



Horn of Africa Peace and Development Center
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February 20, 2007

Senator Russ Feingold
Chair, Senate Foreign Relations Sub Committee on Africa
506 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510-4904

RE: Appeal for USA Action for Sustainable Peace in Somalia

Dear Senator Feingold:

The Horn of Africa Peace and Development Center and the Dallas Peace Center are submitting this joint appeal for peace in Somalia and the Horn of Africa as your committee prepares to schedule hearings on recent events in the region.

We submit that US engagement in Somalia and the region must have the following principles and goals in mind:

- Comprehensive and long lasting peace in Somalia and the region.
- Support for democracy, the rule of law, human rights, and elimination of poverty, hunger and disease.
- Support for a development strategy for the region to tap its vast natural resources. A peaceful, democratic and prosperous Horn of Africa should be a mutual long-term vision for both the US and the people of the region.

With these goals and principles in mind, we recommend that the following steps be taken:

- Immediate withdrawal of Ethiopian forces from Somalia and their replacement by a sizable African Peace keeping force from neutral countries.
- Immediate start of all-party talks for peace and reconciliation.
- Immediate injection of resources by the international community for peace building and economic reconstruction.
- Appointment of a US special envoy for the Horn of Africa to develop and implement a consistent and coherent US policy in the region.

Background

With no functioning central government in the last 15 years, after the ouster of dictator Mohamed Siad Barre in 1991, Somalia has become the quintessential failed state. With the exception of the relatively stable regions of Somaliland in the Northwest and Puntland in the Northeast, the rest of the country had been carved into fiefdoms controlled by feuding clan warlords and their armed militias. The ill-fated US intervention in the early 1990's ended in our complete withdrawal in 1995 after the death of 18 servicemen in the "Black Hawk Down" incident in Mogadishu, the capital. Since then the US has been largely absent from the scene until last year when CIA agents went to Mogadishu to organize the notorious warlords into an "Anti-terrorism Alliance" in the hope of nabbing three Al Qaeda members believed to be hiding in Somalia. In doing so the US government undermined the internationally recognized Transitional Federal Government (TFG) and also drove public support in this predominantly Muslim nation to the Union of Islamic Courts (UIC). The subsequent outpouring of popular support was the catalyst that enabled the UIC to oust the notorious warlords from Mogadishu in June 2006.

By December 2006, the UIC gained complete control of the country's south and central regions, finally surrounding the weak TFG in Baidoa. The TFG appealed for help from Ethiopia, which sent troops across the border to protect the TFG. Thus started a face-off between Ethiopian and TFG forces on one side and the UIC forces on the other. War finally broke out on December 24, 2006. To everyone's surprise, the powerful UIC did not put up much of a fight. Their decision to abandon all their positions in the face of superior Ethiopian air and ground power fortunately limited civilian casualties. The Ethiopian and TFG forces routed the UIC in a few days, and the war appears to be over; for now.

US air strikes in southern Somalia in January 2007, aimed at suspected Al Qaeda members believed to be responsible for the 1998 embassy bombings in Kenya and Tanzania, appear to have missed their mark. Instead, scores of Somali nomads and their livestock were reportedly killed. Casualty figures vary from 30-70. This is likely to further inflame sentiments against the US.

Challenges and Opportunities for Peace

The incessant mortar attacks against Ethiopian and TFG forces in Mogadishu and other parts of the south appear to validate the UIC's promise to wage an insurgency, much like the one in Iraq. Without major and immediate response by the US and the international community in peace building and economic reconstruction, Somalia is bound to slide back into lawlessness again. The 8000 peacekeeping troops promised by the African Union (AU) are yet to materialize. The AU does not have the resources to deploy such a force quickly and sustain it for any length of time. It is noteworthy that the AU is still unable to fulfill its past promise to mobilize sufficient peacekeeping forces for Darfur in Sudan, where over 200,000- and counting- precious lives have perished. Somalia, with the longest coastline in Africa, and just across the sea from the oil rich Middle East, occupies a strategic location. The Bush Administration has noted the security implications for the region and the US from an unguarded coastline of 3500 kilometers in lawless Somalia. But the US policy towards Somalia and the region for the past ten years has been incoherent and spotty. As you have correctly noted in your Op-Ed piece in the Christian Science Monitor recently, an occasional air strike here and there is not an appropriate or sufficient response to the problems of the region. A more substantive engagement guided by a coherent long-term strategy is needed.

We are honored to have the opportunity to submit this position paper for your attention. We will be glad to provide witnesses that can participate in your hearings, if needed.

Sincerely

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