

Anarchy in Somalia: Warlords, Islamic Courts and the Ethiopian Factor ¹

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Introduction

The Horn of Africa is currently embroiled in a multi-layered and multi-faceted feud that has erupted into vicious warfare. The festering dispute between Ethiopia and Eritrea with the power struggle in Somalia, also draws other players - the fledgling provisional government, antigovernment clan militias, Islamist militants, and anti-Islamist warlords.

In order to understand this complicated regional problem of the Horn and the predicament of the state of Somalia, one needs to see the root causes of the conflict. Somalia, as a state was forged in 1960, out of a former British protectorate and an Italian colony. From its inception, its claim to ethnic Somali inhabited regions of Ethiopia, Kenya and Djibouti has put it on war footing particularly with Ethiopia.¹ The country has been plagued by anarchy and there has been no effective central government since 1991.² Incessant fighting between rival warlords loyal to specific clans³ and the country's inability to solve the problem of famine and disease has led to the deaths of up to one million Somalis in the last 20 years.⁴

Anarchy has been the norm in Somalia since the overthrow of Barre when failing to agree on a replacement, warlords who brought the dictator down plunged the country into chaos and clan warfare.⁵ Two regions, in the north, declared independence⁶ though international recognition was not forthcoming, at least in an official way.⁷

With U.N. encouragement, Somali clan elders and political figures met in Djibouti and appointed Abdulkassim Salat Hassan president of Somalia in 2000. However, by the time the provisional government's mandate ended, his administration was far from uniting the county. Again another effort was made and in 2004, after a series of conferences in Kenya, the main warlords and political figures signed a deal to set up a new parliament. A president was subsequently appointed.⁸ This was actually the 14th attempt to establish a government since 1991.

The new transitional entity was government only in name. It had no civil service not even government buildings. Its meeting place was a former grain storehouse. Like all the previous ones, it had to face a formidable task in bringing reconciliation to a country splintered into feuding

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factions based on clan loyalties. It was at this stage that a swathe of land to the south including the capital city of Mogadishu, were taken over by an Islamic militia that called itself “Majilis al-shura Council” or Supreme Islamic Courts Council (SICC). The Ethiopian government claiming the fundamentalist organization presented “clear and present” danger to its sovereignty, invaded Somalia and trounced the visible elements of the Islamic courts and touched off a civil war that is currently raging. However, there is great danger that the conflict in Somalia might spill over into other areas including Eritrea and Ethiopia and transform particularly the latter into another Iraq.

U.S. Strategic Interest in Somalia

American interest in the Horn has increased over time. While Somalia was in total turbulence, the world’s only remaining superpower the United States of America was wary of the consequences because the deteriorating situation might impinge on its own national interest.⁹ The precedent for U.S. intervention was set early during the time of the cold war.¹⁰ The fall of the Soviet Union did bring the cold war to an end but a new development had emerged in its stead. Terrorism was growing all around the world challenging American interest and hegemony. The anarchy that prevailed for more than a decade, Washington feared, was to make Somalia an attractive locale for Al-Qaeda operatives.

In the meantime, the country’s clan leaders, generally referred to as “warlords,” had splintered the land into competing fiefdoms.¹¹ Whereas to the North West and North east, leaders in Somaliland and Puntland had established semi-autonomous governments, in the south, and especially in Mogadishu, warlords continued to feud to control more territory on behalf of one clan or another. But while all this was shaping up, American primary objective remained to be the containment of terrorists in the region.

As early as December 10, 2001 the U.S. had decided to expand its presence in the Horn of Africa. The Bush administration had declared Ethiopia the United States' principal ally in fighting against terrorism. It was due to this fact that the U.S. Agency for International Development that donated to Ethiopia \$460 million in food aid and assistance in fiscal year 2005 referred to the country as being "of strategic importance to the United States because of its geographic position" and "the linchpin to stability in the Horn of Africa and the Global War on Terrorism."¹²

In order to apprehend Al-Qaeda operatives hiding among the Islamic Courts Union, Washington funded the Somali warlords to pursue, capture or kill them. The enlisted warlords who forged an association called “the Alliance for the Restoration of Peace and Counterterrorism” obliged. Starting in 2006, each warlord was paid \$150,000 a month.¹³ This is despite the fact that the United States gave far less humanitarian assistance to Somalia than to other countries on the continent. In the long run, the American policy failed because the people of the country supported the Islamic courts not the war lords. Being tired of violence and lawlessness, the Somalis had turned to armed Mullahs who imposed Sharia to contain the outlaws. Though many Somalis did not like the extreme aspects of Sharia which forced women to wear veils, abolished the consumption of alcohol and the use of the local stimulant khat, prohibited watching international

soccer games on TV and closed down of cinema houses, the Islamic group rose to the occasion and defeated the U.S. financed warlords one by one and gave the people a peace of mind.

In its plan for the Horn, Washington struck a deal to station intelligence and military assets in northern Somalia.¹⁴ The decision was made so that the US. Would be able to use the port and airfield at Berbera in support of Ethiopian operations in the region. It was also to gain greater reach to conduct anti-terrorist operations of its own in the Horn theatre.¹⁵

Starting in November 2001, the U.S. and its ally, Germany had sent a delegation that toured Berbera and negotiated to use its port and airfield.¹⁶ A London-based Arabic daily had earlier reported that U.S. forces were preparing to move to Berbera in order to make use of the facilities. A week later, a similar report came from a U.N. Publication but hinted that Germany might be more interested to sign an agreement with Djibouti rather than Somaliland.¹⁷

Berbera presents many advantages for the U.S defence department. Its deepwater port, which was developed by the Soviet navy in the 1970s, is still one of the best ports in the Indian Ocean littoral. Its airfield also has one of the longest runways in the entire North-East African region.

The move is not new for the U.S. It had earlier made Berbera a major base in the region when in the early 1980s the revolutionary situation in Iran had forced Washington to look for new bases in the area. At the moment, the strategic location of Berbera makes it a focal point for the U.S. anti-terror campaign outside of the Afghanistan war theatre.

Southern Somalia, Sudan, Yemen, Kenya and Tanzania are all suspected of being breeding grounds for Al-Qaeda operatives and all of them happen to be within striking distance of Berbera.¹⁸ If the Americans aim to make active military strikes against terrorist targets in the aforementioned countries, the port and the airfield of Berbera could be handy. Furthermore, the mere presence of the U.S. army there could act as a deterrent to Al-Qaeda's expansion.

