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# Monitoring Study:

## British Media Portrayals of Somalia

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Newspapers monitored: All British national dailies, and the Evening Standard

Monitoring period: Mid 2006 - July 2009

## Introduction

This report compiles and analyses how Somalia has been portrayed in the British media. Across the board, the only consistent feature or element of context is violence.

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## Summary

- The subject of violence is never far away in anything written about Somalia, with a particular spur in interest provided by the US-backed Ethiopian invasion that began in December 2006.
- Somalia is placed firmly in the context of the 'War on Terror,' much to its cost.
- Few commentators provide historical perspective, which when they do, elucidates Somalia's strategic interest to the West.
- It is common to mention the US intervention in Somalia in 1993 as one of only a few historical facts written about Somalia.
- A few commentators describe Islam in Somalia, with the view that it is increasingly politicised - which has the effect of providing some context to the violence.
- A lot of comment was passed on the occasion of the US-backed Ethiopian invasion of Somalia and its consequences in late 2006 / 2007. The invasion was frequently cast in the context of the 'war on terror'.
- Although piracy has long been a problem in the waters surrounding Somalia, the bulk of media interest in it is far more recent.
- The subject of Somalia's future is an infrequent one, with commentators seemingly more content to describe and analyse the status quo.
- Somalia is most frequently compared to Gaza, Iraq and Zimbabwe.
- It is common to mention that Somalia has been without a functioning government since 1991.
- After piracy, the insurgency that grew in response to the US-backed Ethiopian invasion is the most popular subject - although Somalia is not a frequent subject in the media.
- From time to time, Somalia appears in lists along with various other countries, and it is instructive to learn what kind of company commentators think it keeps. It is almost never anything positive.
- The relationship between Britain and Somalia in varying contexts is quite a frequent topic. The most common angle is purported terrorist activities committed by Somalis in Britain.
- The representation of Somalia in the tabloids is worthy of consideration in a category of its own, as the themes - generally very suspicious - vary little.
- Somalia is almost universally considered by the tabloids to be a hotbed of terrorism.
- By far the most interesting Somalia-related topic for the tabloids is immigration, often conflated with asylum-seekers. Questioning particular Somalis' right to be in the UK is the main angle.
- Piracy became a popular subject in the tabloids in 2008.

## Summary (Arabic)

في أي شيء يكتب عن الصومال نجد مقاربة لموضوعة العنف، وجزء كبير من الاهتمام بهذا البلد يمكن اعتباره ناتجاً عن الدعم الأميركي للغزو الأثيوبي والذي بدأ في كانون الأول/نوفمبر من عام 2006.

وغالباً ما يوضع الصومال بالقوة ضمن سياق "الحرب على الإرهاب" وهو أمر ليس في مصلحته.

وقلة من المعلقين يقدمون منظورا تاريخيا للمسألة الصومالية، وعندما يفعلون ذلك فإنهم يضعون المصالح الإستراتيجية للغرب في الصومال ضمن هذا المنظور.

ومن الشائع الإشارة للتدخل الأميركي في الصومال عام 1993 على أنه أحد الوقائع التاريخية القليلة المكتوبة عن الصومال.

بعض المعلقين القلائل يقومون بتوصيف للإسلام في الصومال – من خلال الإشارة لكونه يزداد تسييساً – مما يعطي الانطباع بأن العنف مرتبط بهذا التسييس.

الكثير من التعليقات نشرت عن حادثة الغزو الأثيوبي المدعوم أميركياً على الصومال ونتائجه وتبعاته في أواخر 2006/2007. وكان الغزو في أحيان كثيرة يصنف في قالب "الحرب على الإرهاب".

ومع أن القرصنة في المياه المحيطة بالصومال قد شكّلت منذ زمن بعيد معضلة، إلا أن معظم وسائل الاعلام لم تعرها أي اهتمام حتى فترة قريبة.

إن موضوع مستقبل الصومال لا يكاد يذكر، ويبدو المعلقين في المقابل أكثر ميلاً لوصف وتحليل الوضع الراهن كما لو أنه هو الوضع الدائم.

ويقارن الصومال في أكثر الأحيان بغزة، العراق وزيمبابوي

كما أن من الشائع الإشارة إلى أن الصومال بدون حكومة فعالة عاملة منذ عام 1991.

وبعد القرصنة فإن التمرد الذي نما وازداد كرد على الغزو الأثيوبي المدعوم أميركياً أصبح موضوعاً شهيراً، مع أن الصومال ليس الموضوع المتكرر في وسائل الاعلام.

ومن وقت إلى آخر، يظهر الصومال ضمن تقارير إلى جانب بلدان أخرى متعددة، وكان ليفيد الجميع أن نعلم كيفية تصنيفه في اعتقاد المعلقين. إذ يكاد يكون من المستحيل ربط الصومال بأي شيء إيجابي!

العلاقة بين بريطانيا والصومال في سياقات مختلفة هي موضوع متكرر، والزوايا الأكثر شيوعاً هي الأنشطة الإرهابية المزعومة التي يقوم بها الصوماليين في بريطانيا.

إن تصوير وتمثيل الصومال في الصحف الشعبية يستحق أن يؤخذ في الاعتبار ضمن فئة خاصة، حيث أن المواضيع والأفكار – وهي مرببة جداً عموماً – لا تختلف عموماً في تناولها لهذا الموضوع.

فالصومال يكاد يُعتبر من قبل الصحف الشعبية مرقداً وبؤرة عالمياً للإرهاب.

قطعاً الموضوع الأكثر تشويقاً للصحف الشعبية عن الصومال هو الهجرة التي غالباً ما تخلط مع موضوع اللاجئين. ومناقشة حق بعض الصوماليين في التواجد في بريطانيا هو الزاوية الرئيسية.

