

Horn of Africa: Priorities and Recommendations
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Madame Chairperson and members of the Subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to testify on priorities and recommendations for U.S. policy in the Horn of Africa. My name is David Shinn, Adjunct Professor, Elliott School of International Affairs, George Washington University, and former ambassador to Ethiopia and Burkina Faso. One-third of my thirty-seven year career in the Foreign Service focused on the Horn of Africa. I continue to follow the region closely as an academic.

Treat the Horn as a Region

The countries normally considered to constitute the Horn of Africa are Ethiopia, Eritrea, Somalia, Djibouti and Sudan. Some include Kenya and Uganda in the Horn. I will confine my remarks to the first five countries. The challenges and the future of the Horn are interlinked to an even greater extent than is the case in other regions of Africa. A problem or conflict in one country has negative implications for one or more of its neighbors just as political and economic progress benefits neighboring countries. Any strategy that does not take into account the implications for its neighbors of a policy towards one country is probably doomed to fail. I believe that the Horn of Africa, taken as a region, has been the most conflicted corner of the world since the end of the Second World War.

The only serious U.S. policy effort that tried to deal with the countries as an integrated region occurred during the Clinton administration in the mid-1990s. It was known as the Greater Horn of Africa Initiative. In addition to the five core countries in the Horn, it included Kenya, Uganda, Tanzania, Rwanda and Burundi. Its two main goals were to focus U.S. resources on food security and conflict prevention/mitigation. It achieved exceedingly limited success for a variety of reasons, primarily because new conflict in the region overwhelmed efforts to resolve existing conflict. In addition, there was not a total commitment from all U.S. embassies in the field to embrace a concept that did not have as its primary objective an emphasis on bilateral relations. The Initiative was a good one; it is a pity it did not have more success. It would be useful to review the lessons learned from that effort before embarking on a new regional approach for the countries in the Horn of Africa. For example, including Tanzania, Rwanda and Burundi as part of the Initiative may have been too ambitious. On the other hand, it is essential to include Kenya and Uganda as they are critical to many of the issues that impact the Horn.

The United States and others have devoted considerable attention in recent years to the major crises in the Horn: the failed state of Somalia and especially its implications for terrorism, the civil war between southern and northern Sudan and the crisis in Darfur, the war between Ethiopia and Eritrea and periodic famine in several of the countries. An

even longer list of second tier problems such as conflict in Ethiopia's Ogaden, the confrontation along the Eritrea/Djibouti border and conflict in eastern Sudan have consumed much less U.S. time and resources. There is a third group that receives very little U.S. attention. These are largely local conflicts involving disagreements over issues such as pasturage, scarce water sources, cattle rustling and ethnic migration. It is not surprising and, in fact, appropriate to focus on the most serious issues. On the other hand, it is a mistake to exclude the second and third tier problems as they usually contribute to the more serious problems. In a few cases, smaller local disagreements may even lead to major conflict. A much overlooked technique in the West for dealing with these localized issues is the use of traditional conflict resolution mechanisms.

Most of these conflicts are exacerbated by a relatively high annual population growth rate in spite of the negative effects of regular conflict and HIV/AIDS. According to World Bank figures, the population growth rate between 1990 and 2005 for Djibouti was 2.6 percent, for Eritrea 2.5 percent and for Sudan and Ethiopia 2.2 percent. Somalia lagged well behind at 1.4 percent. Each year, Ethiopia adds about 1.5 million people to its population. The country has not produced enough food to feed its population for several decades and there is no prospect that it will be able to achieve this goal in the foreseeable future.

Cooperating with Other Players in the Horn

The United States can not and should not be expected to solve the problems of the Horn on its own. It is essential to continue to work with the countries in the region and the traditional donor countries including the members of the European Union, Norway, Canada, Australia and Japan. Egypt and some of the Arab Gulf states, which have a direct interest in developments in the Horn, should be part of efforts to solve problems in the region. China has become the principal non-African influence in Sudan and has a growing presence in Ethiopia and Eritrea. China will not always agree with western donors on the best approach to the region, but it has cooperated in Sudan and Somalia and should increasingly be brought into discussions concerning the Horn. The role of Russia is more problematic as its primary interest seems to be selling weapons to Sudan, Ethiopia and Eritrea. Nevertheless, it should be part of the consultative process if for no other reason than to try to minimize the potential negative impact of its arms sales and because it has expressed a growing interest in investing in countries like Ethiopia.