The United States had also an eye on Baidoa, which is within the un-splintered sector of Somalia. The city, chosen as a secondary sight, is located 150 miles southwest of Mogadishu. Already, by Dec. 10 2001, nine American military officers had visited it. They met with senior members of the Rahanweyn Resistance Army (RRA), an Ethiopian-backed paramilitary force in Southern Somalia. Baidoa had ultimately been a refuge for the Ethiopian supported and U.S. backed provisional government of Somalia.

The United States interest in Berbera and the German navy's plan to have a presence in nearby Djibouti was motivated by many advantages that might accrue from such a move. For U.S. military strategists, using the base at the north-western city of Berbera would offer several strategic advantages in conducting military operations throughout the Middle East and East Africa. It was a strategy aimed at enabling Washington and its allies to make a sustained effort to sever Al-Qaeda's communications and supply lines through the Arabian Sea, one of the group's major transport routes.

All this activity was at the expense of Somali unity. In fact, as early as 2001, Al-Zaman that is known to have a good source for its information had reported that Washington was

clandestinely supporting Somaliland President Muhammad Ibrahim Egal and was actually encouraging him to declare himself the legitimate president of Somaliland.¹⁹ The inevitable result of the move was to bolster the bid of Somaliland to stay autonomous and enjoy financial and political support from the United States in exchange for access to the port.

Somali nationalists were incensed by U.S. activities in Hargeisa because they considered it a harbinger of Somaliland's bid for independence, thus forestalling any chances of a united Somalia emerging out of the chaos that appeared after the fall of the Siad Barre regime in 1991. That this cosy relationship with a separatist entity was bound to encourage the partition of Somalia was not of major concern to Washington.²⁰ Since Al-Qaeda members had been suspected of being in the country by 1993, and there was fear that after fleeing Afghanistan they might take refuge there, the most important issue for them was how to stop Somalia from becoming a prime terrorist hideout.

The United States has been determined to do everything in its power to curb any semblance of terrorism appearing in the region and it was due to its global interest that it allowed Ethiopia to purchase weapons secretly from North Korea in January, 2007, three months after the U.N. Security Council passed a resolution sanctioning Pyongyang.²¹ The New York Times quoted senior U.S. officials as saying that the United States permitted the deal because Ethiopian troops were in the middle of an offensive against Islamist militias in Somalia.²²]

Ethiopian Government Strategy

Ethiopia, being a Christian dominated state, has always worried about the ominous prospect of Islamic fundamentalism encroaching on its borders. But Addis Ababa's policies vis-à-vis Somalia were not always successful. For example, in November 2001, Ethiopian troops had crossed into Puntland, where there was fear that radical Islamists were trying to extend their influence. The Meles regime intervened on the side of the nominal government of Puntland to support a power grab by Abdullahi Yusuf. The action was coordinated because both the EPRDF government and Yusuf were vehemently opposed to Muslim extremists in Somalia. Yusuf was however, ousted by the reversals that followed Meles' intervention.

Indeed, there was some danger to Ethiopian interests. The Islamists were expanding their hold on the region and no matter under which government, the fight against Islamic extremism has reverberated in Addis Ababa. The Prime Minister of Ethiopia, Meles Zenawi had many reasons to fear Islamic terrorism. In the capital, Addis Ababa, in 1995, a group of extremists almost succeeded with their assassination attempt of Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak. The Somalia-based "Al-Ittihad Al-Islami" had carried out terrorist activities in major cities such as Addis Ababa and Dire Dawa. When senior Islamic Court officials announced that they intended to incorporate the Somali populations in the Ogaden province of Ethiopia into greater Somalia, the situation became even more urgent.

Furthermore, the courts were backing Ethiopian opposition groups such as the Ogaden National Liberation Front as well as the Oromo Liberation Front in southern Oromia. This

presented an immediate challenge to the Ethiopian Prime Minister who knows full well that even a small guerrilla army can achieve its aims if it is determined, if it is disciplined and if it can garner support from outside. His own Tigray Peoples Liberation Front [TPLF] that ultimately triumphed started in exactly that manner. Thus, when hundreds of Somali volunteers who went to assist the Taliban and Al-Qaeda forces in Afghanistan returned back to the Somali city of Boosaaso, he swiftly sent Ethiopian soldiers and routed many suspected Islamists out of the area. However, he was not able to completely eliminate them and many extremist elements succeeded to retreat south to an area bordering Kenya in order to carry out guerrilla warfare.

The Meles Intervention

Meles invasion of Somalia was conceived and carried out within a very short period of time. The tensions in Somalia between the forces of the Supreme Islamic Courts Council (SICC) and the interim government and its Ethiopian backers broke into open warfare as Ethiopian forces launched air strikes against SICC positions in several locations in December 2006 and began moving ground forces. The attacks came a month after Ethiopian Prime Minister Meles Zenawi called Somalia's Islamists a "clear and present" danger during an address to parliament.²³ In the intervening weeks, both sides maneuvered for better position before the end of the rainy season.

The swift invasion surprised many onlookers particularly compared with the resistance shown by the Somalis against the Americans in the Black Hawk incident in 1993. Ethiopia's defeat of the Islamic Courts was decisive because Addis Ababa is known to have one of the largest, well-equipped and war-hardened armies in Sub-Sahara Africa. Meles was able to deploy a full range of tanks and warplanes against opponents equipped mainly with makeshift armoured vehicles fashioned out of about 65 mini-buses. Ethiopia's conventional campaign led to the capture of the Somalian capital of Mogadishu on Dec. 28 2006-- a day after SICC fighters, who had controlled the city since June, abandoned it. Regarding the routing of the Islamists, The Economist of London commented:

The Islamists' forces have been humiliated on the battlefield, their soldiers driven back into the bush and desert from where many of them came, their political power broken. And all this at the hands of that very same feeble transitional government--with an awful lot of help from the regional and world superpowers, Ethiopia and the United States.²⁴

Ethiopian Prime Minister Meles Zenawi said Jan. 2, 2007 that his country's forces will withdraw from Somalia within weeks and called for an international peacekeeping force to replace them. Though Germany, the current holder of the rotating EU presidency, convened European members of the International Contact Group on Somalia to discuss the issue on Jan. 3, 2007, no peacekeeping force was suggested to be created by countries outside the continent. Thus, Ethiopia

was forced to continue occupying Somalia to keep the Supreme Islamic Courts Council (SICC) from returning to power. The continued occupation of Somalia is, not without peril. Ethiopian troops not only have to rely on supply lines that extend through southeastern Ethiopia with questionable security. They have also exposed themselves to Islamist fighters who are adopting guerrilla tactics. As a result, the Addis Ababa government and its troops in Somalia will remain targets of unremitting guerrilla campaigns into the indefinite future. Furthermore, the threat of a dual guerrilla and conventional campaign at home is even more critical to the Ethiopian regime. On another note, the intervention gives the prime minister whose repressive and anti-democratic policies have made him highly unpopular at home, a respite from international accusations of fomenting electoral abuse and carrying out gross human rights violations.