أصبحت القرصنة موضوعاً رائجاً ومحبوباً في الصحف الشعبية عام 2008.

## Violence

The subject of violence is never far away in anything written about Somalia, with a particular spur in interest provided by the US-backed Ethiopian invasion that began in December 2006.

### 'War on Terror'

Somalia is placed firmly in the context of the 'War on Terror,' much to its cost. "Somalia has in the past 12 months been battered by drought, floods, even a plague of locusts. But its role in the United States' 'war on terror' has caused it the most pain," writes former Independent Africa correspondent Steve Bloomfield (22 November 2007).

### Historical Perspective

A few commentators note a more historical perspective, elucidating Somalia's strategic interest. Western intelligence chiefs belatedly realised that Somalia was fertile ground for al-Qaeda training camps in the mid-1990s," notes Daniel McGrory in the Times (10 January 2007).

They are "anxious to prevent extremist elements" from "exporting terror to their neighbours and beyond the continent," adds Daily Telegraph Africa correspondent Mike Pflanz (25 October 2007).

Somalia was "a handy client for both sides in the cold war" because of "state weakness, acute poverty, and strategic position on the Red Sea," writes former Guardian associate foreign editor Victoria Brittain (1 March 2007). When the Union of Islamic Courts was brought down by the US-backed Ethiopian invasion, "needless to say, it was all cast as a war against terrorism."

### Continued Relevance

Simon Tisdall, assistant editor and foreign affairs columnist at the Guardian, notes how seriously Somalia and terrorism are being taken by the US, reporting that the Pentagon created an Africa Command, "tasked with tracking down militant Islamists from Somalia to the Maghreb and the Sahel," which he takes to be "further escalation" of the 'war on terror' (24 October 2007).

However, Gideon Rachman, chief foreign affairs columnist at the Financial Times, suggests there is reason behind focus on Somalia in the 'war on terror' (11 September 2007):

"We have plenty of evidence that terrorism flourishes in failed states with large, lawless areas - such as Somalia."

The country is home to one of al-Qaeda's "main franchises," where "it is feared that instead of going to Pakistan for jihad training, they [radicalised Somalis living in Britain] are travelling to Somalia," writes Times defence editor Michael Evans (2 July 2008).

Times diplomatic correspondent Catherine Philp also notes a connection with Pakistan, writing that "the CIA has been tracking a growing influx into Yemen and Somalia of al-Qaeda fighters from Pakistan, where they are coming under growing pressure from US and Pakistani military action" (16 June 2009).

It is also common to mention the US intervention in Somalia in 1993, eg former Guardian associate foreign editor Victoria Brittain (1 March 2007) and Daily Telegraph executive foreign editor Con Coughlin (1 June 2007), who suggests that the killers of 18 US servicemen were trained in al-Qaeda camps in Sudan.

This intervention was such a disaster because of "the fractured command structure" that is run "not from the theatre but from Washington," notes Paddy Ashdown in the Guardian (19 July 2007).

## Islam

A few commentators describe Islam in Somalia, with the view that it is increasingly politicised - which has the effect of providing some context to the violence.

Richard Dowden, director of the Royal African Society, suggests in the Independent that "fundamentalists - influenced by Saudi Wahabists, whose Islam is at odds with Somalia's more tolerant Sufi tradition - tried to enforce Sharia law and codes of behaviour and dress" (11 January 2007).

Times Africa correspondent Jonathan Clayton also notes the change to the more tolerant Islam of Somalia (18 December 2006):

"Swahili Islam has always been a relaxed affair. Yet there are growing fears that the West's perceived crusade against Islam could ignite this area."

Guardian Africa correspondent Xan Rice reports on how militant Islam is being used (18 October 2007):

"Although Somalia is almost completely Muslim, the transitional government views mosques, particularly in Mogadishu, with suspicion. The Somali council of Islamic courts, which took over the capital last year before being defeated by invading Ethiopian forces, used clerics to help draw in supporters."

As to why this may be so, a Guardian editorial explains (10 January 2007):

"Somalia provided all the right conditions in which it [militant Islamism] could thrive: a traditional Islamic nation, a failed state, complete freedom in which to develop, a plethora of Muslim associations under which it could hide. And yet the jihadis have failed repeatedly to take hold. as the respected analysts of the international crisis group concluded, this is not because of foreign counterterrorism, but because of Somali resistance."

## US-Backed Ethiopian Invasion, 2006 / 2007

A lot of comment was passed on the occasion of the US-backed Ethiopian invasion of Somalia and its consequences in late 2006 / 2007, which included a US airstrike that killed 27. The invasion was frequently cast in the context of the 'war on terror'.

The Daily Telegraph later reported that one of those killed was a British national (4 June 2007). This fact, and others it lists, are described as "facets of a single story: a story that has dominated the news pages of this and every other quality newspaper since September 11, 2001. It is a truism to say that the world changed that day; but it is important to grasp how it changed. Terrorism, in its contemporary form, is a recent phenomenon."

An Independent editorial describes the 'war on terror' as ongoing (11 January 2007):

"This week's US raid on a suspected al-Qaida camp in Somalia shows that the 'war on terror' continues..."

The newspaper argues that the US sought to prove that it "could still project its military power on several fronts, despite Iraq, and that the US could, and would, go it alone militarily" (10 January 2007).

Daily Mail columnist Max Hastings disagrees with the efficacy of this point, arguing six months later that "so discredited has the Bush administration become, and so thread-bare is US moral authority in consequence, that this great nation is incapable of addressing...Somalia...with any prospect of imposing its will" (14 July 2007).

"Somalia has been ignored since the US pulled out 14 years ago," says an Independent editorial (3 January 2007). "Now the terror threat has caused the world to take a new interest."

