

Evaluating U.S. Policy Objectives and Options on the Horn of Africa

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I thank Chairman Feingold for inviting me to testify on U.S. policy objectives and options on the Horn of Africa. The Horn has long been one of the most conflicted regions of the world and, as back door to the Middle East, is strategically important to the U.S. It merits close attention by both the Administration and Congress.

The Subcommittee on African Affairs asked me to assess the current security situation in Ethiopia, Eritrea, and Somalia, and to identify the most serious threats to regional and U.S. security. It also solicited my analysis of efforts by governments in the Horn and by the Administration to address these threats. It then urged that I offer recommendations on how the U.S. can better contribute to security, stability, growth, and democracy in Somalia, Ethiopia, and Eritrea. In particular, the Subcommittee asked what tools and leverage the U.S. possesses that would be most effective in achieving U.S. objectives in the Horn of Africa.

Current Situation in Ethiopia, Eritrea, and Somalia

The serious challenges facing Ethiopia, Eritrea, and Somalia are long-standing and have implications for neighboring Djibouti, Kenya, and Sudan just as developments in those countries impact the situation for the three countries discussed in this testimony. With approximately 75 million people and located in the center of the Horn, Ethiopia is in many ways key to peace and security (or lack thereof) in the region. But the cross-border linkages are so important in the Horn that any one of the countries has the potential to destabilize or make more stable the other countries in the region.

Turning first to Ethiopia, the country is still recovering from the aftermath of the 2005 general election. The run-up to the election and the actual balloting were deemed to be generally free and fair. It was a major improvement over all previous elections. Charges by some opposition parties that the ruling Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) stole the election during the ballot counting process resulted in violence that continued sporadically for the subsequent six months. In some cases the opposition provoked a strong reaction by government security forces. Nevertheless, the security forces clearly used excessive force in responding to a number of challenges.

With local elections (districts and *kebeles* or wards) and those for some forty vacancies in the national legislature scheduled for April 2008, the internal political situation approaches another potentially significant turning point. Unfortunately, opposition political parties are demoralized, arguing that the government has shut down

most of their regional offices and arrested some of their supporters. Several of the opposition parties may not even contest seats for local offices, which in Ethiopia are actually very important. The current internal political dynamic surrounding these elections does not auger well for enhancing democracy in the country. Traditionally, there are no international observers for local elections. In any event, because of the size of the country and large number of contests, it would be difficult to mobilize a sufficient number of international observers. Nevertheless, the local elections are an opportunity for advancing democracy in Ethiopia. If they fail to achieve this goal, it will be an enormous lost opportunity.

Turning to Ethiopia's relations with neighboring countries, Addis Ababa has close relations with Kenya and Djibouti, which now serves as the principal port for all Ethiopian imports and exports. Relations with Sudan have fluctuated since the EPRDF took power in 1991, but have been good following the outbreak of conflict in 1998 between Eritrea and Ethiopia. Addis Ababa is particularly hopeful that the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) that ended conflict between northern and southern Sudan not collapse. From the perspective of Ethiopia's security, maintaining peace in southern Sudan is more important than ending the conflict in Darfur. Nevertheless, Ethiopia has offered both helicopters and troops to the UN/African Union peacekeeping operation in Darfur. This has ingratiated Ethiopia with the U.S. and presumably with Sudan. Ethiopia has also earned praise in Washington for supporting U.S. counterterrorism efforts in the region.

Ethiopia has established a good working relationship with Somaliland, which declared its independence from Somalia in 1991 but has not been recognized by any country. Ethiopia's military intervention in Somalia in 2006 at the request of Somalia's Transitional Federal Government (TFG) has been opposed by virtually all Somalis except those aligned with the TFG. If Ethiopian troops left Somalia tomorrow, however, the TFG would almost certainly collapse. The leaders of most Somali groups opposing the TFG are in exile in Asmara, Eritrea, where they formed the Alliance for Re-liberation of Somalia (ARS) and receive support from Eritrea.