Despite the SICC's collapse as a political force, Somalia's Islamists can still aggravate anti-government tensions in Ethiopia's eastern Ogaden region, where ethnic Somalis have been waging an insurgency in a bid for independence. Addis Ababa faces a second domestic insurgency from the Oromo Liberation Front in the South, which is fighting for secession.

Reasons for Meles' Intervention

To justify his actions, Meles says it was merely giving military support to the legitimate, UN-backed government in Baidoa²⁵ that had been put together after long negotiations only two years ago.²⁶ But the simple answer to Meles Zenawi's invasion of Somalia is that he wants to hide his regime's excesses during the last 15 years which according to international human rights organizations and the European Union and the U.S. State Department's assessment shows it to be anti-democratic, dictatorial and even totalitarian.²⁷ The Meles regime is currently one of the world's repressive states that parades in the name of democracy in order to use it as a palliative for the West that provides it with close to 2 billion U.S. dollars in aid per annum.

Why does the Meles administration fit the bill of a repressive state? It is because it uses systematic and indiscriminate acts of violence against people who oppose it, tortures and kills civilians who fall out of line, routinely carries out extrajudicial murders, practices extreme censorship, suppresses political dissent and opposition political parties, flagrantly violates people's individual liberties, and crushes the independence of the judiciary.²⁸ The regime, in fact, considers the opposition as an enemy to be jailed or destroyed instead of treating it as a possible government of tomorrow. All these and more need hiding. The Somali intervention, Meles hoped, would divert people's attention from his brutal treatment of civilians and opposition groups such as Kinijit that won the election thumbs up only to end up in jail and be accused with bogus charges of "Crimes against humanity" and "attempted genocide."²⁹

The ERRDF prime minister also hoped to buy the friendship of the Bush administration by intervening in Somalia under the guise of fighting Al-Qaeda operatives who camouflaged themselves under the name of Al-Itihad Al Islami. As is now clear, H.R. 5680 which calls on the

Meles regime to account for his massive human rights abuses has passed the U.S. House International Relations Committee with unanimous and bi-partisan support, and is awaiting passage in the full house and the Senate.³⁰ Meles aspires either to get the legislation scrapped or at least to get it watered down by appearing an American ally against the war on terrorism.

Consequences of Meles' Intervention

As early as January 2001, Ethiopian troops were deployed into southern Somalia and clan leaders from many Somali factions were planning a southern regional government. These developments indicated the possibility that the Meles regime was determined to back a plan for another semi-autonomous region in Somalia. This was indirectly to undercut the newly formed U.N.-backed interim national government in Somalia and afford the EPRDF government that had botched up the victory Ethiopia won over the Eritreans, a new front on which the opposition and the Ethiopian people would look. When Meles' army was pouring into the south-western region of Somalia, leaders from several Somali clans met to discuss plans for the creation of a regional government. This was custom made by Addis Ababa that wanted to shift attention away from its problems at home.³¹

For a long time, Meles had sought and gained the chance to create military alliances with Somali factions when benefited his regime. Reports of Ethiopian troops operating within south-western Somalia combined with the creation of a southern regional government by separatist clan leaders clearly suggested in early 2001, that Meles actually reversed his claimed support for the newly formed U.N.-backed central government in Mogadishu. Meles had the U.S. on its side whatever policies he adopts. Thus, the United States quietly poured weapons and military advisers into Ethiopia, whose invasion of Somalia opened a new front in the Bush administration's war on terrorism.

Military experts estimate the extent of American support for Meles' military to be more than for any other country in Sub-Sahara Africa. Even U.S military officials admit it. For example Pentagon spokesman Lt. Cmdr. Joe Carpenter had told USA Today that the U.S. and Ethiopian militaries have such 'a close working relationship,' that includes intelligence sharing, arms aid and training ... the Ethiopians." This became necessary, he said because they need to have "the capacity to defend their borders and intercept terrorists and weapons of mass destruction."³²

The international community had tried hard to bring the Somalis together so that they could once again be a sovereign entity lead only by one government. It was in November, 2000, that the United Nations, with the support of regional states including Ethiopia, Djibouti and Libya, sponsored a peace plan aimed at ending Somalia's anarchy. The group helped form a transitional national government for Somalia which was led by President Abdiqasim Hassan who moved his headquarters to the capital Mogadishu. But Abdiqasim Hassan's government, was never able to gain the support of the country's multifarious clan based factions. Then, Meles' deployment of troops to the region, undercut the newly created central government. The Addis Ababa regime was working swiftly to forge a new regional government encompassing Bay, Bakol, Gedo, Lower Juba

and Lower Shabelle.³³ If created, this was to form an ominous arc around the capital city of Mogadishu.

There were difficulties facing the newly created national government of Somalia right from the start. The EPRDF came to its support but on condition that Addis Ababa's interests be paramount. Ethiopia was already in conflict with Somalia with regard to the Somali populated Ethiopian province of Ogaden.³⁴ The major weakness of the new government was its total reliance on Ethiopian support, both economically and militarily. Since the TPLF that is in control of Ethiopia had deliberately let the Ports of Assab to go to independent Eritrea, Meles and his team had landlocked Ethiopia. From the time of Eritrea's de jure independence in 1993, Ethiopia was forced to be totally dependent on Djibouti. However, Djibouti, that knows that Ethiopia has no choice but to depend on it for its survival had threatened to increase import duties by 150 percent.

Berbera was touted as an as a viable alternative but the port is simply too small to accommodate Ethiopia's imports and exports. The Meles regime had for a while tried to negotiate to use the Kenyan port of Mombassa.³⁵ The economic difficulties of financing the building of a reliable transportation network, and if that is done, the added transportation time, are bound to drastically increase the cost of Ethiopian imports. Hence Meles' interest in using the deep water ports of Kismayo that serves the Juba region of southern Somalia. The EPRDF government had, in addition, an eye on the smaller ports at Merca and Brava located south of Mogadishu. All this is to make up for tacitly agreeing to leave Ethiopia's ports to independent Eritrea.