There are several other countries with important interests in the Horn whose role has not received much consideration by the United States. India is a major player, especially in Ethiopia, which is its principal African recipient of economic assistance. In recent years, Turkey has made a major effort to increase its relations in the Horn, especially with Sudan, Ethiopia and Djibouti. Although Brazil's main African focus is West Africa and the Lusophone countries, it is expanding ties with Sudan and Ethiopia. All of these countries should be consulted in any regional strategy towards the Horn that would benefit from their material and/or political support. In addition, the United Nations and its specialized agencies, World Bank, International Monetary Fund, African Union, Intergovernmental Authority on Development, African Development Bank, Arab Development Bank and Arab League (Sudan, Somalia and Djibouti are members) have the ability to influence developments in the Horn.

One potential spoiler deserves special mention. Iran is taking a growing interest in Africa generally and the Horn in particular. Iran's goal is not clear, but there are concerns that it is primarily interested in propagating its fundamentalist beliefs in the region. If this is the objective, it will be a tough sell for Shi'ite Iran as virtually all the Muslims in the Horn are Sunni with strong Sufi beliefs. Nevertheless, Iran has an especially long-standing and close relationship with Sudan and has made significant progress recently in improving ties with Eritrea and Djibouti. Eritrean President Isaias Afewerki visited Tehran in December 2008, and Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad went to Djibouti in February 2009, when he signed five cooperation agreements with his Djiboutian counterpart. Iranian contact with Ethiopia has been occurring at a lower level. Iran has also engaged recently in high level contact with the leaders of Kenya, Uganda, Tanzania and the Comoro Islands.

Ethiopia

Ethiopia has been a good ally of the United States on a number of issues while it offers challenges for U.S. policy concerning its human rights practices and pace of democratization. As a result, U.S. policy towards Ethiopia since the current government took power in 1991 has always been a delicate balancing act. This will continue to be the case.

Ethiopia has been a strong supporter of U.S. counterterrorism policy in the region. Even if the tactics change under the Obama administration for dealing with terrorism, the United States will continue to look to Ethiopia for support. Ethiopia has also consistently been responsive to U.S. concerns about stability and peacekeeping operations in the region and beyond. It supported U.S. policy on the Comprehensive Peace Agreement in Sudan and provided support to the peacekeeping operation in Darfur. It has contributed to peacekeeping efforts beyond the Horn of Africa. Although in my view, both the United States and Ethiopia followed a misguided policy in Somalia, they did it together. It is just not possible to ignore the helpful role of Ethiopia on regional issues that are important to the United States. In addition, the Meles Zenawi government has established a solid economic track record for which it does not receive much credit.

U.S. policy must weigh these positive factors against the need for significant improvement on human rights issues and the democratization process. Since 1991 there have been periodic large-scale arrests of political dissidents, frequently among the Oromo who are perceived rightly or wrongly to have ties to the Oromo Liberation Front, which calls for the overthrow of the government. Although many are eventually released, new groups of political dissidents are routinely arrested. The government has a long history of harassment of the private press and a reluctance to permit civil society groups to engage in advocacy work. The new act covering charities and non-governmental organizations places severe restrictions on their ability to conduct advocacy work.

Democratization in Ethiopia experienced a major setback following the 2005 national elections. Although the election process began well, it ended badly. The political opposition must take some responsibility for the violence that followed the election, but ultimately the government is responsible for preventing violence and maintaining credibility in the electoral system. The 2008 local elections were an opportunity to put the democratization process back on track. They did not. The

government party won all but a handful of the 3.6 million positions. The next national elections occur in 2010 and the outlook for serious competition is not good.

