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## **Mohamed seeks public support for Somalia**

### **Discusses terrorism, piracy during visit**

By **Stephen T. Watson**

NEWS STAFF REPORTER

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The threat of piracy in the waters off the Somali coast is only growing worse, and the recent deaths of four American hostages signaled a dangerous shift in this lucrative trade.

Somalia's prime minister, a Grand Island resident on leave from his job with New York State, argues the root causes of the piracy problem — and the path to a solution — are found on shore.

Mohamed A. Mohamed returned to the United States last week to seek international support for Somalia's efforts to fight pirates and terrorists and construct a functioning government.

“We are fighting two-front wars, which is piracy and terrorism. And, of course, we can not do it alone. We need international collaboration and international cooperation,” Mohamed said in an interview in a downtown Buffalo hotel, part of a media campaign intended to bring his message to the American public.

Mohamed stopped in Buffalo in between treks to New York City, where he spoke before the United Nations Security Council, and Washington, D. C., where he planned to meet with federal and congressional officials.

Mohamed's government has hired a powerhouse lobbying firm — former Sen. Alfonse M. D'Amato's Park Strategies — to help him make his case.

“We are working on a succession plan, the way forward, and that's still in the works,” Mohamed said on his second visit to this country since taking the prime minister's job.

Mohamed was employed with the state Department of Transportation here when Somalia's president, Sheikh Sharif

Sheikh Ahmed, selected him to serve as his prime minister, an appointment confirmed Oct. 31.

Mohamed, a Somali native who resettled in Western New York in 1990, returned to his homeland to try to help bring order to a country plagued by violence and poverty.

Somalia's government collapsed in 1991, and the transitional government that Mohamed joined has waged a fierce struggle with al-Shabaab, an Islamic militant group connected to al-Qaida.

Mohamed said these Somali terrorists pose as much of a threat to the world as those who found safe harbor — and prompted a U. S.-led NATO invasion — in Afghanistan.

He called for more political, military and financial support to deal with the insurgency.

“It is a common enemy, and we have to deal with that enemy collectively,” Mohamed said.

Last week, he caused a stir when he told the Security Council he believes al-Qaida soon might hijack oil tankers to use in their next terror attacks.

“We have to be more proactive in thinking that anything is possible,” he told The Buffalo News on Sunday.

Piracy is a risky but often rewarding business for Somalis who have no job prospects and little to lose.

Pirates board and take control of private boats and merchant ships, holding the crews and their vessels hostage until a ransom is paid.

The pirates generally don't harm their hostages because the crimes are commercial transactions, essentially, but four Americans were killed Feb. 22 while negotiations were ongoing with their captors.

“We will go after those who are responsible. We will bring them, definitely, to justice,” Mohamed said.

However, he said, the larger problem must be addressed by training a Somali coast guard, creating jobs for young people, winning the support of elders in the region and setting up a functioning justice system when pirates are arrested.

While the twin problems of piracy and terrorism grow, Mohamed pointed to the successes of the transitional government during his time in office.

The government has installed generator-powered street lights on many of the main thoroughfares of Mogadishu, the capital; presented and won approval of a budget for 2011; and provided paychecks for the past two months to civil servants and soldiers.

Mohamed, though, already is looking toward August, when the mandate for the transitional government expires.

He said the government is putting together a long-term political plan for Somalia, and he is trying to gain support for it at home and abroad.

Part of that effort involves winning over officials at the United Nations, in the Obama administration and on Capitol Hill.

That's where the Park Strategies firm comes in, he said.

Joel A. Giambra, the former Erie County executive, is a managing director of the lobbying firm, and years ago he hired Mohamed to serve as his minority business coordinator.

“[Mohamed is working] to create a democratic form of government. That's his goal. That's the goal of the international community and the United States,” said Giambra.