Meles may be encouraging the separatists in both north and south Somalia for his own pragmatic reasons. But by doing so, he is putting Ethiopia at great risk. Whereas Somalia's inner turmoil may likely remain contained, poisoning its relations with moderate Arab countries and irritating the dangerous Al-Qaeda operatives may not only ultimately destroy the entire region's chances for peace but drag Ethiopia towards a religious war and create another Lebanon on the continent of Africa.³⁶

In general the dangers of Meles' interventions can be summed up as follows:

- The action would lead to the fanning of conflict in the Horn
- If Ethiopia and Eritrea start a war again, the former may be forced to fight on two fronts – against Isayas Afeworki's army and the Islamic Court Militia that is already conducting guerrilla warfare.
- Meles' action would alienate moderate Moslem countries who might start to consider Ethiopia an enemy state
- Intervention would lead to more and more money that should be slated towards economic development to be squandered on useless war
- Ethiopia's intervention would set a bad precedent for all other countries considering the fact that it is the seat of the Economic Commission for Africa as well as the African Union

- It may encourage radical Islamists such as Al-Qaeda to target Ethiopia and incite religious war between Christians and Moslems who have co-existed peacefully for hundreds of years thus engulfing the country in a fratricidal war.

The Eritrean Dynamic

Ethiopia faces a conventional threat from rival Eritrea, which long supplied the SICC with arms and which blames the United States for supporting Ethiopia's intervention in Somalia. By 2006, Asmara had deployed large numbers of tanks and troops on the buffer zone along its border with Ethiopia. This was a frontier that inspired a war between the two countries from 1998 to 2000 and consumed the life of 120,000 people as well as making almost a million inhabitants refugees. Chances are, if Meles is distracted by Somalia, Isayas Afeworki of Eritrea could take the opportunity to strike Ethiopia and get even for his humiliating defeat in 2000.

Meles Zenawi of Ethiopia and Isaias Afeworki of Eritrea had a history of supporting different factions or warlords in order to outflank each other in shifting their problems at home to the intractable problems of Somalia. The conflict in Somalia is serving as a proxy war for Ethiopia and Eritrea. As it continues, direct fighting between Addis Ababa and Asmara could become a reality. And this raises security concerns for U.S. operations in the Horn of Africa, which are based out of Djibouti, squeezed between Eritrea, Ethiopia and Somalia.³⁷

Close observers of Ethiopian politics know that there are linkages between what expired in the war between Ethiopia and Eritrea and the Somali invasion. Meles, had to make up for his blunders in not securing the port of Assab at the time Ethiopia won the war against Eritrea in 2000. His new policy was therefore to make up for past miss-ups. It is motivated by his need for port access now that Assab is gone for good.

Before 2001, Ethiopia's reliance on ports in Djibouti and in the north-eastern semi-autonomous region of Somaliland, in Somalia was not secure. Meles was perfectly aware that he could lose them the moment a hostile clan took over. Having right of entry to several ports in southern Somalia could provide alternate access in those eventualities. Supporting a separatist movement that would create a semi-autonomous region in the south of Somalia, Meles could patch up an alliance with local clan leaders by helping them achieve independence and in return receive access to the ports of southern Somalia.

There was already a precedent. Hargeissa and Puntland had already sprang up in the north without much challenge from factions outside those areas. Meles' effort was therefore, to further Somalia's Balkanization in order to secure his hold on the disputed south-western region and guarantee access to southern Somali ports.

With his intervention, Meles had succeeded to undermine the new Somali central government of President Abdiqasim Hassan; but he also spurred Eritrea to renew its involvement in Somalia as well, thus enabling him to shift the attention of the Ethiopian people and the international community away from the Badme-Zalambassa frontline which he had tacitly allowed

to be dismembered from Ethiopia though thousands of youth sacrificed their lives to protect the territorial integrity of their country.

The anarchy in Somalia got almost out of hand starting in mid July 2006. In a dramatic development, the ineffective Somali Transitional Federal Government's constitution and federalism minister, Abdullah Deerow Isaaq, was assassinated on July 28 2006 in broad daylight as he stepped out of a mosque he was praying at in Baidoa. The assassination follows the July 27 2006, resignation of 18 Transitional Federal Government Cabinet members in protest to Meles Zenawi's flagrant intervention in Somalia's internal politics. The Islamic court had immediately referred to this action as hostile and an obstacle to peace.

Meles Zenawi's intervention and the consequent assassination immediately provoked the national security concerns in Ethiopia and Eritrea and among Somalian Islamists, encouraged a wide scale war in the region. It is clear that Isaaq's assassination took place in the very presence of 3,000 Ethiopian troops providing security in and around Baidoa on behalf of the beleaguered transitional government. Their presence was therefore giving the Somalis allied to them a false sense of security. The assassination undermined the Transitional Federal Government in that more of its members have to live in fear for personal safety. The assassination was the work of the Islamic courts Council armed through Eritrea and it constituted a direct challenge to the security guarantees provided by Ethiopia.

Aweye's Islamic Court Council was emboldened by July 26 and July 28 shipments of arms off-loaded at Mogadishu airport from an Ilyushin-76 chartered by Eritrea. Since Eritrea has no resource to afford to buy the equipment for the Islamists, it is safe to conclude that Egypt, Iran and Libya who consider Ethiopia as Christian foe were behind the shipment.

As the situation took on an international character involving three countries – namely Ethiopia, Eritrea and Somalia, many in Somalia considered the Meles regime an obstacle to peace in their country. This is because the longer Ethiopia props up the Transitional Federal Government, the longer the interim government is seen as a puppet of Ethiopia, thus preventing Somalia's political factions uniting against Ethiopia but still remaining divided on a clan basis. Meles cannot easily back down from his support for the Transitional Federal Government because he has clearly said “the threat of Islamists -- and in particular Sheikh Hassan Dahir Aweys -- holding power in Somalia is an intolerable threat to the national security of Ethiopia, which has long struggled for internal and regional stability.”³⁸ Aweys was secretly armed by Isayas Afeworki of Eritrea.

There can be no doubt that Meles's resolve not to back down in Somalia is bolstered by Eritrea's open support for the Islamic courts. For Meles, the supply of weapons originating in Eritrea to the Aweye group justifies his army's continued intervention in Somalia. For all practical purposes, by 2007, the rapport de force in Somalia has increasingly pit Ethiopia and Eritrea, into a position where backing down from conflict will be very difficult due to each parties' security concerns.