To Telegraph executive foreign editor Con Coughlin, "the very fact that al-Qaeda terrorists and their Somali allies have been forced to undertake a hasty retreat from the Somali capital represents a significant victory in the coalition's attempts to keep the curse of militant Islam at bay" (10 January 2007). "Mogadishu is arguably the world's most lawless city."

Hastings said of the raid that "the past seven days have formed a typical week in the 'war on terror'" (13 January 2007). "Because Washington loves to freshen up the story, on Tuesday American AC-130 gunships shot an alleged al-Qaeda group in Somalia, killing 27 people."

Times associate editor Rosemary Righter suggests (4 January 2007):

"The peremptory ousting of the Islamic courts by Ethiopian forces is Somalia's first piece of potentially good news in two devastating decades."

However, a few days later in the same newspaper, associate editor Martin Fletcher begged to differ "as one of the few journalists who has visited Mogadishu recently" (8

January 2007). He argued that "the good news came in June. That is when the courts routed the warlords who had turned Somalia into the world's most anarchic state during a 15-year civil war that left a million dead." He added:

"The courts were less repressive than our Saudi Arabian friends. They publicly executed two murderers (a fraction of the 24 executions in Texas last year), and discouraged western dancing, music and films, but at least people could walk the streets without being robbed or killed."

As to why the invasion took place, he writes:

"Washington backed military intervention by Ethiopia's unsavoury regime because it regarded the courts as a new Taleban, and accused them of harbouring al-Qaeda terrorists. It would surely have done better to try engaging the courts."

Simon Tisdall, assistant editor and foreign affairs columnist at the Guardian, was more specific about the objective (10 January 2007):

"The principal aim of the US air strikes in southern Somalia appears to have been the elimination of three al-Qaida suspects held responsible for the 1998 bombing of American embassies in Kenya and Tanzania."

US President George Bush "doubtless hoped that a neat, self-contained air strike in Africa could remind Americans of the bit of the war on terror they like - hunting down the baddies," writes columnist Jonathan Freedland in the same newspaper (10 January 2007).

A Times editorial also refers to the embassy bombings as a primary aim (10 January 2007), adding:

"Washington cannot be blamed for seizing a rare chance to damage extremists in Somalia."

A Financial Times editorial was much less certain (4 January 2007):

"Washington claims the Union of Islamic Courts is allied to al-Qaeda. That looks as doubtful as the recent record of US intelligence."

The newspaper warns:

"Certainly, the Islamist alliance has its extremists. Their influence and audience is now set to grow exponentially...Moreover, [they] are not going away. Their retreat looks like the tactical prelude to guerrilla war."

Similarly, Telegraph diplomatic editor David Blair was not upbeat on the immediate future (10 January 2007):

"This operation was about as far from a surgical strike as can be imagined. It may have succeeded in eliminating terrorists responsible for the attacks



in East Africa. Or it may only have sown more hatred for America among Somalia's long-suffering population."

A Guardian editorial offers criteria for assessing the US strike (10 January 2007):

"The test of the US operation is not whether it killed the right people, but whether an attack generating mass casualties has advanced or squandered the opportunity to create a stable government in Mogadishu, backed by a multinational peacekeeping force."

### Ethiopian Angle

In answer to the question "Why has the Ethiopian prime minister, Meles Zenawi, sent his army into Somalia?", Cameron Duodo in the Guardian (5 January 2007) relates some historical context, unlike most commentators:

"Ethiopia fought a war against the Somali government in the late 1970s and early 80s, but there has been peace on the border for over a decade. So Ethiopia cannot point to internal safety concerns in allowing itself to be drawn into invading its neighbour."

He added that "the most explosive fuel will be the involvement of the US on the side of Ethiopia...the US objective is to safeguard access to the Red Sea for its oil tankers, and to prevent al-Qaida cells being nurtured in Somalia or in Ethiopia, which has a sizeable Muslim minority."

Richard Dowden, director of the Royal African Society, was another to provide context vis-à-vis Ethiopia, in the Independent (11 January 2007).

"Anyone who has watched Somalia over the years will see how Ethiopia has undermined or destroyed every other attempt to establish a national government."

### Aftermath of the Invasion

A lot of comment on violence in Somalia is descriptive. More comment hit the newspapers in around March / April 2007, which deals more with the aftermath and consequences of the invasion.

Salim Lone writes in the Guardian that "the military victory in January was swift, but the plan to install a client regime has quickly gone awry and a fierce insurgency is already under way" (12 March 2007).

He calls it "the most lawless war of our generation...no conflict in recent memory has witnessed such mounting layers of illegality as the current one in Somalia" (28 April 2007). Lone condemns the ignoring of UN resolutions by the US, writing that "in our new world order, the powerful decide which UN resolutions are passed, and whether they need to be honoured."

A US-sponsored UN resolution linking the Islamic Courts government to international terrorism and mandating a peacekeeping force "made the Security Council the aggressor and turned a clearly peaceful situation into war," he continues. Lone also criticises the Somali government, which "is busy crying 'al-Qaida' at every turn and offering lucrative deals to oil companies, in a bid to entice greater western support."

Daily Telegraph Africa correspondent Mike Pflanz writes on the growing insurgency: "Despite the support of hundreds of Ethiopian troops in Mogadishu, the government is suffering a rising number of attacks on its forces" as it "is struggling to contain a growing insurgency launched by remnants of the Islamism groups which controlled much of the country until they were driven from power in 2006" (21 April 2008).

"Once again, the residents of Mogadishu are cowering under the hammer blows of shellfire," writes a Guardian editorial (26 April 2007). "Once again, the capital is in the grip of warlords, clan leaders and foreign armies."