Ethiopia's intervention in Somalia has also led to increased conflict in its Somali-inhabited Ogaden region in the southeastern part of the country. There is strong evidence that Eritrea is supporting the dissident Ogaden National Liberation Front (ONLF) in the Ogaden. The withdrawal of Ethiopian forces from Somalia and the end of Eritrean support for the ONLF would reduce, but not eliminate, conflict in the Ogaden between ONLF and Ethiopian government forces.

The situation in Somalia remains extremely volatile. The TFG has limited support of Somalis, most of whom see the Ethiopians as an occupying force. Almost 300,000 Somalis have fled the violence in Mogadishu since last October, raising the total number who has left the capital to about 700,000. A UNHCR representative commented at the end of January that Somalia "is the most pressing humanitarian emergency in the world today—even worse than Darfur." The African Union force is unable to take control of the situation in Mogadishu as a replacement for Ethiopian troops. The UN is

debating whether the security situation even permits planning to send a UN peacekeeping operation to replace the African Union force. An affirmative UN decision, which does not seem likely anytime soon, would be followed by many months of delay before the UN could mobilize such a force. In the meantime, Somali animosity against the Ethiopians increases.

Two spoiler groups, which may have concluded it is in their interest for conflict to continue, are also benefiting from the current deadlock. The al-Shabaab militia, which once served as the muscle for the Islamic Courts, is by most accounts gaining strength. Some key al-Shabaab leaders now operate independently of the Islamic Courts while others reportedly still follow its lead. Mogadishu's warlords, some of whom now support the TFG, are notorious for switching sides or operating completely independently when that serves their purpose. Often backed by businessmen, some of them actually benefit financially from continuing conflict. Neither they nor al-Shabaab can be counted on to work for peace or to serve the broader interests of the Somali people.

The positive development in this otherwise bleak analysis of Somalia was the appointment in 2007 of Prime Minister Nur "Adde" Hassan Hussein by President Abdullahi Yusuf. Nur Adde has stated that he supports a broad-based reconciliation process that takes into account Islamists and clan-based factions that now oppose the TFG. He said the TFG is "ready to talk to those who are fighting in Mogadishu. Nobody is exempted from negotiations." International envoys who have met with Nur Adde believe he is sincere in reaching out to disaffected Somali groups. There are still concerns, however, whether President Abdullahi Yusuf is as committed to a reconciliation process with the enemies of the TFG. Nor is it clear that the ARS is prepared to join a government of national unity before the departure of all Ethiopian troops. Such a precondition would result in even more chaos in Mogadishu than exists now. Nur Adde has for the first time raised the possibility of real accommodation with the TFG's opponents. A sequenced departure of Ethiopian troops agreed upon by both the TFG and ARS should not be ruled out.

The U.S. role in Somalia is focused primarily on countering terrorism, although it deserves credit for providing significant amounts of emergency assistance to Somalis through international and non-governmental organizations. So long as the U.S. effort in Somalia remains essentially to capture and kill bad guys, and there are some in Somalia, the U.S. marginalizes its ability to impact in a positive way any long-term solution to the Somali problem. U.S. aerial attacks against suspected high value terrorist targets inside Somalia can be justified if there is a very high probability they are conducted on the basis of accurate, up-to-the minute intelligence. Going back many years, however, the U.S. record for accurate intelligence in this part of the world is, unfortunately, not very good. The U.S. has conducted four aerial attacks inside Somalia since January 2007. The most recent one occurred early in March. If there was any success against high value targets as a result of these attacks, this information has not become public knowledge. Anecdotal evidence suggests the aerial attacks accomplished little. In the meantime, each American attack only increases the anger of most Somalis towards the U.S., Ethiopia, and the TFG.

Developments in Eritrea present special challenges for U.S. policy. The internal Eritrean situation leaves much to be desired. While Ethiopia has had a long series of controversial elections, Eritrea has not even had a national election since it became independent in 1993. It is subject to growing criticism in the West for a concentration of power around the executive, a lack of press freedom, a faltering economy, support for the Islamic Courts and opposition groups in Somalia, and effectively ending the ability of the UN Mission to Ethiopia and Eritrea (UNMEE) to operate in Eritrea. It supports a number of organizations that are trying to destabilize the government in Ethiopia while Ethiopia provides sanctuary to Eritrean dissidents who wish to do the same in Eritrea. On the other hand, for a country that is approximately half Christian and half Muslim, it has managed to preserve cordial relations between these two major religious groups. Eritrea has good relations with neighboring Djibouti and Sudan and even played the principal role in brokering a peace agreement between dissident groups in eastern Sudan and the government in Khartoum.