U.S., the Horn and Al-Qaeda

For a long time, Africans have claimed that their continent was being treated by U.S. State Department officials as if it is a geopolitical backwater. However, all of a sudden, it became a key front in the war against Al-Qaeda. This is understandable.³⁹ The anarchy and turmoil prevalent in Somalia has afforded an ideal atmosphere for terrorism networks' undertakings as the frequent assaults in Kenya and Tanzania had revealed. For a while, Americans had tried to leave matters mostly to the governments of the region relying instead on surgical strikes into countries like Somalia and Sudan and intelligence sharing with local governments of Ethiopia, Tanzania and Kenya. This has, at least on the surface, denied Al-Qaeda operational freedom in Eastern Africa and the Horn. But as time passed, it became imperative for the U.S. to get involved directly.

In 2003, Africa was depicted by the U.S. as a hot spot for terrorism. Al-Qaeda, on its part, had tried hard to demonstrate its ability to conduct violent operations in the region to show to the U.S. that it has the capacity to strike at any point it wants. The American government was nevertheless, determined to gain victory over Al-Qaeda to frustrate its ambition to turn the continent of Africa into turmoil. After the terrorists hit its embassies in Kenya and Tanzania, it became imperative for the U.S. to score noticeable victories in the region.⁴⁰ Thus during the last three years, pressure had been mounting as both sides raced to demonstrate their effectiveness in outflanking the other.

Washington has been engaged in concerted attempts to dismantle Al-Qaeda's communications and terrorist network in the Horn and East African regions. U.S. military forces have been deployed there to effectively deny sanctuary to suspected militants holed up throughout the region. American intelligence agencies have been working with local African security forces to uncover possible Al-Qaeda operatives in cities and villages in the Horn and in East Africa. Addis Ababa, Khartoum, Nairobi, Dar es Salaam, Kampala and Mombassa, are suspected to be sites of hibernating terrorist nests. Thus, the U.S. military is increasing the pressure on local African governments to share intelligence information and resolve local conflicts that through the chaos it creates, gives cover to Al-Qaeda.

Not to be outflanked, Al-Qaeda itself has been manoeuvring to avoid detection, to cultivate local allies and factions within some unreliable governments and to take advantage of local conflicts that can conceal its terrorist activities. Thus, the civil wars in Somalia and Sudan had limited the ability of anti-terrorist forces to control the countryside and to monitor traffic flow in and out of the countries they operate in. This afforded an operational advantage to Al-Qaeda. It was thus able to establish bases in southern Somalia and north-western Sudan without any interference by the authorities in the regions.

Al-Qaeda's network has been exposed in some situations but others are unknown. For example, in mid July 2003, reports surfaced that Fazul Abdullah Mohammad, a key Al-Qaeda operative connected with the 1998 bombings of the U.S. embassies in Nairobi and Dar es Salaam, had gone back to Kenya unnoticed. In November 2003, Al-Qaeda operatives tried to shoot down an Israeli airliner with a rocket launcher. Others rammed explosives-laden truck into an Israeli-owned hotel in Mombassa, thus wreaking havoc.

What is shaping up is a battle in which the Ethiopians push the buffer back farther from their border, and carry out long-range strikes on Mogadishu in an effort to stem the flow of foreign weapons and fighters to the SICC as well as return the country's areas of control to their pre-December 2006 position. On the SICC side, there is now an open call for foreign fighters, both from Ethiopian rival Eritrea and from foreign jihadist fighters. Earlier moves by the SICC to reshape itself as a political force with minimal religious goals are no longer expedient, and the SICC is openly seeking foreign Islamist assistance.

This has the potential to create a shift in the dynamic of the international Islamist militancy. While Iraq has been the focal point of international recruiting and volunteering for Islamists seeking a place to fight for their cause, Somalia is shaping up as a new center for international fighters. This could contribute to the reduction of the flow of fighters into Iraq and Afghanistan. But it also creates a locale where, unlike the steady presence of U.S., NATO and allied forces in Afghanistan and Iraq, Western forces are unlikely to intervene.⁴¹

With the interim government unable to fully control Somalia even with the assistance of Ethiopian forces, Somalia becomes a prime area for Al-Qaeda and other Islamist forces to train, rest and recruit, something that neither Afghanistan nor Iraq currently provide beyond the realm of tactical battlefield training. This makes the conflict in Somalia extremely important for Washington. But history and current priorities make active involvement highly unlikely. Thus, Washington will most probably continue to offer increasing levels of support to the Ethiopian forces and in the meantime attempt to revive the warlords in Somalia. This, obviously, will not augur well for the people of Somalia.

In the meantime, the Americans do not want to give any respite to terrorists taking refuge in turbulent Somalia. That was what led the U.S. to launch a new air-strike in the south of the country on Jan. 10, 2007. The attack hit close to the coastal village of Ras Kamboni near the Kenyan border, where many Islamist fighters are believed to have hidden after fleeing Ethiopian troops that are protecting the Somali interim government. This signaled U.S. resolve to show that it is no more hiding its intention to intervene in Somalia in concert with its allies from Ethiopia.

Somalia and Political Islam

The dramatic rout of the U.S.- backed warlords in the Somali capital of Mogadishu by militias loyal to the so-called Islamic Courts Union (ICU), the latter's rapid expansion into much of southern Somalia and Meles Zenawi's surprise move to directly involve Ethiopia in an intractable internal problem has caught the world by surprise. Is it really the danger of Islamic fundamentalism creeping towards Ethiopia that inspired this callous intervention by the TPLF/EPRDF Prime minister Meles Zenawi? Before one answers the possibilities of the danger and the motive of the EPRDF's decision to intervene, one needs to look at the real politics in Somalia at the moment.

The Islamists' sudden rise as a force in Somalia has already prompted U.S. "concerns" that, as President Bush declared, the country might become "a haven for terrorists." This is a reaction that is the result of the terrible terrorist attacks already etched in the minds of people as "Nine

Eleven". The ease with which the terrorists hit the US, the destruction the action caused in human as well as material and moral terms is indeed unbelievable. It deserves the greatest condemnation and vigilance on the part of all those who are targets of terrorists. But the Bush administration had overreacted in the Somali case. If left alone, the so called Islamic Courts would not have been as perilous as they are being depicted. The danger is, that provocation like the intervention by the EPRDF army may do just that: push them towards extreme political Islam and wreak havoc for the U.S. as well as for Ethiopia.

