

**Speech of His Excellency Dr. Abdusalam H. Omer
Minister of Foreign Affairs and Investment Promotion
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Excellencies, distinguished guests and Ladies and Gentleman,

I am honoured to be here in my hometown of Washington to be speaking to you all about a country that I serve and love dearly.

I want to extend a special thanks to the organisers of this event and to the Atlantic Council leadership for inviting me to deliver this lecture today and for having the confidence that I will not bore its members to death (laugh). I will try my absolute best to honour this faith in my oratory skills.

I fully understand the influence, reach and national and international significance of the Atlantic Council as an organisation that promotes constructive leadership and engagement in international affairs across the World. It is therefore, an even greater privilege to be contributing in my small way to the sharing of knowledge at this event.

I am very proud to be from Somalia as it is a place of magnificent beauty, with wonderful people and many resources. It may seem impossible to believe now but Somalia was once a nation at the forefront of development after independence in 1960. Our governmental and private institutions were strong, well managed and able to cope with the difficult diplomatic balancing acts during the cold war.

The Somali armed forces, civil service and public institutions functioned and were effective at delivering public services, maintaining law and order as well as encouraging active citizenship. Somalia was one of the founding members of the African Union, The Organisation of Islamic Conference (OIC), a valuable member of the Arab League and a staunch campaigner against Apartheid in South Africa and colonisation and injustice in the continent and wider world.

Somalia before the civil war was one of happiness, community and actual progress and social mobility. Despite all our past and current challenges, the happiness of the Somali people has been verified by the recent UN World Happiness Report as Somalia was ranked first among Sub-Saharan African countries.

Somalia then was a place where a poor farmer's son or daughter could dream of becoming someone in any field they wished. The tribalism that overpowers and informs our internal politics today and which had been the basis of some of the most violent periods in Somali history since the collapse of the state in 1991 was not employed as an instrument of politics in a sinister way. Somehow, everything then was mitigated and overlooked by the hope of Somali unity and collective prosperity. There was genuine commitment to nationhood and internationalism within Somalia society.

Since the beginning of the Somali civil war and the collapse of the State in 1991, Somalia had experienced one of the most traumatic, violent and disastrous civil wars in modern history. The scars of this war are still visible on the architecture and landscape of the nation's capital Mogadishu and still fresh in the minds of those who had lived through it.

Somalia's insecurity was born out of poor governance and the near two decade civil war that ravaged the nation, its people, institutions and resources, most obvious of which today is its human capital scattered across the world.

The impact of Somalia's national collapse and the violence that followed enormously impacted on our regional neighbours but the first and last victims of this instability and insecurity have been, and remain, the Somali people and nation. Understanding this only too well, security is our government's number one, two and three priority. It is crucial to absolutely everything else we endeavour to achieve. Without security there cannot and will not be the peaceful, progressive and prosperous Somalia all of us dream of.

Our government is hoping to make history this year by turning a fragile state which today is alive with hope and expectation into a democratic country. The history of violence, clan mistrust and mass brain drain can make this task more difficult but our resolve to change Somalia for the better is iron cast.

Wars are not uncommon on the African continent and increasingly within the Middle East since the Arab Spring. It is noteworthy to remember that great civilisations, nations and regional groupings throughout history were born out of struggle including America and the European Union.

One of the fundamental foundations of the now politically stable and socially integrated European Union, arguably the most integrated regional block, is the promise of "Never again" returning to war. Therefore, what is important is that while wars occur, the real lessons to take from it are those to enhance future peace, security, stability and regional integration. While peace almost always seems fragile, its importance can never be understated as so much depends on it for us and the rest of the world.

We as a government understand the importance of and are committed to winning the war against terrorism both at home and internationally. The Somali National Army, in conjunction with AMISOM troops from our brothers in East Africa namely Djibouti, Ethiopia, Kenya, Uganda and Burundi, have ensured there is no ungoverned space in Somalia.