A close friend of the U.S. until the outbreak of conflict with Ethiopia in 1998, relations between Washington and Asmara subsequently steadily deteriorated. Eritrea has been particularly frustrated by the inability of the U.S. to convince Ethiopia to accept the 2002 ruling of the Ethiopia Eritrea Boundary Commission. This disagreement largely accounted for a series of decisions by Asmara that have worsened the U.S.-Eritrea relationship. At one point recently, there was even a suggestion in Washington that Eritrea might be added to the list of states that support terrorism. This would have been an unwise decision. It is more important to find ways, as difficult as it will be, to encourage Eritrea to support initiatives that improve peace and stability in the region.

Most Serious Threats to Regional and U.S. Security

The most serious threats to the Horn of Africa, and indirectly U.S., security are in order of priority the continuing violence in Somalia, a breakdown of the CPA in Sudan, the conflict in Darfur, and a possible but unlikely resumption of conflict between Ethiopia and Eritrea. Other issues of concern are instability in Ethiopia's Ogaden region, ethnic conflict in Kenya, opposition to the EPRDF by the Oromo Liberation Front, continuing violence by Uganda's Lord's Resistance Army, and a possible resumption of conflict in eastern Sudan.

The situation in Somalia is particularly worrisome because the country has effectively not been governed since the early 1990s. It has attracted a number of movements that do not represent mainstream Somali thought, including some affiliated with terrorism. The humanitarian situation is worsening. The Somali conflict either impacts directly or has drawn in Ethiopia, Kenya, Eritrea, and Djibouti. The U.S. treats Somalia primarily as a counterterrorist threat and is especially anxious to capture or kill three persons (all non-Somalis linked to al-Qaeda and believed to have taken refuge in Somalia) who were involved in the 1998 bombings of the U.S. embassies in Kenya and Tanzania. Even if counterterrorism were not a key to the U.S. agenda, Somalia would pose a major threat to regional stability and, hence, American interests in the Horn.

The U.S. played a significant, positive role in helping to broker the CPA in Sudan and bring an end to the civil war. This was the most significant political achievement of the Bush Administration in Africa. The international community and, at least until recently, the U.S. have allowed the conflict in Darfur to monopolize their collective energy while paying insufficient attention to a possible breakdown of the CPA. As serious as the situation is in Darfur and its negative impact on neighboring Chad and the Central African Republic, the possible resumption of civil war between northern and southern Sudan would have far greater negative implications for the Horn of Africa. Consequently, it is critical that all parties, including the U.S. refocus attention to assure the successful implementation of the CPA and the avoidance of a return to war both between the north and south and among rival southern factions.

The absence of normal relations between Ethiopia and Eritrea contributes to instability in the region. When these two countries resolve their differences and resume their important economic relationship, all neighboring countries will benefit. I do not subscribe to the school of thought that war is likely between Ethiopia and Eritrea because of the failure to implement the border agreement. I believe both countries have concluded that it is not in their interest to initiate conflict, although both sides support groups that have hostile intentions against the other. Any diminution in effectiveness of the UNMEE operation increases slightly the possibility for conflict along the border. Therefore, it is important, even as UNMEE is forced to leave Eritrea, that it maintain a presence, however modest, on the Ethiopian side of the border. Independent UNMEE observers would be in a position to identify quickly and point the finger at whichever party might initiate a border incursion.