Sahal Abdulle gives an eyewitness account in the Guardian (27 April 2007):

"Anybody with the means to leave Mogadishu has already gone...There are burned bodies in burned-out houses. People are being buried by the roadside in shallow graves. There are so many wounded people; from babies to 90-year-olds...the smells and sounds are unbearable."

Times associate editor Martin Fletcher also describes what he saw (26 April 2007):

"Burnt-out slums, huge refugee encampments, hospitals overflowing with the sick and injured, and enough misery to last a lifetime...it is hard to overstate the suffering of this forgotten country."

Former Independent Africa correspondent Steve Bloomfield gives an indication of the scale of the displacement caused by the fighting (15 May 2007):

"Up to 400,000 people have fled the capital since the insurgency began at the end of January. A further 300,000 are believed to be displaced within the city. The fighting has made it difficult for aid agencies to reach those in need and the majority of those who fled Mogadishu are still without any humanitarian assistance."

Guardian Africa correspondent Xan Rice describes the flight of people from the violence, for whom Yemen is the best option (21 April 2008):

"Yemen might lie across a hazardous stretch of water, but its policy of offering Somalis automatic asylum makes it the most attractive destination...from January to early April about 14,500 migrants - mainly Somalis - crossed the gulf of Aden to Yemen. That represents more than half the number of people that made the journey in 2007."

He suggests that smuggling networks can help people move on to wealthier countries.

A Guardian editorial describes the political complexity that characterises the situation, suggesting that the Union of Islamic Courts lost credibility "by sending volunteers to their deaths against an Ethiopian army which was better-trained and -equipped" (26 April 2007). It continues:

"Having provoked the battle, the Islamists did not stand and fight. (...) Many fled into exile and won no affection among a population left to suffer the consequences."

It adds that the transitional government fares no better, in "doing the Islamic courts' propaganda work for them by terrorising the civilian population." Fletcher confirms this point (26 April 2007):

"In five days we spoke to scores of ordinary Somalis. Overwhelmingly they loathed a government they consider a puppet of the hated Ethiopians."

Telegraph diplomatic editor David Blair looks at the regional implications (26 April 2007):

"One sombre conclusion is unmistakable. A new regional war is now being fought in the horn of Africa, spreading refugees, terrorists and weapons into an arc from Eritrea to Kenya."

The invasion "has heightened Eritrean paranoia and hastened its hunt for friends," writes Guardian assistant editor and foreign affairs columnist Simon Tisdall (14 December 2007).

### Later Comment

Once the main body of comment in the first half of 2007 died down, political violence in Somalia became a subject that is sporadically written about, mostly in the broadsheets. The humanitarian situation is also an angle.

Former Independent Africa correspondent Steve Bloomfield reports on the presence of peacekeepers (28 July 2008):

"A threadbare AU force in Somalia faces attacks almost every time it ventures out of its compound... Western leaders had hoped that the African Union, launched in 2002, would begin to take control of peacekeeping missions on the continent. But its first two missions - to Darfur and Somalia - have not been successes... in Somalia, the fragile government wants un peacekeepers to replace the au mission."

The election of "a moderate Islamist as Somalia's president has given Barack Obama an early opportunity to redeem his pledge to forge new relationships with the Muslim world," writes Simon Tisdall, assistant editor and foreign affairs columnist at the Guardian (6 February 2009). He adds "humanitarian imperatives aside, basic US and Western security and commercial self-interest suggests the opportunity presented by Ahmed's election should be urgently seized."

## Piracy

Although piracy has long been a problem in the waters surrounding Somalia, the bulk of media interest in it is more recent, with three main bursts identifiable.

A few commentators wrote about piracy before the main burst of interest. Piracy "off the coast of Somalia is on the rise again," writes Guardian special correspondent Audrey Gillan, adding that "under the UIC, piracy declined" (12 June 2007).

Pirates "used the haven provided by Somalia's lack of leadership to defy 46 warships from 20 countries in the international coalition centred around America's Bahrain-based 5th fleet," writes Daily Telegraph foreign affairs correspondent Damien McElroy (29 November 2007).

From April 2008, interest in Somalia and piracy began to pick up a little. The International Maritime Bureau "lists the most dangerous coasts in the world as those of Somalia and Nigeria," reports John Lichfield in the Independent (7 April 2008). Last year, "there were 31 pirate attacks off Somalia, the most anywhere worldwide," reports Guardian Africa correspondent Xan Rice on the same day.

Towards the end of 2008, there was further interest in piracy, which "is the fastest growing industry in Somalia, especially in the northeast," writes Jamal Osma in the Times (12 December 2008). However, more context was being reported at this time.

Somali pirates "traditionally operate from speedboats, using automatic weapons and rocket launchers," reports Independent Africa correspondent Daniel Howden (18 November 2008). He adds:

"Without an effective government for nearly two decades, Somalia has descended into a violent anarchy, a vacuum exploited by commercial fishing operations, many from Europe, to cash in on tuna and unspoilt fishing grounds."

Piracy "reflects political trends in Somalia, including the resurgence of warlordism and Islamism since the collapse of the last effective national government in 1991," writes Guardian assistant editor and foreign affairs columnist Simon Tisdall (18 November 2008). He adds that "at this point in time, Somalia arguably constitutes the world's biggest single humanitarian disaster, and that's including Sudan, Zimbabwe and Congo." He attempts to explain the increase in interest in piracy:

"For many outsiders, media and politicians, chasing cut-throat pirates is sexier than helping starving Somalis."

Somali insurgents have "armed and equipped pirate gangs as part of a campaign to control the seas," writes Rob Crilly in the Times, adding that "this year the pirates have acquired an ideological dimension" (29 September 2008).