Somalia is in fact one of the few countries which fought its way back out of conflict while others in the region, like Yemen, begin to enter the violent cycle. Somalia is also one of the few nations defeating terrorism on its soil with a fraction of the budget spent on other places experiencing some similar challenges like Afghanistan and Iraq. Our fight against transnational terrorism is truly low cost and high impact except for the human loss, which cannot be quantified.

The Somali government's strategic objective is establishing a unified, capable, and accountable and rights based Somali Federal security institutions. These will operate in an environment of democratic freedom and provide safety and security for its citizens. This is no longer an idea on a drawing board in some distant office: It is a reality slowly taking shape right at home.

Our Soldier's and people are fighting courageously alongside AMISOM troops to protect their fellow countrymen from AlShabaab's pointless violence and tyranny. Our police force

on daily basis is conducting door to door and car by car searches on the main roads and residential areas in an effort to protect innocent lives, private property and restore confidence in the apparatus of our strengthening State on the part of our people and economy.

Our successes against the terrorists are very clear: AlShabaab is weakened and control no fixed territory. Their ideology is shunned by the wider population and some of their key leaders have been killed recently. It is increasingly impossible for them to launch a conventional war or military assault of any significance in any region like they used to thanks to the efforts of the Somali National Army and AMISOM.

There are news reports and discussions in the media about AlShabaab's resurgence. I can honestly say there is no such thing as we cannot define opportunism and desperation after failure as resurgence. What AlShabaab is most skilled in is taking innocent lives and the only increase has been in their lack of respect for the sanctity of human life.

AlShabaab's opportunistic attacks will also lessen as the Somali security forces increase in number and capacity. In the end, the only long term solution for maintaining peace and security in Somalia is a well-resourced security apparatus including the national army and police force. We remain grateful to all our partners in the region and internationally including the USA, for their continued support in the achievement of this goal.

AlShabaab's strategy now is simply to run and hide in the population and carry out desperate and opportunistic attacks against innocent civilians and government employees. This only further demonstrates their moral and ideological bankruptcy. While the results of their mindless and criminal assassinations have been horrifying, these attacks are occurring in smaller numbers within Somalia. Indeed, from all this evidence, it is credible to argue, that Somalia is finally turning the corner towards security and stability.

Somalia and the entire Horn of Africa regions security is challenged by the worsening security and political situation in Yemen. Somalia has very deep and historical roots with Yemen but we remain concerned by the spill over of the conflict into Somalia.

Foreign Fighters are a dangerous phenomenon who are adding further fuel to the fire. With their various skills, including language and technology and their thirst for violence, we should all be worried by those who cross borders to fight for causes which they do not fully understand or fraudulently represent and mislead others into.

Foreign Fighters are already a concern in Somalia with 85% of recent suicide bombers being in this category and most of the terrorist's plots we intercept involve them at all stages.

The challenge for us is that we have an enormous and overwhelmingly productive and supportive Diaspora who have kept our nation going and continue to keep it going today.

However, there are a few among these who have and still desire to return to undertake terrorist acts within our borders and the region. To overcome this deadly challenge, the Somali Government is cooperating closely with partner nations like our neighbours, the European Union, Gulf States and the USA to detect, monitor and disrupt these plotters before they fulfil their goals both in Somalia and other nations.

Yemen's conflict has turned the tables with Somalia receiving thousands of refugees from Yemen seeking asylum and refuge from the violence of their nation. The Government of the

Federal Republic of Somalia, despite our limited resources, is playing its role, just like Yemen did for us in our hour of needs, by welcoming the refugees.

However, the urgent question for us is who is getting off the boats in Somalia. Are there terrorists hiding among the refugees waiting to establish cells and cause damage? This is a question we must answer to sustain and advance Somalia's and the wider Horn of Africa region's peace and stability.

Security today is an international issue. No country, no matter how powerful can insulate itself from it or just simply say it is not in my backyard. Due to technological advancement, fluid borders, increasing and continuing conflicts in the Middle East and poor governance in many instances, the world has become more dangerous than ever before.