Analysis of Efforts to Address These Threats

Efforts by governments in the region to solve the problem in Somalia, keep the CPA on track, and encourage a normalization of relations between Ethiopia and Eritrea are sometimes at counter purposes with American objectives. The U.S. seeks stability in the region and wants to mitigate or even eliminate the terrorist threat. Regional governments do not necessarily share these priorities. Eritrea and Ethiopia support each other's opposition groups; this does not encourage stability. The TFG has been more interested in retaining political power than encouraging reconciliation among all Somalis. It is not even clear how committed the Sudan People's Liberation Movement (SPLM) and especially the Bashir government in Sudan are to implementing the letter and spirit of the CPA. All governments in the Horn give lip service to countering terrorism, but with the possible exception of Ethiopia their support for this goal is not always convincing.

For its part, the U.S. obsession with counterterrorism emphasizes short-term objectives aimed at tracking down terrorists. It gives insufficient attention to working with regional governments on ameliorating the long-term root causes that lead to support for groups that use terrorist tactics. Nor has there been a meeting of the minds on what constitutes terrorism in the region. The U.S. is primarily interested in international terrorism instigated by al-Qaeda and groups affiliated with it like the now moribund al-Itihad al-Islami in Somalia. It is much less interested in terrorist tactics used by local

groups such as the Lord's Resistance Army, which is not affiliated with al-Qaeda. Ethiopia, for example, ascribes terrorist acts to groups such as the ONLF and the Oromo Liberation Front that are not on the U.S. terrorist list. It should come as no surprise that regional governments are more concerned with these groups that have a domestic objective than they are with al-Qaeda.

All international and regional efforts since the early 1990s to solve the Somali dilemma have failed, although not for lack of trying. The U.S. essentially abandoned Somalia following the departure of American troops in 1994 and the end of the UN peacekeeping operation in 1995. It reengaged sporadically only after 9/11 and the invasion of Afghanistan for fear that the Taliban might move to Somalia. It became much more involved about two years ago as the Islamic Courts began to assert authority in Mogadishu, but again with an overwhelming focus on counterterrorism. The U.S. ill-advisedly supported an alliance of warlords in Mogadishu that led directly to a military victory by the Islamic Courts. Ethiopian military intervention, at some point encouraged by the U.S., resulted in the defeat of the Islamic Courts, but did not contribute to a solution that allowed Somalia to establish a government that has the support of most Somalis. From the standpoint of regional stability, the situation in Somalia today is no better, and arguably worse, than during the period of control by the Islamic Courts.

Sudan's CPA nearly collapsed in 2007 when the SPLM withdrew its representatives from the government of national unity. This occurred at a time when the international community was far more engaged in the situation in Darfur. Fortunately, the SPLM and the Bashir government resolved their differences. The CPA is back on track but remains in a highly fragile state. In recent months, the U.S. appears appropriately to be giving this issue greater high-level attention. Ethiopia is also taking steps that encourage peace and stability between northern and southern Sudan.

Since the outbreak of conflict in 1998 between Ethiopia and Eritrea, the U.S. worked hard to end the war and made considerable effort to convince both countries to normalize their relations. The major stumbling block has been the unwillingness of Ethiopia to implement the decision of the Boundary Commission. Eritrea has not helped its case by taking a series of steps aimed at destabilizing Ethiopia. The international community, including the U.S., seems to have concluded in the past year that there is little it can do to resolve the impasse.

U.S. Leverage and Resources

Of the major challenges facing the U.S. in the Horn, it probably has the most leverage with Somalia's TFG. Although total American assistance to Somalia is modest and not likely to influence the TFG, its political leverage should be enormous. The TFG is heavily dependent on Ethiopia and the U.S. for its very survival. If the TFG chooses to ignore advice from Ethiopia and the U.S., it does so at its peril. The U.S. has also worked hard to stand up the African Union force to replace the Ethiopians in Somalia.

The U.S. has brought substantial financial resources to bear in Sudan for both implementing the CPA and alleviating suffering in Darfur. It expended considerable political capital in helping to achieve the CPA, but has been much less successful in resolving the conflict in Darfur. The U.S. has far better relations with the SPLM than it has with the Bashir government, with whom relations are strained. The rocky relationship with Khartoum limits U.S. leverage to effect policy change in Darfur or to ensure implementation of the CPA.