U.S. policy must continue to balance the need for Ethiopia's cooperation on regional issues with its desire to influence positively the human rights' situation and democratization process in the country. Putting pressure on Ethiopia will become increasingly difficult for the United States and other western countries as Ethiopia continues to strengthen its relations with countries such as China and Russia.

Eritrea

U.S. relations with Eritrea during the past year reached their lowest point since Eritrea became independent in 1993. They would have fallen even further if some persons in the previous administration had had their way and managed to place Eritrea on the list of state sponsors of terrorism. Fortunately, this did not happen and the door remains ajar for a possible dialogue with the Isaias government.

There is much standing in the way of better relations with Eritrea. During the past year, the rhetoric on both sides has been harsh. There have never been national elections in Eritrea and the democratization process is virtually non-existent. Eritrea believes that the U.S. has almost single-handedly made it possible for Ethiopia to avoid implementation of the binding arbitration agreement that delineates the Ethiopian-Eritrean border. Eritrea has been aiding and abetting extremists in Somalia in an effort to put pressure on Ethiopia. Asmara serves as the headquarters for the Oromo Liberation Front that periodically launches attacks across the border into Ethiopia. Eritrea sent troops to the border with Djibouti, which it continues to taunt for reasons that are not clear. Eritrea is making a major effort to improve relations with countries such as Iran, which according to an Eritrean opposition group has deployed or intends to deploy Iranian troops in the Eritrean port of Assab. There is no independent confirmation of this report.

Any U.S. attempt to improve relations with Eritrea faces huge challenges. A new administration has the advantage, however, in that it can look at old problems in new ways. It may not be possible to improve relations with Eritrea, but the effort still needs to be made.

Djibouti

U.S. relations with Djibouti are good and generally problem free. Djibouti hosts the only U.S. military base in Africa, Combined Joint Task Force-Horn of Africa (CJTF-HOA). Its main purpose is to counter terrorist activity throughout the region, including Yemen. Djibouti extracts a rental fee for this base; these negotiations have not always been easy. It would be useful to conduct an independent assessment of CJTF-HOA to determine if its costs justify the benefits that it provides. The countries of greatest concern are Somalia and Yemen. CJTF-HOA reportedly has no involvement in Somalia and limited ability to conduct activity in Yemen. As I understand it, U.S. military components other than CJTF-HOA have conducted the actions in Somalia.

Although there is no indication that Djibouti desires to alter its close relationship with the U.S., its recent high level contact with Iran bears watching. Djibouti serves as

the port for nearly all of landlocked Ethiopia's exports and imports that depart/arrive by sea. Ethiopia has an even greater interest in cordial relations with Djibouti than does the United States. Because Djibouti hosts CJTF-HOA and Ethiopia is dependent on the port, Djibouti becomes an important part of a regional policy for the Horn of Africa. It is also in the interest of the United States to quietly support Djibouti in its dispute with Eritrea. Even better, the United States, if it is able to improve relations with Eritrea, might be in a position to help this problem go away.

Somalia

The United States essentially abandoned Somalia following the departure of U.S. troops from the country in 1994 as part of the UN peacekeeping operation. It continued to provide diminishing amounts of humanitarian aid. Following 9/11 and the subsequent invasion of Afghanistan, the U.S. feared that the Taliban might move to Somalia and largely relegated its engagement in Somalia to counterterrorism. This excessive focus on terrorism led to poor U.S. policy decisions that helped to ensure a takeover of most of Somalia by the Union of Islamic Courts (UIC). The United States then supported the secular Transitional Federal Government (TFG) and its Ethiopian allies in forcibly removing the UIC from power only to witness in late 2008 creation of a new government of national unity that combined the TFG and elements of the UIC. U.S. policy towards Somalia in the past year has been realistic; it now supports the new unity government.

The situation in Somalia is especially fluid. It is up to the new government to prove that it can rally most Somalis to its more moderate agenda. The first priority is the difficult task of reestablishing security. An enlarged African Union peacekeeping force is not the answer, although it can continue to play a useful role by keeping the port and airport in Mogadishu out of the control of radical groups. The African Union does not have the capacity, funding, experience or willingness to defend the new Somali government against its opponents. A UN peacekeeping force would be somewhat more effective, but only if there is a peace to keep that all Somali sides endorse. For the time being, security will be messy as the new government uses its own militia to deal with groups that oppose it, especially the extremist al-Shabab and freelancing militias.

