structural problems that give rise to conflict, I'm not sure that there is any way around those structural problems. Mohamed Sahnoun, who is deeply involved in the peace process, was quite critical afterwards saying that the Americans, I believe, were rushing too much and insisting on a conflict resolution process that would move more quickly. He was eventually let go, and the view is, well, if they had kept him in, maybe things could have been different. No doubt, patience is required in any sort of conflict resolution process.

I don't know how long you would have to wait, and I don't know how generous you would have to be in your funding for the peace process in order to get success. Getting a national government with an army or armed forces that represent the country and that act on behalf of the country would basically require Somalis to turn their backs on the entire Somali experience, which is focused on clan, not on national identity. I'm not optimistic. I do say that there are people who say, probably including Professor Menkhaus.... But I'm not confident that there is a clear strategy or path out of here, I'm sorry to say.

● (1345)

Mr. Marwan Tabbara: Thank you for being very forward on that. We understand, from your testimony, that it is very, very clan based, and the loyalties lie within clans and, as you mentioned, that when individuals vote, they vote based on their loyalty to their clans.

My second question is for Mr. Menkhaus. You mentioned the 22,000-man African Union force that has been in Somalia for the past 10 years. You mention that, in the near future, it may be pulling out of Somalia, and you talk about a vacuum being created for al Shabaab. Part two of that question is, if you can answer, from where is al Shabaab being funded? Are they being funded by a rogue state or other militia groups somewhere else in Africa? Could you elaborate on that?

Dr. Ken Menkhaus: Al Shabaab is mostly funded by its own ability to tax everything and everyone in Somalia. It has a very effective network called the Amniyat that knows every Somali civil servant, every business person, and every plantation owner. They tax them systematically. Not paying the tax is not an option, because that will create a significant security problem for you. It's an extortion racket, but it's a very, very effective one. What that means is that any resources introduced into Somalia, whether by the Somali diaspora, USAID, or the World Bank, al Shabaab is getting a cut, and they're quite good at figuring out how to do that.

They do not have major flows of external money coming from, for instance, al Qaeda. The diaspora, once, years back, was a more significant source of funding, but that's largely dried up. This is a pretty self-sufficient group. We do hear that they have received funding from some interest in the gulf, but we don't know how significant that is. I don't think it's decisive. Given how much they're able to tax in Somalia, they have more than enough resources to conduct the kind of asymmetrical urban guerrilla war and terrorist attacks they're currently doing.

Mr. Marwan Tabbara: Just to sum up, what can Canada and the international community do to help Somalia with its state of insecurity and to stabilize the country? I'll just wrap up with that. I know that could require a long answer.

Dr. Ken Menkhaus: It's the critical question right now.

As the African Union peacekeeping forces begin to redeploy, the current strategy is that we have to accelerate support to Somali armed forces and the Somali security sector, so that they can step in and assume the very important roles AMISOM has been playing, protecting key installations and preventing al Shabaab from retaking major towns that they lost over the past five years.

The challenge there is, as Dr. Spears said earlier, that we have already been spending billions of dollars on the Somali security sector, with very little to show for it. The problem comes back to massive corruption. Somalia is one of the most corrupt countries on earth. People are making millions of dollars diverting foreign aid. We have got to find ways to combat corruption.

We won't eliminate it in Somalia; we have to be realistic. But we have to have enough of the money flowing to the soldiers and the police who are waiting for their salaries so that they don't defect, desert, or double hat, which many of them are doing. They're police by day and al Shabaab informants by night. That of course gives al Shabaab all kinds of opportunities to penetrate the security sector and know more about what's going on there than the security commanders themselves do sometimes. That's going to make it very difficult.

For me, it starts with combatting corruption. The bad news is that we're on the clock. The African Union peacekeeping forces, as they redeploy, are going to be doing so over the next two to three years. We could be facing a major crisis in Somalia if the security sector can't be minimally stood up to do the job it's expected to do.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Mr. Marwan Tabbara: Thank you.

The Chair: We're going to hear now from MP Fragiskatos.

Mr. Peter Fragiskatos (London North Centre, Lib.): Thank you very much.

Thank you to both of you for being here today.