Who would have thought in the space of a month that terrorist cells would be hit Ankara and Paris? Who would have thought the world's most famous cities would all be on high alert with armed uniformed officers strategically placed in public spaces like never before?

Security and the nature of the threat have evolved and so must Governments. How do you stop a young man or woman who wakes up one morning and decides to kill themselves and many other innocent people? How?

This is a question we must study and approach from different angles and not always pretend to know the answer to or prescribe a hasty cure for.

We must learn from the terrorist's operational model especially in Intelligence and resource sharing, getting our message of hope across as well as cross border institution-to-institution cooperation.

Further, as foreign fighters in Somalia are now from the immediate region and the West and causing havoc with their skills and by recruiting from their native states, it is important to also re-evaluate integration policies and practices on the home fronts in these countries.

Islam is a religion truly committed to peace, human solidarity and tolerance like all other religions. Somalis are Muslims and therefore defined by all these noble characteristics.

We must always separate the beautiful Islamic religion from those who forcibly misinterpret it to mislead others to commit the greatest sin against mankind in the teachings of Islam.

Terrorists aggressively sell a divisive message of them and us. Yet they readily bomb mosques during Friday prayers in order to kill the maximum number of innocent worshippers. The only battle is between their fraudulence and cowardly violence and our commitment to progress and peace.

I am proud to share with you that our Government has completed its first drafted Foreign Policy since independence. Many of you at the Atlantic Council through your excellent and diverse research of International Affairs are aware of the enormous concerns and aspirations a document like this must contain. I am sure through practice you will also understand the difficulties of implementing it in an age of multi-level governance, 24 hour media, dwindling resources and ongoing consultations regarding the future of our world in the form of the security, economics and climate change discussions.

Somalia's Foreign Policy focuses on Peace and Security, the Somali Diaspora, Socio-economic Development, sustainable environment and cultural promotion.

The overall goal of this policy is to once again create a Somalia positively contributing to its own progress and that of the region and the wider world in all fields and forms.

For a post conflict nation like Somalia Peace and security will remain a subject of great attention until the process of healing and development is completed. However, bringing this lasting change requires more than just an obsession with conventional security and a greater focus on its enablers.

Sustaining security and stability in Somalia requires more than the conventional weapons of war. Opportunities for alternative livelihoods and economic rebuilding and growth are equally as important as the physical security. Education, skills and jobs are partner tools for ensuring security and stability to bring about lasting peace and change.

Social Exclusion and Poverty increases the risk of a return to war in all post conflict societies. The young exploited recruits, the most vulnerable in Somali society today, are always easy targets and aimlessly around to wreak havoc and die for any side willing to cover their most basic of needs as a result of poverty and lack of alternative livelihoods.

In the words of one reformed former youth recruit who participated in terrorist activities but has since attended a government de-radicalisation program, "What did we have to lose? We got food and money for what we did."

We collectively have to do more to win back the hearts and minds of our youth through the provisions of public services and support if sustainable security, peace and stability are to be possible. The nation building process has to also have their needs and aspirations at its heart as they will inherit the privilege and burden of continuing with their forefather's legacies.

Our Foreign Policy clearly recognises that the traditional aid model has done all it could in Somalia. To truly consolidate the current security and socio-economic gains, Somalia will need investment to spearhead further economic growth.

I am absolutely convinced that, while there are no silver bullets in international development and security, investment is the tip of the spear to weakening many of the obstacles Somalia and its people face today. As such, we placed Investment Promotion at the heart of our Foreign Policy.

Somalia is blessed with untapped natural resources, which, with limited investment in most cases, can both transform Somalia's economic future and create wealth for investors. It is a true land of hope and opportunity just like America is.

Somalia has the longest coast in Africa, one of the most reliable broadband in the Horn of Africa, 8.9 million hectares of arable land, a young and increasingly educated workforce and is a world leader in the livestock trade. In addition, Somalia has one of the best wind and sun radiation in the world.