The next main burst of interest in piracy in Somalia came in April 2009, when a US crew was taken captive. Independent Africa correspondent Daniel Howden notes that

"the first pirate attack on a US vessel in history has pushed the disintegration of the failed state of Somalia up the global agenda" (14 April 2009).

The world "has been captivated by the high seas drama of Somalia's pirates," he writes, adding that "the human cost of the accelerating collapse of Somalia...attracts nothing like the global interest that surrounds Somali piracy and its threat to commerce" (17 April 2009).

Daniela Krosiak in the Independent agrees (17 April 2009):

"Living in the west, you could be forgiven for thinking that Somalia was little more than a dark and dangerous pirate theme park where American ship captains and US special forces go to gain their 15 minutes of fame."

Guardian New York correspondent Ed Pilkington notes the recent increase in piracy incidents (22 April 2009): "Figures from the International Maritime Bureau showed that incidents of piracy around the world had almost doubled in the first quarter of this year."

Telegraph Africa correspondent Mike Pflanz suggests that the piracy continues despite "an international naval force of more than 30 warships from a dozen countries including Britain, which is trying to deter pirates" (15 April 2009).

Jay Bahadur in the Times reports some ill-fated attempts to combat the problem (16 April 2009):

"Beginning in 1999, the government of Puntland launched a series of ill-fated attempts to establish an (official) regional coastguard, efforts that each time ended with the dissolution of the contracting company and the dismissal of its employees. The new generation of Somali pirates - better trained, more efficiently organised and possessing superior equipment - can be traced in part to these failed experiments."

He adds:

"A military solution alone is incapable of completely eradicating piracy off the Somali coast - certainly not one which is economically or politically feasible."

An Independent editorial also discusses causes and solutions (16 April 2009):

"The explosion of piracy off the Somali coast is a consequence of malign neglect from the international community."

The editorial notes the coincidence of the decline of the Somali fishing industry, adding that "the only lasting solution to the problem of Somalia's lawless waters will be to resuscitate the Somali state." It suggests that "in some respects, the pirates of Somalia are like the Taliban of the seas," but "Mogadishu needs to police its own coastline and arrest those mounting raids from its territory."

## Somalia's Future

The subject of Somalia's future is an infrequent one, with commentators seemingly more content to describe and analyse the status quo. However, some do tackle it.

"Only a process of dialogue and national reconciliation can save Somalia from the curse of recurrent chaos and violence," writes Louis Michel in the Independent, adding that "Somalia is not doomed. The Somali people are tired of war and violence. They crave peace and a chance to build decent livelihoods" (9 January 2007).

He also notes the international dimension:

"A concerted international approach to the crisis is needed more than ever...Our support will have to be rooted in a Somali-owned process, and we all have the collective responsibility to get it right."

Michel conditions regional stability on the success of peace in Somalia:

"The stability of the Horn of Africa can be ensured only if there is peace and security in Somalia."

An Independent editorial writes that "only with EU help will effective interventions be possible, not just in Sudan, but also in Somalia, where another au-mandated force is clearly needed" (30 January 2007).

Shadow Foreign Secretary William Hague agrees, writing in the Evening Standard that "the lack of African Union peacekeepers is being felt tragically in Somalia, where only a small fraction of the 7,000 called for by the un have been deployed" (8 June 2007).

Independent diplomatic editor Anne Penketh notes a success (17 June 2008):

"Saudi Arabia was instrumental in obtaining a UN-brokered ceasefire in Somalia."

## Descriptions of Somalia

It is useful to look at the way Somalia is described in the press. For example, according to Simon Tisdall, assistant editor and foreign affairs columnist at the Guardian (4 April 2007):

"In the league of failed states, Somalia is runaway leader...it is the hidden shame of the world."

### Gaza

Gaza is a common comparison. For example, Guardian columnist Jonathan Freedland writes that Gaza is close to collapse, which would see it "fully transform into what it already resembles: a lawless, failed state, a Somalia on Israel's southern border" (23 April 2007).

Gaza proves to be a popular comparison for Somalia, and the same newspaper's editorial suggests that "comparisons with murderous Mogadishu are not far-fetched" (18 May 2007).

Emma Williams in the Daily Telegraph agrees (6 June 2007):

"Gaza is degenerating into anarchy worthy of Somalia, breeding increasing radicalism."

Independent columnist Johann Hari suggests that the political chaos of Gaza is characterised by its enemies as "a Mogadishu on the Mediterranean" (18 June 2007) and a "Somalia-replica" (26 February 2007).

### Iraq

"Baghdad is certainly a safer place these days than Mogadishu," writes Independent Iraq correspondent Patrick Cockburn (23 June 2009), adding that "it is still more dangerous than Kabul" (30 June 2009).

### Zimbabwe

Evening Standard defence correspondent Robert Fox warns against non-intervention in Zimbabwe, suggesting that failure to act "will see it reduced to a permanent failed state (and rogue state) like Somalia" (24 June 2008).

### Government

It is common to mention that Somalia has been without a functioning government since 1991, as do, for example, Nick Hasell in the Times (2 April 2008), Mikhail Gorbachev in the Guardian (17 December 2007) and Africa correspondent Daniel Howden in the Independent (1 October 2008)

Somalia "has a federal government only in name, without ministries or offices, let alone an effective military," writes Times associate editor Rosemary Righter (4

January 2007). She suggests that "massive and above all immediate humanitarian aid is essential, along with engineers to repair shattered infrastructure, and administrative advice."

A Daily Telegraph editorial suggests further governance issues: "What little authority president Abdullahi Yusuf has over Somalia is rapidly evaporating" (14 December 2007). It adds that "the attempt to submit Somalia to a modicum of centralised control for the first time since 1991 seems doomed."