The United States and the international community should begin to help Somalia train a professional, community-based police force that draws its recruits from all regions of Somalia. The Arab countries, which have a stake in a stable Somalia, should help finance this effort. If it is possible to neutralize al-Shabab and independent militias, a Somali police force, which has a long tradition of professionalism in the country, should be able to ensure security until Somalia creates a national army.

The United States should continue to support the new government in spite of its imperfections, while remaining in the background. It should give the Somali government an opportunity to build a functioning coalition, neutralize support for al-Shabab and co-opt opposing political organizations. Somalia's new prime minister has stated that he is prepared to sit down with al-Shabab, although its leaders continue to oppose the new government. As much as the United States disagrees with al-Shabab, it is necessary to let Somalis work through their differences in their own way. This is also the time for the United States to eschew military activity in Somalia. The United States should continue to provide humanitarian assistance, help to establish a police force and be prepared to

step in quickly with development aid as soon as the security situation permits. In the meantime, the United States should increase development assistance to Somaliland, which has generally avoided the instability endemic in Somalia.

Sudan

Sudan poses a serious challenge for U.S. policy. The United States has four major goals in Sudan: ensure implementation of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) or at least avoid a return to civil war between the north and south; end the crisis in Darfur; improve the overall human rights situation; and continue to receive the cooperation of Sudan on counterterrorism.

Achieving these goals requires a combination of pressure, frank talk and acceptance of some unpleasant truths. The government in Khartoum is highly flawed. While the United States has no interest in supporting the government, it must deal with it as a fact of life. The United States should continue to press both the Bashir government and the leaders of the Sudan People's Liberation Movement to implement the CPA. In fact, this should be the highest priority. A resumption of the north-south civil war would result in more death and destruction than has occurred so far in Darfur. The United States should also continue to press the Bashir government and the Darfur rebel groups to reach an accommodation in Darfur. The Sudanese government is primarily responsible for the situation in Darfur, but the rebel groups have increasingly contributed to the carnage. In the immediate future, the United States has minimal ability to influence the human rights situation in Sudan.

If the United States is to be taken seriously by the Bashir government, there are two U.S. positions that need to be reconsidered. In view of the universally hostile attitude towards Khartoum in Washington, I realize that I am stepping in front of a fast-moving eighteen wheeler by challenging conventional wisdom. Nevertheless, these points need to be made if the United States is to have meaningful discussions with Sudan.

First, U.S. policy is not well served when it says that genocide is continuing today in Darfur. Alex de Waal, one of the world's leading authorities on Darfur, recently made an analysis of the violent deaths that occurred in 2008. The figures he worked with exclude any excess mortality caused by hunger and disease, sexual violence and forced displacement, although he does not believe these numbers are unusually high. In 2008, UNAMID reports there were about 1550 violent deaths in Darfur. Less than 500 were civilians, more than 400 were combatants and about 640 died in inter-tribal fighting. The Sudan government armed all of the militia involved in inter-tribal fighting and is ultimately responsible for these deaths. This is a deplorable situation to be sure, but it is not genocide. Using the term genocide today to describe the situation in Darfur adds an emotional quality that distorts the discussion. It is time to acknowledge that the situation has changed in Darfur.

Second, the United States appropriately put Sudan on the list of state sponsors of terrorism in 1993. Again, the situation has changed. Sudan began even before 9/11 to open the door for cooperation with the United States on counterterrorism. It significantly expanded that initiative after 9/11. The State Department's Country Reports on Terrorism for 2006 stated that "The Sudanese government was a strong partner in the War on Terror and aggressively pursued operations directly involving threats to U.S.

interests and personnel in Sudan. . . . With the exception of HAMAS, the Sudanese government did not openly support the presence of extremist elements in Sudan.” The State Department’s Country Reports on Terrorism for 2007, the most recent one, reaffirmed Sudan’s cooperation and added, “While the U.S.-Sudanese counterterrorism relationship remained solid, hard-line Sudanese officials continued to express resentment and distrust over actions by the USG and questioned the benefits of continued cooperation. Their assessment reflected disappointment that Sudan’s counterterrorism cooperation has not warranted rescission of its designation as a state sponsor of terrorism.” The report went on to note that Sudanese authorities uncovered and largely dismantled a large-scale terrorist organization targeting western interests in Khartoum.