I want to get back to something that has been raised already, but only in a very basic way. I think for most Canadians, perhaps even for most Canadian politicians, we think of the world in the way we think of Canada, with a central government, a cohesive social framework, established identities, and established conceptions of citizenship. Can you leave us with some thoughts on how you would hope the Canadian population and Canadian political representatives ought to understand Somalia?

Professor Menkhaus, you've written at length about the fragmented nature of authority in Somalia and other societies like it. I wonder if you could go into that again. We've heard about the clan-based structure of the society.

And Professor Spears, you talked about the Christmas tree analogy, which I think is very apt.

Can you talk about how that fragmentation actually impacts upon authority, how authority is divided as a result, and what that has meant for Somalia? Somalia is divided in this way, but so are other societies. I think through Somalia we can understand a little bit more about some of the key human rights catastrophes taking place in the world today, and their root causes.

● (1350)

Dr. Ken Menkhaus: The reality is that in places like Somalia, whether we like it or not—and reasonable people can differ about whether this is a good thing or a bad thing, or just a thing—the government is going to remain weak for the foreseeable future. We know that state-building and institution-building take a long time.

Meanwhile, what we have in Somalia by default is a negotiated state, or a mediated state. That's the way to try to understand it. The state is just one of a number of armed actors. Most of the rest are non-state actors, or they're kind of quasi-state, in that they are planned paramilitaries that are hatting themselves as the military to get some ammunition and salary once in a while, but they're really acting as autonomous groups.

The state has already been engaged in negotiations with this galaxy of non-state and sub-state actors. It forms a hybrid kind of government. It's messy, it's fluid, it's often illiberal, and in some cases it's profoundly distasteful if it involves warlords and war criminals. In other cases, it involves municipalities that are actually run reasonably well and trying to do the right thing, or a district commissioner or a mayor somewhere who's a reasonably legitimate leader.

We need to be thinking of Somalia as that kind of negotiated state, involving hybrid governance, formal and informal, in partnerships, for the foreseeable future. That is a major challenge, not so much for the Somalis. They know how to deal with this; they've been doing it for years now. It's a major challenge for international actors, because we have plug-in mechanisms for formal authorities. We struggle a lot more with the informal actors: how to deal with them, when to deal with them, and when not to deal with them. I would say that is generally a question to leave up to the Somalis. For us, it's important not to get in the way of those negotiated relationships that, as Dr. Spears said, do keep the country from in fact falling into anarchy.

There is order there. It's a very complex political order that requires an awful lot of energy from the Somalis to figure it out, day to day. But they are capable of doing it.

Mr. Peter Fragiskatos: Professor Spears, with that in mind, and building upon some of the work that you have done as well, to what extent is fragmentation a root cause of the bloodshed we have seen as whole in Somalia, but particularly in recent years? Societies can be fragmented, but they are not necessarily predisposed to conflict. Why is it that there has been so much conflict in Somalia? Is it because of this fragmentation of authority?

Professor Menkhaus talks about a galaxy of non-state actors. Is that the cause of the instability and the suffering we're seeing?

Dr. Ian Spears: I'm not sure. I would maybe reverse what you just said.

I think with fragmentation, inevitably there is going to be conflict. Political theorists have talked about this for a long time. In an anarchic situation, it's difficult to trust anybody.

I would maybe rephrase it, though, to say it may not be that fragmentation is the root cause as much as an effort to rebuild the state. I'm not sure I know the way forward here, but there is a case to be made that the problem isn't just the fragmentation, but trying to make a federal government that looks like, as you said earlier on, what we westerners expect a country to look like.

We assume that every state should have a federal government that should speak on behalf of all of its people. I'm not sure that's possible in such a massively decentralized state where there can be very profound suspicion of any effort to create any sort of federal government. As I outlined in my opening remarks, if you read, for instance, a series of International Crisis Group reports, each one will often say there is a need to make it more inclusive. In the next one, there would be another effort to be inclusive, but somebody would say they were left out, or be unhappy about being left out.

The problem may not be just the fragmentation, but maybe the effort to build a centralized state structure. The more resources you give it, the more desirable it becomes to control it, and, therefore, the more likely it is that people will contest it.

