

Remarks at the Horn of Africa Peace and Development Center
Dallas, Texas
June 3, 2007

By David H. Shinn
Adjunct Professor, Elliott School of International Affairs
The George Washington University

I thank the Horn of Africa Peace and Development Center for inviting me to speak today and commend the organization for encouraging better understanding of the complex issues in the Horn of Africa.

It has become a cliché to say that the countries of the Horn of Africa are in crisis. It would be newsworthy to report that all was peaceful and quiet throughout the Horn. In Sudan, the crisis in Darfur continues while it remains to be seen if the Comprehensive Peace Agreement that ended the war between the north and south can stand the test of time. The Lord's Resistance Army continues to conduct sporadic attacks in southern Sudan and factional fighting has become commonplace there. Relations between Ethiopia and Eritrea are at a new low since the end of fighting in 2000. Eritrea supports groups that oppose Ethiopia and vice versa. In the past year, Eritrea has aided groups that oppose Somalia's Transitional Federal Government (TFG), which Ethiopia supports. This has worsened relations between Ethiopia and Eritrea. The Ogaden National Liberation Front has stepped up attacks in the Ogaden and the Asmara-based Oromo Liberation Front remains a threat to be reckoned with. Peace in Somalia is little more than a dream following the defeat of the Union of Islamic Courts. The fallout from Somalia has impacted much of the Horn. Somaliland has been reasonably quiet but has not resolved its differences with Puntland. Only Djibouti in recent years has been an island of relative peace.

I will focus my remarks today on events in Somalia and, especially, their impact on the Horn. Those of you in this room know the long history of hostility in Somali-Ethiopian relations. The picture is not very pretty. There is no need to review the background for this audience. Suffice it to say that Ethiopia has legitimate security concerns vis-à-vis Somalia and vice versa because of the 1,000 mile long border that arbitrarily divided the Somali people. Nevertheless, this border is a fact accepted by the African Union and the international community.

The long history of previous Somali-Ethiopian hostility and the legacy of Mogadishu's "Greater Somalia" policy that laid claim to about one-quarter of the land area of Ethiopia returned last year. Somalia's irredentist claims remained dormant following the collapse of the Siad Barre government in 1991 but returned after the Islamic Courts gained control of about fifty percent of the former Somali Republic. One of the most important leaders in the Islamic Courts, Hassan Dahir Aweys, revived Somali claims to Ethiopian territory. To the best of my knowledge, the other key leader in the Islamic Courts, Sheikh Sharif Sheikh Ahmed, did not call for, at least publicly, negotiations with Addis Ababa over the Somali-inhabited Ogaden region. But the

Islamic Courts as an organization did declare a jihad against Ethiopia after Ethiopian troops entered Somalia in support of the TFG. For its part, the TFG has not given any indication that it intends to revive the Greater Somalia issue.

I should make clear that I approach the issue of Somalia (and all other issues for that matter) and its impact on Ethiopia from the standpoint of what I believe is best for US policy based on American interests in the region. As a result, I probably see the challenge in the Horn of Africa differently than the governments and much of the public in both Ethiopia and Somalia.

US interests include the establishment of a stable and peaceful Somalia with a widely accepted national government that re-establishes the rule of law, a functioning economy, and cordial relations with its neighbors. From the American perspective, political stability in the region is essential. It is also in the interest of the US to see that humanitarian disasters in Somalia are eliminated or, at least, minimized. This is not only good for Somalis, but it puts fewer burdens on the American taxpayer who provides much of the emergency assistance. Finally, the US seeks to counter extremism and terrorism that has, on occasion, been aided and abetted in Somalia. In the past, terrorist acts with links to Somalia have directly impacted US interests in Kenya and Tanzania.

My remarks are based on several important assumptions. The TFG is the only Somali government recognized by the United Nations, African Union, Arab League, and international community generally. It is important to help the TFG succeed **so long as** it is willing to become a truly inclusive government. So far, it has not demonstrated that it is serious about significantly broadening its base. The TFG remains weak, is not sufficiently representative, and continues to be highly dependent on the presence of Ethiopian troops for its survival. I strongly doubt that any Somali government will succeed unless it includes representation from virtually all elements of Somali opinion and society. This will require sharing power at the highest levels of the TFG with some persons who are now excluded. From my perspective, the only groups that should be excluded from a national Somali government are those that:

- urge war or support terrorist acts against neighboring countries;
- have indisputable links with terrorist or criminal organizations; and
- hold views so extreme that they will prevent a national government from functioning successfully and peacefully.

