

## Puntland state – seeing Somalia differently

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### Key words

Confirmation bias, connote, Diaspora, investment, knowledge deficit, leadership, perception and misconception, media, opportunity, risk,

### Extended Abstract

*For all the talk of globalisation it has become increasingly apparent that in some respects policy makers and those in leadership roles have a dearth of knowledge about certain regions of the world. Whilst the internet has proved an extraordinary tool of possible enlightenment and connectivity it cannot fully address the knowledge deficit that exists in regard to specific regions. The mainstream media with its reduced budgets and rapid turnaround times does not help matters especially as rating wars invariably leads to quest for sensation stories as opposed to in depth analysis and investigative reporting. The world has been reduced to a series of simplistic and often wildly inaccurate vignettes, ones that whilst they may have a grain of truth are given a credence and value that has the potential to distort our view of those people and places of which we already know next to nothing. Anyone familiar with the seminal report: Shrinking World: The decline of international reporting in the British press (Media Standards Trust, 2010) will appreciate the ramifications of this; for this study does not focus on the tabloids, but on the broadsheets, the papers that are traditionally read by those who occupy positions of influence across the spectrum.*

*We expect those in leadership roles to be prepared to look as well as see, but what is our education doing to ensure that such people do not fall foul of confirmation bias? When it comes to seeing things differently Punt land State, Somalia makes for an interesting case in point. The mere mention of Somalia conjures up a raft of negative associations ranging from famine and piracy to lawlessness and terrorism. Mentally our guards are up and our minds alert to threats and potential danger. For some the only knowledge they have of that region of the Horn of Africa comes from films such as Black Hawk Down (2001) or Captain Phillips (2013), hardly a basis for a sound understanding of any region, culture or society. Leadership always has been about appraising oneself of the facts, of seeking out the truth and not the myths or quasi-myths that we embrace out of convenience or laziness. Those in decision making roles are required to differentiate and appreciate degrees of risk and opportunity. A logical approach sounds perfectly reasonable, but in this desk and computer bound age there appears a marked reluctance to discover for ourselves. For many people and institutions there is a general acceptance of the received 'wisdom' and an earnest desire to play safe at every stage. Frontier Markets are called that for a reason, but history tells us that frontiers change and that they contain both real risk and real opportunity, but not necessarily in equal measure. Effective leadership requires the constant quest to discover and recalibrate thought processes and for this to happen each of us needs to be ready to have a modicum of healthy scepticism for what we have been told or taught. If fortune favours the brave then somewhere along the line courage is required; courage takes many forms, one being the ability to see things differently and be prepared to challenge the accepted narrative. Knowledge such as it exists can be erroneous, and we must be alive to the possibility that we may well be the ones who can play a part in addressing the knowledge deficit.*

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