



ZMO-Kolloquium 2011/2012

Not all about Islam: Current Political Conflicts in Africa, the Middle East and Asia

Thursday, October 27th, 2011, 6 pm

The Rise (and Fall?) of Al Shabaab: How Militant Islamism, the War Against Terror and Famine in Somalia are Related

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Venue:

Zentrum Moderner Orient
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Al Shabaab (The Youth) developed from a small terror cell in 2003/2004 into the dominant military force in southern and central Somalia in 2009/2010 that increasingly took over government-functions. It combined a militant Islamist ideology with a terror strategy against its enemies and some form of stable political and legal order and even administration at the local level. The presentation argues that the evolution of Al Shabaab is closely related to the (counter-) terrorism strategies of external and internal actors on Somali soil. The main external actors are Ethiopia and the USA. Additionally Eritrea got involved, engaging Ethiopia in a kind of 'proxy-war' in Somalia by supporting the militant Islamists. Al Qaida uses the situation in Somalia to wage a 'propaganda war', without much material involvement. The African Union (AU) sent its AMISOM troop to protect the TFG and is currently the main opponent of Al Shabaab on the ground. The internal political actors opposing Al Shabaab are several warlords and the Transitional Federal Government (TFG) that enjoys international recognition but only little legitimacy and power inside Somalia. The international community including aid organisations became increasingly involved in the fighting in Somalia that escalated after the Ethiopian military intervention end of 2006 and is still ongoing. The UN and the EU unconditionally support the TFG and tolerate the military interventions of Addis Ababa and Washington. They also finance the AMISOM presence in Somalia. Aid was subjected to political aims when the USA decreed that none of its money earmarked for humanitarian purposes must benefit 'terrorists' in Somalia, which effectively excluded large parts of southern and central Somalia under Al Shabaab control from aid operations. This, together with ongoing fighting, displacement and the 'hard-headedness' of the Al Shabaab leadership with regard to 'Western' aid caused a periodical drought to escalate into famine in early 2011. While Al Shabaab lost ground in Mogadishu in 2011 and the famine undermined its recruitment basis in parts of southern Somalia, the movement is far from defeated. It is likely to continue to conduct terror attacks inside and around Somalia. The presentation challenges dominant external views on Somalia as anarchic and 'ungoverned' space that 'inevitably' became the home of 'Taliban-like' militant Islamists. It re-assesses Somalia's protracted state failure and the rise of Al Shabaab as at least co-produced by external interventions. In that way, counter-terrorism co-produced terrorism.

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