I also assume that Islam has become an even more essential component of Somali society in recent years and that what is sometimes called political Islam has become a permanent feature of Somali politics. Somalia's neighbors, the US, and the West generally must learn to live with this situation and even be supportive **so long as** Somali Islam remains tolerant and seeks to solve problems peacefully. The Sufi beliefs in Somali Islam have resulted in a tradition of moderation. In spite of some recent radicalization among a small minority, usually encouraged by foreigners, this continues to be the case. I recently had the occasion to read a number of declassified al-Qaeda documents concerning their efforts in the mid-1990s to establish a base in Somalia. The frustration these foreign terrorists experienced in contacts with the Somalis was palpable.

Nevertheless, they eventually did achieve a few successes, especially with adventure-driven young Somalis.

The TFG, African Union, United Nations, and the international community are attaching considerable importance to the standing up of an 8,000 member African Union peacekeeping mission in Somalia to maintain law and order. So far, only about 1,600 Ugandans have arrived in the country and there is no indication other African contingents plan to come anytime soon. More importantly, I think the peacekeeping mission misses the point. It can achieve very little unless there is first major progress on a political settlement in Somalia. Once there is general agreement among Somali clan leaders, business representatives, moderates from the Islamic Courts, civil society, and even the warlords, an outside peacekeeping force can then make a positive contribution. This can be followed by the training of Somalis to take over the functions of the police and security forces. Even a peacekeeping force that is much larger than 8,000 will not be able to maintain order if key opponents of the TFG refuse to cooperate.

You may recall that the African Union force was to remain in Somalia for six months and then be replaced by a United Nations force. The Ugandan troops arrived in Mogadishu in early March. Although the full 8,000 member AU force never materialized, the Ethiopian troops filled the void. Arguably, the AU commitment is about half finished and the UN should be readying its force to replace the Ugandans in early September. But there is silence on this front. In fact, the April 13 report to the UN Secretary General on the situation in Somalia stated that “it is difficult to offer a definite recommendation at this point with regard to the possible deployment of a United Nations peacekeeping operation in support of the peace process.” The report commented that UN personnel in the region expressed concern about deployment of a force and that it would encounter significant logistical challenges. The Ugandan and Ethiopian forces can certainly vouch for that. The UN seems to have no intention of establishing a peacekeeping force in Somalia by early September. This leaves either the Ugandans and/or the Ethiopians stuck in Mogadishu. Other than the TFG, most Somalis have made it clear they want the Ethiopian force to leave. It is also obvious that 1,600 Ugandans are not able to provide security in Mogadishu.

I suspect that even the government of Ethiopia would like to remove its soldiers from Somalia. It is creating a financial burden and probably having a negative impact on military morale. If the Ethiopians departed immediately, however, that would leave only the Ugandans and the TFG militia in Mogadishu. Even a weak opposition force on its home turf could defeat this combination. In an *al-Jazeera* interview that appeared on the web March 24, Prime Minister Meles stated that Ethiopia had completed the first phase of its troop withdrawal from Somalia and he added the second phase will take place in a few days, leaving less than a third of the original contingent in Somalia. It has never been clear to outsiders how many troops Ethiopia had in Somalia originally. Hence, it is impossible to say whether Ethiopia has met that schedule. But I doubt it. The security situation in Mogadishu is just too tenuous for Ethiopia to draw down two-thirds of its original force. Although there has been no major fighting in recent weeks, violent incidents continue on a regular basis.

An Ethiopian scholar in Addis Ababa, Medhane Tadesse, who supported the sending of Ethiopian troops into Somalia and on occasion has advised the Ethiopian government, was quoted in the *Washington Post* in late April that Ethiopia's military victory in Somalia "was not complemented by a political victory." He added that "long-term stability in Somalia requires a long-term social strategy, but Ethiopia and the US only had a military strategy." That conclusion is worth thinking about.