If there is any hope of achieving a more productive discussion with Sudan about those issues of concern to the United States, a good place to start would be discontinuing references to genocide in Darfur in the present tense and taking steps to remove Sudan from the list of state sponsors of terrorism. Most, if not all, U.S. sanctions against Sudan would remain in place even after it is removed from the list. It is not possible to know if taking these steps would result in more responsible actions by Khartoum in Darfur and in implementing the CPA, but these steps would send a signal to Sudan that the U.S. is prepared to acknowledge a new reality.

Operational Issues

I would like to associate myself with testimony by former ambassador Prudence Bushnell before this Subcommittee on 25 February 2009 concerning ways the Foreign Service needs to do its job securely and effectively. Ambassador Bushnell’s comments apply to the Horn of Africa as well as the rest of the continent. I want to underscore several points. Ambassador Bushnell commented that security concerns have trumped policy objectives. I fully agree. While the bombings in 1998 of U.S. embassies in Nairobi and Dar es Salaam necessitated changes in the structure of U.S. embassies in the region and beyond, the fortress embassy concept has been carried to an unnecessary extreme. The embassy in Khartoum, where I served for three years in the mid-1980s, is totally unsatisfactory from a security standpoint and must be moved. The State Department is building a new structure. It will be a fortress in an isolated part of the city, effectively cutting it off from the Sudanese public. The embassy in Addis Ababa, the same structure where I served from 1996-1999, has put security procedures in place since the late 1990s that effectively cut it off from the Ethiopian public other than visa applicants. The U.S. has no mission in Somalia and the security situation there now does not permit the assignment of American personnel. I am less familiar with the current situation in Djibouti and Asmara.

In 2007, I visited a number of missions in Africa and was appalled at the lack of contact between host country nationals and American embassy personnel. Much of the problem was due to the physical isolation of the embassy or consulate in cities like Pretoria, Abuja and Cape Town where terrorism is not even a significant threat. The only antidote to fortress embassies is embassy leadership that forces American staff regularly to get out of the fortress and move around the city and the country. My recent experience suggests that all too often this is not happening. Part of the problem is the enormous amount of time spent in some capitals escorting visitors to the same locations and too few

personnel completing reports required by Washington. But some of the problem is unwillingness to move around the country for security reasons. The Foreign Service is a career that by definition requires a reasonable amount of risk taking. I believe most Foreign Service personnel accept this. I fear that U.S. embassies in much of Africa and perhaps the world generally are becoming too risk averse. The security tail is wagging the diplomatic dog.

One way to get around the fortress embassy concept is to establish more American Presence Posts staffed by one Foreign Service Officer and a couple of local employees. Advances in communications make this solution imminently feasible. There are several cities in Ethiopia and Sudan where the U.S. could formulate more enlightened policy if it had a better understanding of the situation on the ground. I understand, however, that security personnel are reluctant to expand significantly these one person posts because of the possible risk encountered by the American officer.

A corollary to the American Presence Post is the need to increase language training. Persons assigned to one person posts in the northern part of Sudan must have some Arabic. Any American assigned outside Addis Ababa should have Amharic, Afan Oromo, Somali, Tigrinya, etc., depending on the location of the assignment. When it becomes safe to reopen an embassy in Mogadishu, there must be at least one American on the staff who speaks Somali. With the huge number of Somalis who now have U.S. citizenship, this should not be an overwhelming obstacle. Teaching these languages is expensive and can only be accomplished if Congress authorizes funding to increase the number of Foreign Service personnel to take account of down time for long-term language training.

Thank you for your time and consideration.