According to the IMF, the economy grew by 3.7% in 2014 and GDP rose by 6.5%. This is forecasted to continue on this upwards trajectory for the foreseeable future as the country stabilizes and the many of the estimated 2 million Diaspora returns to invest and resettle in their motherland.

With its enormous untapped resources mentioned earlier, Somalia has the potential to be a world leader in Renewable energy, fishing, agriculture, ICT and livestock. Furthermore, with its strategic location in the Gulf of Aden, it has the potential to return to its former role as a gateway of trade, commerce and logistics by connecting lucrative markets in the Middle and Far East as well as land locked neighboring States with over hundreds of millions of ready customers.

Somalia's economic potential is boundless. It is therefore a tragedy that we are among the poorest societies in the world. This is something our Government is committed to addressing to empower our people, nation and enrich our region and the wider world. We therefore welcome all investors to Somalia where I am certain they can make enormous profits while helping to rebuild our country.

Democracy, dialogue and development are crucial to our State building goals. We know better than anyone those without a stake in the existing order are vulnerable to manipulation by those who advocate a perverse political vision based on violence and destruction.

Somali society's historical clan structures inflamed the near 20 year civil war and without inclusive politics, can hold our democratisation process hostage if we do not succeed in heralding in a new age of political inclusivity and opportunity.

This process has already begun as we Somalis have already created Regional Federal States. In addition, we have chosen a model to elect our Parliament, President and the Lower and Upper House of Parliament this year.

This historic agreement on whose implementation planning our government is working on now, is one that will truly come to symbolise a new Somalia moving forward towards democracy, stability and progress.

Democracy has many challenges especially in post conflict societies with limited experiences of it like Somalia. However, the fact that we agreed on an election model and are determined to see it through is a great success.

This election model, while not yet based on the traditional one person one vote, is more inclusive than the one in 2012 as it will include the voices of all the representatives of the Somali people, including those from traditionally marginalised groups and in larger numbers. We are determined in Somalia to move forward together in the direction of peace and progress through democratic ideals and genuine inclusiveness to ensure we never return to the dark past.

Democracy is not easy. As you know in America it is a long, difficult and compromising process which itself is not perfect. Recent European elections have produced many coalition governments and the simple majority voting and winner takes all mentality appears to be

have been shaken. This is the best illustration that while democratic ideals are precious, its implementation is often messy and requires compromise.

We in Somalia are experiencing the difficulty of the democratisation process. Our Government is undertaking the kind of transformative political and socio-economic reforms which many developing and developed nations have struggled with for decades if not centuries in just 4 years. It is not all-simple, straightforward textbook rational policy making. In most cases we are muddling through as we are juggling all the state building goals, with our mandate to secure the peace and rebuild and capacitate public institutions while developing the economy.

As is clear, our Government is flying, fuelling and trying to safely land the plane with limited fuel. However, I can assure you all we are burning many midnight candles to ensure the plane lands safely and our nation goes forward together and permanently.

Despite my grey hairs, I am like many of us in this room today, a student of an evolving world riddled with questions and a search for solutions to all major issues.

In my humble opinion, as I am surrounded by imminent scholars and seasoned practitioners, on all matters of development and international affairs such as security, economic development and environment, there is no one size that fits all. Each situation is unique and each solution must be tailored and, where it exists, transferred to where it is required and best fits.

This flexibility and plurality will generate honest discussion and certainly involve those who matter most, the people and beneficiaries, in all processes.

Somalia has truly turned the corner and is once again returning to the community of nations with a strong and visionary ambition to play a meaningful role. Somalia is no longer the problem as we in fact through our difficult experiences have many answers to contribute to many pertinent international discussions.

In Somalia, whether it is the planned elections, regional state formation process or security and economic development, we are putting the people at the centre of all conversations.

This we are confident will herald in the new peaceful, democratic, progressive and prosperous Somalia once again playing its role in the world we seek to build as a Government.

Thank you.