Most observers agree that political reconciliation among Somalis is the most urgent task. The report to the UN Secretary General said there is a broad agreement within the international community that without an all-inclusive political dialogue and reconciliation process, no peacekeeping force is likely to bring sustainable peace to Somalia. Prime Minister Meles acknowledged in the *al-Jazeera* interview that large numbers of peacekeepers in Somalia are not the answer. He said progress will be determined by "the reconciliation process among the Somalis." I believe he is correct. The question is how one achieves reconciliation. Plaintive calls for political dialogue, which are common in Western capitals, are not the answer. Somalis will dialogue everyone to death. The TFG solution was a 3,000 member conference for political dialogue in Mogadishu. The idea of holding the conference in Mogadishu is admirable, but the security situation probably precludes it. The TFG has postponed the conference several times and now reduced the number of participants to about 1,300 persons, allegedly because the international community has not provided adequate funding. The last scheduled date for the conference was mid-June. There are reports that it may be postponed again.

Hawiye Abgal leader Ali Mahdi Mohamed is in charge of the conference. Hawiye clan elders in Mogadishu recently said three conditions must be met before they will participate. The demands included a ceasefire between insurgents, on the one hand, and Ethiopian and TFG militia, on the other, so that there is no more killing of civilians. Second, they called for the deployment of the full 8,000 member AU peacekeeping force and the withdrawal of all Ethiopian troops from Somalia. Third, they demanded the sharing of the conference chairmanship with a representative from opposition groups. None of these conditions will be met quickly, if at all. In addition, Sheikh Sherif Sheikh Ahmed, former chairman of the executive committee of the Council of Islamic Courts, and Sherif Hassen Sheikh Aden, former speaker of the Somali Transitional Federal Parliament, both of whom are now in exile in Asmara, called for a boycott of the conference. It is questionable whether the conference will take place anytime in the foreseeable future.

While it is true that large conferences and months of discussion are part of Somali tradition, the current situation calls for something different. Time is running out and I doubt that anyone has the patience to wait for a reconciliation conference that may never happen anyway. It is time for the TFG to reach out to its moderate opponents and bring them into the government. It may be possible to convince enough of them to accept responsible positions so that the political factions in Mogadishu, the location of most of the problems, can then begin the real process of reconciliation.

While I agree that the departure of the Ethiopian troops would enhance the prospects for a successful power sharing arrangement between the TFG and moderate opponents, this would pose a security challenge, at least in Mogadishu. It probably means the Ethiopian force will have to remain until there is some progress on the political front. Ethiopia could announce a schedule for the departure of its troops from Somalia. This would put pressure on the TFG to seriously begin the process. The spoilers in Mogadishu—the extremist remnants of the Islamic Courts, the Shabaab militia, and whatever is left of the foreign jihadis—will see this as an opportunity to simply wait out the departure of the Ethiopians. But Somali clan leaders and moderates from the Islamic Courts in Mogadishu, if the TFG has seriously begun the process of making them an important part of the government, may well decide this is an opportunity to participate in a government of national unity. If they follow this course, which admittedly is a gamble, they are in a position to neutralize the spoilers. There is no way to convince the spoilers that they should serve the interests of the Somali people. They have their own, selfish jihadi agenda. The only way to deal with them is to take steps that will encourage most Somalis, especially clan leaders, to isolate the Somali extremists and remove all foreigners from Somalia.

Achieving a satisfactory solution to the current crisis in Mogadishu will not be easy even if all the major Somali parties finally agree to act in the best interest of the Somali people and put their personal ambitions aside. But a good result is not impossible. To summarize, the first step should be the immediate initiation by the TFG of serious power-sharing with elements now excluded from power. As soon as that process has begun, the Ethiopian force should quickly begin its final and complete departure from Somalia. In the meantime, the UN, not the African Union, should be organizing a peacekeeping force consisting largely but not entirely of African units. This force should be ready to move into Mogadishu as it becomes clear that the political reconciliation process is working.

None of this will happen, however, **until the TFG engages in serious power sharing** with disaffected Somali parties. If the TFG fails to begin this process, there is no reason why the international community should support it other than to provide emergency assistance to the Somali people. In fact, lack of TFG willingness to share power should cause the international community to signal the TFG that the time has come to leave it to its own devices. Ethiopia, because of its military support of the TFG, has more leverage over the TFG than any other country. If, on the other hand, the TFG makes an immediate and sincere effort to share power and its opponents refuse to reciprocate, then it is up to the Arab League, its members, and other friends of the opposition like Eritrea to pressure them to do what is right for Somalia. Somali author Nuruddin Farah recently wrote that “both sides must give. Most Somalis believe that the Islamists deserve a place at the table.” He urged the withdrawal of Ethiopian troops and acknowledged that genuine negotiations will not be easy. But the alternative in his view is just more violence. I am inclined to agree.

I would be happy to take your questions.