The U.S. provides Ethiopia substantial assistance, although most of it in recent years has been emergency aid and support to counter HIV/AIDS. Washington also has a close working relationship with Addis Ababa. In theory, therefore, the U.S. has considerable leverage with the Meles government. At the same time, the close relations with Ethiopia have contributed directly to a worsening of relations with Eritrea. The Isaias government accuses Washington of favoring Ethiopia on the border question. As a consequence, it asked the USAID mission to leave Eritrea. Washington has virtually no leverage with Eritrea. But even in the case of Ethiopia, leverage is a relative concept. The leaderships in both Ethiopia and Eritrea since they assumed power in their respective countries in 1991 are notably resistant to outside pressure even when large amounts of assistance are at stake. Both Meles and Isaias will change positions on a policy only after they have concluded it is in the long-term interest of their respective governments.

Recommendations for the U.S.

Taking the above analysis into account and as requested in the invitation to testify, I suggest the following recommendations for ways the U.S. can contribute to security, stability, growth, and democracy in Somalia, Ethiopia, and Eritrea. I have purposely omitted many desirable recommendations that are hopelessly unrealistic or beyond the ability of the U.S. to implement because of its limited leverage in one or more of the three countries.

- Work closely with Ethiopia to encourage the TFG to create a government of national unity that includes moderates from the ARS and from sub-clans in Mogadishu who currently oppose the TFG.
- Consult closely with the Somalia “Contact Group” and ask its members to follow the same approach with the TFG.
- Ask the Arab League and its member governments to encourage the ARS to engage without preconditions in power sharing talks with the TFG.
- Encourage governments that have good relations with Eritrea to follow the same approach with Eritrea vis-à-vis the ARS.
- If a government of national unity that is widely accepted by the Somali people actually materializes, be prepared quickly to mobilize a significant amount of development assistance for Somalia.
- Likewise, push the wealthier Arab countries to make major contributions to Somalia’s development.

- As security improves in Somalia, work with Ethiopia and the TFG to design a quick, sequenced departure of Ethiopian forces from Somalia so as to encourage broader Somali support for a new government of national unity.
- On a contingency basis, request the UN to draw up plans for a peacekeeping operation that would replace the small African Union presence and would actually keep the peace rather than try to separate warring factions.
- Be prepared to offer substantial logistical support for standing up a UN peacekeeping mission in Somalia.
- Make a concerted effort to reach out to the Somali diaspora in the U.S. to solicit ways it can help to bring peace and stability to Somalia.
- Help Ethiopia and Eritrea identify confidence building measures that may eventually lead to Ethiopian acceptance of the Boundary Commission's decision followed by practical adjustments along the border that are acceptable to both countries.
- Encourage both Ethiopia and Eritrea to end support for groups whose goal is to destabilize the situation in the other's country.
- Following the departure of UNMEE from Eritrea, insist that it maintain observers inside Ethiopia along the border so that it can assign blame for any military incursion across the Ethiopian-Eritrean frontier.
- If requested by the UN, assign a significant number of U.S. personnel to this effort, certainly more than the tiny number that has participated in UNMEE.
- Continue and even increase the high-level attention devoted to ensuring implementation of the CPA in Sudan.
- Initiate a working group of government and non-government experts from the Horn, a few European and Arab countries, and China to identify and suggest solutions for the root causes of both domestic and international terrorism in the region.
- Put front and center counterterrorism programs that mitigate the root causes of terrorism and the environment in the Horn that sustains both domestic terrorists and those coming from outside the region.
- Engage governments in the region on their responsibility to reduce social and economic inequality and political marginalization as important ways to reduce both conflict and support for terrorist groups.
- Engage governments and groups inside and outside the region to end their support for religious ideology of whatever persuasion that expressly encourages intolerance.
- Increase support for democracy, good governance, and anti-corruption programs in Ethiopia and be prepared to initiate funding for such programs in Somalia and Eritrea when the situation permits.
- Provide additional funding for basic education programs, especially in the Somali language, conducted over the radio and which also contain useful civic lessons that include encouragement of religious and ethnic tolerance.
- Identify and, where desired by host governments, fund programs, even on a pilot basis that help reduce youth unemployment.