Somalia "is a country with high levels of internal insecurity in which westerners are targeted...last year a journalist and a nurse and her escort were shot dead," writes Roger Blitz in the Financial Times (27 June 2007). "Suicide-bombers and car-bombs have also featured in the past year."

## Other Areas

Mikhail Gorbachev in the Guardian describes variation within Somalia, suggesting that "northern Somalia...is relatively stable in a country beset by chaos and violence," but is also an area that "has increasingly become associated with rampant piracy off its coast" (17 December 2007).

Rob Crilly in the Times also notes some geographical variation, writing that "the semi-autonomous region of Puntland...once had a reputation for peace and stability. That has been lost in the past year as killings and kidnapping have increased" (27 November 2008). These assertions are echoed by Daily Telegraph Africa correspondent Mike Pflanz (30 October 2008).

"While the rest of Somalia has forced its way on to the world's news agenda as an anarchic, failed state and the spawning ground for a new age of piracy, the former British protectorate of Somaliland has been quietly pleading for international recognition," reports Independent Africa correspondent Daniel Howden (6 May 2009).

Howden adds that "the UK recognised Somaliland at independence in 1960 but London would have to upset powerful allies to renew that step. In private, people here know that Egypt remains the major hurdle. Cairo sees a powerful Somalia as a bulwark against Ethiopia in any future conflict over the vital resources of the Nile."

## Insurgency

The insurgency that grew in response to the US-backed Ethiopian invasion is a popular subject. Daily Telegraph Africa correspondent Mike Pflanz describes it as "an Iraq-style insurgency" (30 October 2008).

Rob Crilly provides a concise recent history of Somalia in the Times (18 October 2007):

"A coalition of Islamic courts took control of Mogadishu before spreading its influence across much of southern and central Somalia. They brought security to communities riven by 15 years of clan fighting but their brand



of Sharia raised concern among western governments and neighbouring countries that Somalia could become a haven for Islamic terrorists. The courts' reign ended when Ethiopia launched an air and ground assault in December [2006]. Since then Mogadishu has disintegrated into anarchy as insurgents and warlords resumed their battle for control of the city."

Guardian Africa correspondent Xan Rice suggests a regional dimension (7 September 2007): "Somalia has become a theatre for the proxy conflict between Ethiopia and Eritrea." The insurgency was "growing in scale and aggression, with insurgents openly taking on Ethiopian troops and African Union peacekeepers in the capital Mogadishu," writes Rice (19 November 2007).

He adds that "the Somali Council of Islamic Courts (SCIC)...had brought a measure of calm to Mogadishu for the first time in more than a decade," and that "remnants of the SCIC's military wing, the Shabaab, launched a low-scale insurgency...soon warlords, clan leaders and businessmen were aiding the resistance with money, arms and their own militias."

### Humanitarian Situation

"Somalia is facing the world's worst humanitarian disaster, with 3.2 million in danger of starvation and aid groups forced to pull out after their operatives became targets for militants," writes Independent Africa correspondent Daniel Howden (1 October 2008). "Pirates have taken food shipments."

Howden's predecessor Steve Bloomfield offers a few descriptions of Somalia: "a failed state and one of the world's worst humanitarian disasters" (13 August 2008), and "a byword for anarchy with no functioning central government" (11 June 2007). Bloomfield also notes the humanitarian aspect to Somalia (22 November 2007):

"United Nations officials now consider Somalia to be the worst humanitarian crisis in Africa, surpassing even Darfur in its horror and hopelessness."

He adds that "rampant insecurity has made Somalia a difficult place to deliver aid," having noted previously that "most humanitarian operations in Somalia are coordinated from the safety of Kenya's capital, Nairobi."

Bloomfield also describes the capital (19 January 2007):

"Once upon a time there was a beauty to Mogadishu. Now, it is a city utterly destroyed by war. Through the bullet-riddled walls, crumbled houses and crater-filled streets it is possible to see how far the city has fallen...for many of Mogadishu's estimated two million inhabitants, the threat of violence is just one of the many fears that stalk their lives."

Daily Telegraph Africa correspondent Mike Pflanz reports the difficulties in "the lives of almost half of the country's population, 3.25 million people, who are now in need of emergency aid after failed rains, drought and soaring food prices" (29 October 2008).

## Somalia as an Example

From time to time, Somalia appears in lists along with various other countries, and it is instructive to learn what kind of company commentators think it keeps. It is almost never anything positive. Those countries are:

Afghanistan, Bosnia, Chad, Congo, Eritrea, Haiti, Iraq, Kenya, Kosovo, Kuwait, Lebanon, Palestine, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, Sudan, Yemen and Zimbabwe.

These are their main characteristics:

- countries that are unable "to exercise sovereign control over their territory, ceding power and influence to terrorist groups such as al-Qaida" (Francis Fukuyama, the Guardian, 31 January 2007)
- countries in which the West thinks it can see Iranian ambitions (Azzam Tamimi, the Guardian, 7 March 2007)
- countries that are failed states that could serve as a possible "global base for al-Qaeda" (Daily Express columnist Frederick Forsyth, 9 March 2007)
- countries in which some are urging "moral intervention" (Times columnist and leader writer Tim Hames, 18 June 2007)
- countries the African Union fails to criticise for the "persecution and slaughter of their brethren" (Times associate editor Rosemary Righter, 9 July 2007)
- countries that demonstrate that refugee flows "can often contribute to serious regional instability" (Tom Porteous, the Independent, 6 March 2007)
- countries in which the West's "constant meddling has done nothing but harm" (Independent comments editor Adrian Hamilton, 24 April 2008)
- countries in which "US-led wars on behalf of Muslim populations...hardly won Islamist approbation" (Guardian columnist Timothy Garton Ash, 10 June 2008)
- countries which "face economic and political meltdown [and are] emerging as bases for terrorism" (Daily Telegraph security correspondent Duncan Gardham, 7 January 2009)
- countries that have suffered clandestine US raids since 2004 (Guardian assistant editor and foreign affairs columnist Simon Tisdall, 11 November 2008)
- scenes of "the greatest US foreign policy disasters over the last generation" (Independent Iraq correspondent Patrick Cockburn, 26 February 2009)
- countries that have seen "murderous rampages" (Guardian columnist Simon Jenkins, 18 June 2009)

## Somalia & Britain

The relationship between Britain and Somalia in varying contexts is quite a frequent topic. The most common angle is purported terrorist activities committed by Somalis in Britain.