Why is it that the Islamic Courts if left alone cannot be as dangerous as they are made out to be? The well known Horn of Africa historian Said Samatar has explained this metaphorically. For him Murphy's Law can be defied and an argument presented: "Somalia will never be a breeding ground for Islamic terrorism" the main reason being, the Somali polity shaped as it is "to an extraordinary degree, by a central principle that overrides all others, namely the phenomenon that social anthropologists refer to as the segmentary lineage system."⁴² A nomadic saying pushes the metaphor further. It runs: "my uterine brother and I against my half brother, my brother and I against my father, my father's household against my uncle's household, our two households, against the rest of the immediate kin, the immediate kin against non-immediate members of my clan, my clan against others and, finally, my nation and I against the world."⁴³

In this analysis, segmentation, is what divides the Somalis and leads them into irreconcilable fratricidal war. Their kinship system, social norms, religious precepts coexist dialectically. Being hedonistic, rebellious and free-acting with a penchant for division, the Somalis tend to fragment. Somali tradition militates against national unity which breeds institutional instability. That the Somalis, more than any country on the entire planet have lived without a central government for almost two decades is therefore not surprising.

The author concurs with Samatar's observation that recent political developments in Somalia have shown that among Somalis ethnic loyalty is more important than loyalty to Islam. And it is due to this reason that one can convincingly argue that it is hard if not impossible for a Somali religious leader to gain the total allegiance of his followers and rise to the top. What Osama Bin Laden had done with Al-Qaeda and the Taliban with their followers is an impossible prospect if one takes the Somali political culture into account.

It is clear that the ICU that was on the rise would have imploded even without Meles intervention. Following the rules of a segmentary system which defines Somalia's political culture, they were bound to face the same difficulties others have faced in taking over power. Several factors militate against their continued stay in power. First, they were a disunited groups hanging together temporarily. Second each Islamic court had always wanted to monopolize power. Counter coalitions were therefore inevitable and Somali anarchy would have ultimately prevailed.

The Islamic Court Union, whether at the time it was in power or now when it is waging guerrilla warfare, is a melange of kinship groups and is far from being a united Islamic organization. The ICU is made up of eleven independent wrangling factions each of which is loyal to a specific ethnic group. It is important to note that Sheikh Shariff Ahmed, who acted as the

figurehead chairman of the ICU, was accused by others as a person who was there to advance the cause of Abgaal sub-lineage court, not of the national ICU. By the same token, Sheikh Hassan Daahir Aweys, who was a former military officer attached to the Siad Barre regime, though now being depicted as the leader of the ICU was actually being accused of advancing the interest of his 'Ayr lineage group.⁴⁴

Previously, many Somalis suspected that Abdiqaasim Salad, president of the last failed Transitional National Government(TNG) before the present one was put in place, who is an 'Ayr, was the power behind the scene in the structure of the ICU. Lack of loyalty to him was responsible for the failure of his bid to lead the first really functioning national government since the fall of the Siad Barre regime. The reason why there is was no open rebellion against Aweyes during the few months the Courts were in power was because of his military expertise and because he was the only one who commanded a militia to crush the warlords in Mogadishu and elsewhere. It is after all his role that enabled the ICU to take over most of southern Somalia from Mogadishu to Merka, Baraawe, and Kismayu, down to the borders of Kenya.

It is important to point out that in addition to the Abgaal and 'Ayr courts, there is a strong Murursade court, and a formidable Shiikhaal court. In brief, the Islamic courts Union is far from being truly Islamic. Nor is it a political union. Rather, it is a tenuous merger of clans with Islamic symbols such as the Sharia and the Islamic flag as palliatives for Arab petro-dollar. It is also to intimidate direct intervention by the U.S. that was funding the warlords until they roundly routed them everywhere including in the capital Mogadishu.

The cause of the Islamic Court's swift victory against the warlords was "less indicative of the greatness of their strength and more the lack of support in the Somali populace for the hated warlord thugs."⁴⁵

Samatar points this phenomenon:

The segmentary structure of the Somali society always militates against any Somali group that tends to gain an upper hand. This is because the system functions paradoxically. It is a system that tends to move towards the point around which it is turning ...What that means is that the Somali political culture is one where there is unity when a foreign foe poses threat to wide-ranging national interest and there is disequilibrium when left alone.⁴⁶

A good example of what professor Samatar explains here is what expired in the 1990's. The U.S. and its allies militarily intervened in Somalia's internal squabbles as they moved in their forces to save starving civilians in Operation Restore Hope. U.S. humanitarian help was clearly appreciated by the Somalis but not their intervention in clan disputes. For them, a big enemy has appeared to destabilize an age old system. Their response was to lend help to the rebel general M. F. Aideed who decided to stand to the U.S.

On Sunday, October 3, 1993 Somalis attacked the American military contingent and after killing 18 of them, dragged their bodies through the streets of Mogadishu.⁴⁷ It was a harrowing

seen that former President Clinton said he would never forget. Many believed that Idid was unstoppable after that bravado. They could not be more wrong. As soon as the Americans withdrew from Somalia's anarchy, Idid was targeted by warlords of other clans, Muuse Suudi Yalahaw, Muhammad F. Qanyare among them, who wounded and killed the rising strongman and his ambition to lord over Somalia. In another case, when in January, 2000, Mr. Abdiqaasim Salad became president of the first Transitional National Government, Yalahaw, Qanyare and others from disparate clans overthrew him. The present president of the transitional government, Mr. Abdullahi Yusuf is now fighting an uphill battle. Other clan members are adamant that he not be their national leader. There are, in fact, massive defections from among his faction.⁴⁸

The table can therefore be easily be turned with Meles' intervention. His involvement in Somali politics would only serve to legitimize the ICU insurgents as national heroes fighting against Ethiopia with whom they have fought several bloody wars. Patriotic fervour can be easily galvanized and the entire Somali people may decide to stand behind them in the name of a united national cause.

Mounting Insurgency and Clan Alliance

Meles Zenawi's action is far from rooting out the radical Islamists. Nor did it discourage the liberation movements they used to lend support to. Though some that got caught in the crossfire were removed from action, the most visible part of the movement, particularly the Mujahideen Movement known as Shabbab, made up of an international youth contingent originating from areas spanning the globe had not been touched.

The ousted Islamic group did not take long to start attacking Ethiopian troops and, in an audiotape aired on a website used frequently by Islamic militants, Al-Qaeda No. 2 Ayman al-Zawahri urged Somalis to defeat "the crusader Ethiopian invasion forces."⁴⁹ Across the border in Somalia, Islamists employed suicide car bombings to attack Ethiopian troops in and near the capital of Mogadishu. The Shabbab claimed responsibility for the suicide attacks. This group also claimed an April 19 2007 suicide attack at an Ethiopian military base in Mogadishu. The adoption of jihadist tactics and the involvement of foreigners is quite ominous. It is important to note that a Kenyan member of the Young Mujahideen was identified as one of the suicide bombers. This move signals not only a campaign to drive Ethiopian forces out of Somalia but also an effort to expand jihadist warfare more broadly in the Horn of Africa.