● (1355)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

For the last question, we're going to go to MP Sweet.

Mr. David Sweet (Flamborough—Glanbrook, CPC): Thank you very much, Chair. I appreciate that.

Gentlemen, thank you very much for the education.

Just because Professor Spears said he tended to be less optimistic, I'm going to pose this question to you, Mr. Menkhaus. The UN Secretary General said, in the not too distant past, that he's very confident that Somalia will be one of the great success stories.

What would be the basis of a statement like that? Do you believe that's possible?

Dr. Ken Menkhaus: I do believe it's possible, even though I'm quite pessimistic right now. I think Somalia is rolling towards a potential major crisis. In the long term, what I have found is that Somalis, as fragmented as they are politically, are more economically integrated nationally, regionally, and globally than ever before. The business partnerships that transcend clan lines and other fault lines have produced partnerships across the country. The entrepreneurship that Somalis show in navigating this incredibly challenging environment gives me reason for hope.

My vision of a Somalia that emerges from this crisis and becomes a success story is the moment when Somalis, maybe with international friends helping them, but mainly Somalis, learn how to harness all that positive energy they put into the private sector partnerships and entrepreneurialism into the public political arena.

Right now we have two very different logics there. Politics is highly dysfunctional and divisive, and economics is very integrative and creative. We just have to find a way to tap that energy positively.

Mr. David Sweet: I'm certainly a believer in the miracle of capitalism, so I appreciate that, although the situation on the ground there seems to be profoundly urgent. Most of this year they also teetered toward famine as well. Not only do we have the “galaxy” of other players, as they were called, but also the fact that existence or subsistence is sometimes a major issue in Somalia.

I may very well run out of time here, so the most important questions I wanted to ask both of you are these. I know these will be tough to answer, but for a country like Canada that has invested a lot in Somalia.... In fact, I understand from our briefing note that six ministers in the present Somali government are dual citizens of our country, I believe. What would be the most prudent steps we could take, as one of the players internationally, to make as substantive a difference as possible today in moving forward to get to that dream of a miracle of Somalia, Mr. Menkhaus?

● (1400)

Dr. Ken Menkhaus: To draw on a carrots and sticks analogy, I would say that we must have sticks to threaten with legal action the Somalia diaspora that are misbehaving and are part of the problem, then we need to focus on what carrots we have to incentivize good behaviour there.

Some of the best governance I've seen across Somalia, I would say, has tended to occur at the municipal level. That is where, like everywhere else in the world, the practical day day-to-day things happen, like who's going to pick up the trash and who's going to run the market, and is the school going to open? Municipal government tends to attract really practical, pragmatic, people-oriented leaders. Not always, as we've had some really bad mayors there, but we've also seen some really good ones.

I would not focus too many resources there, because once you start to flood an area with foreign aid, you end up attracting the wrong elements. But with very calibrated support to those local authorities, that could start to create islands of stability. We may end up seeing Somalia as really a league of city states, little by little, rebuilding itself with towns and cities, and increasingly governing themselves effectively.

Mr. David Sweet: Professor Spears.

Dr. Ian Spears: I would start by asking why it is so important to have a centralized government. Of course, there has to be government on some level, but I do worry that part of the problem is the idea that there has to be a strong central government. I think that creates lots of problems.

Maybe it is important to refrain from state building at the national level, and to allow Somalis to build local structures that are effective and where the stakes are lower. That does create problems of its own. How do you enforce compromise when everything is from the bottom up? But when you focus on low-level politics, the stakes are infinitely lower. There aren't the same resources involved, so politics don't matter as much.

I often tell my students that for democracy to work, people have to care, but they cannot care too much. Caring too much is when we start getting into trouble.

The other part of that, as has been pointed out a couple of times now, is that there are lots of Somali Canadians. I think they are an important asset and can probably do a better job than non-Somali Canadians. They'll know the territory and are more likely to be accepted there anyway. They're often enormously talented, skilled and entrepreneurial, and I think they offer the most promising avenue forward.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

I want to thank both of you for laying some very solid foundations today for our second session tomorrow. I want to thank you both for coming and testifying before us.

With that, it looks like we've run out of time.

I will adjourn this meeting.