"The authorities - the home office, immigration officials, the police and security service - have been so slow to recognise the likely effect of allowing into the country so many boys and men who have been brutalised in a series of terrible conflicts around the world, from Somalia to former Yugoslavia," writes Independent columnist Joan Smith (11 July 2007). She notes that "there is anecdotal evidence that Somali gangs are fighting each other to control the supply of drugs in north-west London."

Smith provides as evidence the fact that two Somali men were convicted of terrorist offence in July 2007, something echoed by a Daily Telegraph editorial (14 December 2007), leading it to conclude:

"Violent disorder in the horn of Africa is nearer than we think."

Jonathan Rugman agrees in the Times (16 February 2009):

"Most Somalis in Britain entered the country as asylum-seekers within the past 20 years."

Jonathan Evans in the Telegraph also notes a connection with terrorism (6 November 2007):

"There is no doubt that there is training activity and terrorist planning in east Africa - particularly in Somalia - which is focused on the UK."

Daniel McGrory in the Times notes a connection the other way involving the insurgency in Somalia (10 January 2007):

"A number of young people from Somali families living in Britain are among the international brigade who have volunteered to fight with the country's Islamic militia."

He adds that "with British passports it was easy for militants to fly into Kenya without a visa and cross the porous borders with Somalia."

## British Foreign Policy

Tom Porteous, London director of Human Rights Watch, connects Britain and Somalia via current foreign policy in the Independent (23 April 2008):

"The British government consistently downplays both the gravity of the crisis in Somalia and the role of Ethiopian forces there...The reasons for Britain's failure to speak out against Ethiopia's abuses are no secret. Ethiopia is one of the largest recipients of UK aid in Africa and is judged to be doing well in reducing poverty. Furthermore, Ethiopia is seen by the UK and the United States as a crucial regional ally in counter-terrorism."

Rob Crilly continues the theme in the Times, writing that "millions of pounds of British taxpayers' money is being used to support a government in Somalia accused of human rights abuses and war crimes" (2 June 2008).

He adds that "the British department for international development (DFID) is the second-largest donor - behind the European Commission - to UN programmes supporting the transitional federal government, having committed £11 million to date."

However, not all are such disheartening stories - there is one exception. Al Jazeera English correspondent Rageh Omaar notes in the Daily Mail that when his family immigrated from Somalia in 1973, "the streets of Britain were paved with gold" (12 April 2008).

He adds that "my parents also stressed my Somali heritage and identity. We spoke Somali at home, ate Somali food and went there in the holidays. This gave me a pride in my roots and a confidence to get on with people from all backgrounds."

## Tabloids

The representation of Somalia in the tabloids is worthy of consideration in a category of its own, as the themes - generally very suspicious - vary little.

### Islam

Michael Burleigh in the Daily Mail describes Somalia as "a failed state, in which Islamist extremists are endeavouring to take over, Saudi-style religious police - the mutawiuun - now patrol the streets" (30 October 2007).

Mail columnist Melanie Phillips mentions an example of Sharia law being enforced in Britain in which "a gang of Somali youths...were allowed to go free after paying compensation to a teenager they had stabbed - with the police and courts apparently looking the other way" (11 February 2008). The Daily Express also noted this story with alarm (9 February 2008).

### Terrorism

Somalia is almost universally considered by the tabloids to be a hotbed of terrorism. When America conducted an airstrike against Somalia in January 2007, a Sun editorial suggested that "every civilised nation should applaud" because Somalia "is the failed state where Osama bin Laden first declared war on the west in the 1990s" (10 January 2007).

Al-Qaeda "needs at least one global base. Any 'failed state' will do," writes Daily Express columnist Frederick Forsyth (9 March 2007). He lists Somalia, Iraq, Eritrea, Sudan and Chad as possibilities.

A Daily Star editorial suggests that "it's not just Iraq and Pakistan but countries like Somalia and Algeria where hatred towards Britain is festering" (6 November 2007).

### Immigrants

By far the most interesting Somalia-related topic for the tabloids is immigration, often conflated with asylum-seekers. Questioning particular Somalis' right to be in the UK is the main angle.

The authorities "have been trying for five months to persuade [ex-Guantanamo inmate] Ciise to return to Somalia," writes a Sun editorial (1 April 2009), while a Daily Express editorial asks (2 April 2009): "What's the betting he will be allowed to stay?"

Another example is "failed asylum-seeker Sarmandi Sayid [who] sneaked into Britain illegally with a fake passport" (9 February 2009). The newspaper's solution, not for the first time, is to "drop him back home in Somalia by parachute."

A Daily Mail editorial writes that "39 per cent of migrants from Somalia are on income support, while 80 per cent live in subsidised social housing" (1 October 2007).

Richard Littlejohn envisages a government-led and excessively politically correct future in which his weekly column in the Mail would be "handed over to a Somali woman," because "in Labour's multiculti la-la land, being white and British is now officially a sacking offence" (2 March 2007).