In August 2006, Sheik Hassan Dahir Aweys, leader of the Supreme Islamic Council of Somalia, said that he had taken control of the central Somalian regions of Mugud and Galguduud. These regions are home to Habar Gedir clan, to which Aweys belongs. The action enhanced Aweys' political reach and base of control beyond southern Somalia and the city of Mogadishu.

However, the move, which is an alliance of clans, actually reflects a continuation of traditional Somalian politics.

For Ethiopia, this was a new development. The Ogaden province which is populated by the Somali ethnic group belongs to the Ogadeni clan members. This posed a flashpoint for Ethiopia, which has long struggled to consolidate its internal security, and would not like to see Aweys get involved in Ogadeni politics, already being stirred by the secession seeking Western Somali Liberation Front. For Aweys, the expansion north demonstrated the Islamist council's effectiveness as a legitimate political action reflecting the genuine interests of most Somalis, in contrast to the Transitional Federal Government based in Baidoa, which Aweys argued was artificially propped up by Ethiopia.

Alignment on the basis of clan has been the hallmark of Somali politics. So, whoever wants to come to power has to manipulate it. The 1969-91 government of Mohamed Siad Barre was based on the Meles style divide and conquer approach. So Somali clans were pit one against another - helping him control the fractious nation. Somali clans also had their own sinister manoeuvres. They most often successfully manipulate a weak political environment to advance their partisan political and economic goals. In the Mugud and Galguduud regions claimed by Aweys, before Meles invasion at the end of 2006, clans clashed over land, water and grazing rights -- the critical economic issues of Somalia.

Despite Aweys' growing prominence, therefore, Somalia remained a fractured state for a long time. Its politics instead of being governed by national centrifugal interest is as usual beholden to clan loyalties. Though Aweys had temporarily exploited these divisions to gain control in central Somalia via his clan connections expanding beyond Habar Gedir-controlled regions to parts further north, such as the autonomous regions of Puntland and Somaliland – this proved prove much more difficult, thus exposing Aweys to the inevitable Somali anarchy. But before that expired, Meles made his move and ousted Aweys' from power. Aweys still claims leadership of Islamic courts which is waging guerrilla warfare thus suggesting that Meles' triumph over him is a pyrrhic victory.

It is important to point out that at the time of Meles invasion, rather than fight a conventional campaign against the superior Ethiopian army, which launched offensive operations against the SICC on Dec. 24, 2006, the Islamists chose to hide their weapons and uniforms in order to wage guerrilla warfare against the government and its Ethiopian backers at a later date. Thus, since June 2006, several suicide bombers have blown up Ethiopian facilities in the Somalian capital of Mogadishu. The blast, which likely was meant to further the Islamist goals of driving the Ethiopians from Somalia and collapsing Somalia's secular government, came only days after an Al-Qaeda followers staged similar bombings in both Algeria and Morocco. It reveals that Al-Qaeda's reach has expanded from the Horn of Africa to include the northern part of the continent.

While the recent suicide bombing in Mogadishu will not achieve its intended goal of driving Ethiopian troops from Somalia, the incident indicates jihadist warfare is now being waged on a broad scale in the Horn of Africa and beyond. Given the April 11 suicide attack in Algeria and the

April 17 attack in Morocco, Al-Qaeda followers clearly have penetrated a wide and diverse swath of African territory, from ungoverned spaces like Somalia to cosmopolitan capitals in the Maghreb.

The most recent strike against Ethiopian troops in Mogadishu came a day after three senior Somali opposition leaders, former SICC political head Sheikh Sharif Ahmed, former parliamentary speaker Sharif Hassan Sheikh Adan and Somali Deputy Prime Minister and Housing Minister Hussein Mohammed Farah Aided, met in the Eritrean capital of Asmara to demand Ethiopia withdraw its troops from Somalia or face all out war. The leaders are notable for their ties to both the SICC and the Hawiye clan that props them up.

The trio's threat had provoked condemnation from Ethiopia Prime Minister Meles Zenawi since his government is deeply hostile toward Eritrea, with whom his armies fought a 1998-2000 border war. In July, Ethiopia accused the Eritrean government of funnelling arms to the SICC, a claim that was repeated April 9 by U.S. Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs Jendayi Frazer.⁵⁰

However, the threat and the suicide bombing are unlikely to dislodge the Ethiopians, despite that country's desire to reduce its deeply unpopular footprint in Somalia. So far, there has been little progress in creating an African peacekeeping force to replace the Ethiopians.

Abdulahi Yusuf of the provisional government wants to contain the insurgency in Somalia. On their own initiative, several international groups have tried to insert peacekeepers in and attain a political settlement for Somalia. This has included the African Union's dispatch of a delegation to Mogadishu and the East Africa-based Intergovernmental Authority on Development's sending of envoys to several African countries. Both groups have come up with an idea of a peacekeeping-force intervention. Farther afield, Canada, which sent troops to Somalia in 1992-93 as part of a U.N.-authorized, U.S.-led peacekeeping mission to Somalia, is thought to be preparing a special envoy to Somalia to help facilitate a political settlement for Somalia in response to pressure by the sizeable Somali-Canadian population.⁵¹

But Prime Minister of the provisional government, Yusuf insists Ethiopia should stay. He has thus taken actions such as attempting to disarm the population which provoked stiff resistance and increased violence from the insurgents. Despite diplomatic flurry to find an alternative peacekeeping force, and despite U.S. military operations, both inside Somalia and off its coast, Yusuf's actions indicate he is taking security matters into his own hands. His methods risk undermining his government's fragile legitimacy. Further complicating matters, Yusuf belongs to the Darood clan, which hails from Somalia's northern Puntland region. Scepticism abounds over his ability to govern across clans in deeply divided Somalia. Yusuf's ability to do so will be watched closely in Ethiopia, which has its own national security concerns in Somalia. These concerns provoked Addis Ababa to intervene in its troubled neighbour's affairs to prevent, as Meles claimed, the SICC from threatening Ethiopian territorial integrity.

This intervention has left Yusuf open to criticism in Somalia over the role of foreign interference in his consolidation of power. Combined with his heavy-handed tactics, his foreign backing presents Somalia's Islamists an opportunity to destabilize what they perceive as Yusuf's

secular government. Though the SICC is unlikely to engineer a comeback now that its leadership and fighters are fragmented, other Islamists could use a weakened Yusuf government to portray themselves as a stronger force for law and order, further undermining Yusuf's security and unification efforts. Ultimately, though the Somalian government seeks to provide security, its methods jeopardize its already-dubious popular legitimacy.