A Sun editorial writes that "the four 21/7 terrorists are despicable thugs who deserve no mercy...these depraved plotters came here from Somalia, Eritrea and Ethiopia. Why can't we drop them back where they came from...with or without a parachute?" (10 July 2007)

The newspaper's political editor Trevor Kavanagh spells out his concerns (3 December 2007):

"Did you know there are more Somalis in Britain - up to 500,000 - than anywhere else on earth except Somalia? And eight out of ten are unemployed. This is not a racist point...but quite a few young Somalis are a worry to our security services."

He adds:

"Somalis have imported a particularly vicious knife culture to Britain."

An Express editorial says it "has pursued a long and at times lonely crusade over the issue of Britain's immigrant crime wave," such as "violent assaults perpetrated by Somalis" (20 September 2007). An example it gives is the murder of a teenager in London, which it says is "the latest in a growing line of young Somalis to be convicted of a brutal crime in this country" (3 July 2007).

The Express suggests that "it does not take a genius to realise that large influxes of young men from such war-torn countries as Somalia and Angola are not good news for law and order" (2 May 2007). In fact, the newspaper goes so far as to say (20 December 2006):

"Somalia is so dangerous precisely because it is full of depraved people."

The Express has another example (7 November 2008):

"Hadija Khalib arrived in this country 10 years ago from Somalia and was granted refugee status. Yet the reward she gave the British public for providing her with sanctuary was to swindle them out of GBP30,000 in benefit payments."

A Mail editorial in the Daily Mail notes that the Somali killer of a British WPC fled Britain quickly for Somalia (20 December 2006), and asks:

"Isn't it bitterly ironic that this is the very country the home office ruled 'too dangerous' to deport him to, after Jama finished a fifth prison term in the UK?"

Sun deputy editor and columnist Fergus Shanahan wonders what Somalis are doing in Britain in the first place, given that Somalia was "never part of the old commonwealth or old British empire. Yet we have 356 Somalis [in British jails]" (26 October 2007). He refers to Somalia as "a war-torn hellhole" (1 April 2008).

## Piracy

Piracy became a popular subject in the tabloids in 2008. "As piracy once again flourishes and threatens shipping off Somalia, the UN does nothing," complains Norman Tebbit in the Daily Mail (4 June 2008).

The Royal Navy "could do with some decent PR after...news that its personnel patrolling the waters off Somalia have been warned not to breach the human rights of any pirates they capture," thinks Mail columnist Peter McKay (2 June 2008). Sun columnist David Blunkett notes that this did not bother the French, who landed their helicopters in "lawless Somalia" to deal with pirates (16 April 2008).

A Sun editorial thinks that "the nerve of the Somali super-tanker pirates is breathtaking" (19 November 2008). The newspaper offers "a simple solution - a couple of well-aimed tomahawk cruise missiles into the pirates' HQ in Somalia."

Daily Express columnist Frederick Forsyth, as is uniformly the case in the tabloids, advocates an armed response as a deterrent to future attacks (17 April 2009):

"The pirates seek easy money not death. If attacking a merchantman was a virtual guarantee of an early meeting with Allah they would find alternative pickings."

This echoes an earlier editorial in the same newspaper (21 November 2008):

"Sink the 10th Somali pirate ship with all hands and they will find another way to earn a crust."

## BBC

The BBC comes under fire from the tabloids in connection with Somalia. In one example, the Corporation reworked and 'modernised' the nativity play, such that Daily Mail columnist Amanda Platell complains that "Joseph appears to be a Somali hit-man" (8 December 2007).

The play "features Joseph as a Somalia asylum seeker," writes Daily Express columnist Leo McKinstry (10 December 2007). He says it is "fallacious" to believe that "Somalis are badly treated. No group of migrants has received more support from the British taxpayer, with 80 percent jobless and living in social housing. It is because of Christianity that so many of them want to come and live here."

## Miscellaneous

A number of miscellaneous topics crop up from time to time. For journalists, "some countries, such as Somalia, are often too dangerous to work in," writes Simon Tisdall, assistant editor and foreign affairs columnist at the Guardian (3 February 2009).

Independent Africa correspondent Daniel Howden agrees (27 November 2008):

"Somalia has become one of the most difficult countries in the world for journalists."

He notes that this is also true for locals:

"Somali reporters are frequently targeted by Islamic insurgents, criminal gangs, foreign occupying troops and militia connected to the transitional government as the groups vie for power in the country. Foreign journalists and international staff from NGOs rarely enter the country now and have to hire teams of armed security men to do so."

Independent Iraq correspondent Patrick Cockburn reports evidence of this (26 February 2007):

"Martin Adler, the brave freelance Swedish cameraman was shot in the back by a man in a crowd in Mogadishu on 23 June last year."

Times associate editor Martin Fletcher notes the death of Somali journalist Ali Iman Sharmarke, founder of the Hornafrik radio and TV station (13 August 2007):

"He was the latest victim of a string of attacks on somali journalists trying to chronicle their country's slide back into anarchy."

Another occasional topic is rape. Independent diplomatic editor Anne Penketh writes that "the systematic use of rape has been documented in...Somalia" (13 August 2007), while Rahila Gupta in the Guardian notes that "women get raped even when they're covered from head to foot - think of Sudan or Somalia" (8 July 2009).

In the 21st century, "everything and everyone is connected - whether climate change or violence in Somalia, which can through myriad paths contribute to terror attacks in London," writes Carne Ross in the Guardian (19 February 2007).

Phil Shiner notes in the Guardian that when Canadian troops abused a prisoner in Somalia in the 1990s, "the result was a five-year public inquiry and spring-clean of the military justice system" (23 April 2007).

Minneapolis "boasts the highest percentage of immigrant Somalis in the world outside of London," says Evening Standard columnist Janine di Giovanni (30 November 2007).