The Chinese Connection

It is known that in recent years, China has stepped up its economic, military and diplomatic campaign in the African continent, focusing on expanding its access to natural resources, particularly oil. Beijing's surge in activity, coupled with China's rising international economic prowess, has begun to strip "the Middle Kingdom" of its immunity to accusations of neocolonialism. People have complained in South Africa, Namibia and Zambia, that China is growing too ambitious and influential in domestic politics and too greedy in exploiting Africa of its natural wealth.

On April 24, 2007, Militants attacked a Chinese energy facility in Ethiopia's Ogaden region killing 74 people. The same day, Islamists targeted Ethiopian forces in Somalia with suicide car bombings. The successful strike fulfills a threat by Somalian Islamists to conduct an unprecedented guerrilla war against Ethiopia. They also show the level of regional coordination against Ethiopia that fits Addis Ababa's worst fears of a spillover from Somalia's foibles. In this particular incident, a force of roughly 200 militants killed nine Chinese citizens and kidnapped seven, and also killed 65 Ethiopians. The attack was targeted against China's Zhongyuan Petroleum Exploration Bureau natural gas exploration facility. The Ethiopian government had immediately announced that it was the work of the Eritrean regime that uses proxy fighters in the Ogaden. Considering the simmering conflict between the two neighboring leaders, Isayas Afewerki of Eritrea and Meles Zenawi of Ethiopia the incident provokes fear that the Eritrean-Ethiopian war may erupt again.

Beijing has close relations with both the governments in Ethiopia and Eritrea. The two regimes want the relationship because they want to share from Beijing's economic largesse. But this incident may force Beijing to re-evaluate its involvement and security in Africa in general. The rise in African concerns has prompted China to launch a series of high-level visits to Africa, headed by dignitaries bearing aid and investment dollars and emphasizing that China harbors no neo-imperialistic ambitions. Nevertheless, the goodwill tours and the attempts to buy the affection of Africa's governments and people do not show much success. China should face the reality that goodwill tours and additional infrastructure investment do little to deflate African fears of Chinese aim to prepare a way for resource exploitation. As the incident in the Ogaden shows the benign reputation of Beijing no longer exists. Previously, Chinese involvement was considered innocuous.

This allowed their companies to go to places extractive companies from Western nations could never dare.

Conclusion

Ethiopian Prime Minister Meles Zenawi on Jan. 2 called for an international peacekeeping force for Somalia and announced that his country's forces will withdraw if international observers can guarantee law and order after they leave. But he made clear his position that if no viable peace keeping force is put in place, the Ethiopian army could not leave a provisional government that is incapable of surviving on its own head towards oblivion. Indeed, the bitter truth is that on its own, the government of Mr. Ibrahim Yusuf would crumble and open Somalia to either the radical Islamists or the warlords or both.

If military forces become available, they should not come from Somalia's immediate neighbours, particularly Eritrea, Kenya and Ethiopia. Rather they should be contributed by other African nations or neighbouring Muslim countries. The African Union members have promised to contribute 8,000 peace keeping contingent, but so far only Campala has sent its promised 1,500 soldiers. But since the Ugandan soldiers have no capacity protect the provisional government and the latter is totally incapable of standing on its own, Ethiopia continues to occupying Somalia to keep the Supreme Islamic Courts Council (SICC) from returning to power.

The continued occupation of Somalia by Addis Ababa is fraught with danger. Ethiopian troops not only have to rely on supply lines that extend through south-eastern Ethiopia, an area of questionable security, but they are also exposed to Islamist fighters who have now adopted guerrilla tactics. Despite Ethiopia's blitzkrieg, therefore, the core of the Islamist militant movement will continue to wreak havoc.

The indiscriminate attacks waged against Islamist in Mogadishu by the Ethiopian forces and Somali soldiers lead by the provisional government leader, has caused numerous civilian casualties, triggering renewed threats from Eritrea that believes allowing Somali Islamists to provoke Ethiopia from its soil is worth the risk of an Ethiopian counterattack against its own forces. Though each has different reasons, the Ogaden rebels, Somali Islamists, foreign jihadists and Eritrea are collectively pursuing their common goal of driving Ethiopia out of Somalia and undermining the Meles regime at home. Whereas the Ogadeni rebels desire independence from Addis Ababa, the Somali Islamists want to remove the main obstacle preventing the Hawiye clan and its Islamist allies from dominating Somalia. By the same token, the foreign jihadists are desirous of creating a united front against what they perceive as the Christian nation of Ethiopia as part of world wide political Islam. In due time, the situation is expected to heighten tensions in Addis Ababa, not only toward Islamists in Somalia, but also toward Eritrea to the extent that war could erupt anew between the two unpopular rulers hailing from Addis Ababa and Asmara who keep themselves in power by employing brutal force.

The fact that the provisional government owes its survival to the Ethiopian army is its greatest weakness. Many Somalis see Ethiopia as an enemy that they fought with three times since their independence in 1960. A country that has been construed as an enemy for decades cannot be instantly transformed into a protector. So, Ethiopia would be better off withdrawing soon. If not, the real danger for Ethiopia is that an extended war with Somali Islamists could create religious divisions at home, pitting, in particular, Muslims against Christians.

The Christian-Muslim rancor in Ethiopia has been simmering for some time. The Saudis through their Wahabi movement have invested billions in building Mosques throughout Ethiopia and the Christians not to be left behind have been constructing churches nearby. Now, since the Somali intervention, religious propaganda is being pumped through El-Jezira. The Mullahs in mosques are spreading veiled messages to incite followers towards political Islam. Already, in three regions of the South, particularly in Jimma and Ilubabor, areas known for religious harmony for over a hundred years, Moslems provoked by Christians trying to build shrines near Islamic Mosques have burnt down the churches and massacred priests, nuns and ordinary worshipers. The Washington Post quoting Ethiopian government report commented on scenes of: "'Muslims ..training to attack Christians. Christians ... stockpiling weapons for an assault on Muslims. Fears of an all-out religious melee [becoming] rampant."⁵² The Post then added quoting government sources: "An incident near the southern Ethiopian town of Jima underlined those fears. ...Several days of violence between Muslims and Christians swept through the area, ending with 19 people killed and five churches and 600 houses burned."⁵³ In the Wollo region in the north where Christians have lived peacefully with Moslems intermarrying and sharing celebrations together, communities have been sharply divided on the basis of religion and there is talk of an impending jihad. All these came after Meles invasion of Somalia. Indeed, such development does not auger well for the country since it would turn Ethiopia into another Lebanon and Iraq, two countries that are currently being destroyed by an intractable religious violence.

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