

# Somalia and the Ethiopian Foresight and Commitment That Needs To Be Retold

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Adem Hussien

10-11-15

After two decades, Somalia is gradually but surely coming out of the chaos, instability, and violence that had put its continuity as a state into question. It is now, however, on a challenging but optimistic path to a constitutional democracy.

Indeed, the regional countries as well as the international community played a vital role in the process of stabilizing Somalia. However, the progress achieved so far is owed to Ethiopia's faith and commitment in the peace-loving people of Somalia and regional stability.

Back in the early 2000s, when the world gave up on Somalia, the government of Ethiopia did not relent its efforts. Despite the fact, that historically the relation between Ethiopia and Somalia has not been a healthy one.

In the recent historical period, one major and one lesser war were fought between the two countries. The empty dream of the so-called "Greater Somalia", an expansionist policy, had brought to Somalia nothing but hostility and conflicts with all its neighbors, especially Ethiopia. Moreover, the government of Ziad Barre had always allied with all groups and countries it believed were anti-Ethiopian and had disturbed Ethiopia's peace.

However, the situation had fundamentally changed in the 1990s and afterwards. The "Greater Somalia" ideology has been discredited and Somalia has become stateless.

Moreover, since Ethiopia's constitution guaranteed peoples' rights and Ethiopian Somalis started living in brotherhood and voluntary unity with other Ethiopians in a newly defined, inclusive Ethiopian identity in the spirit of equality, democracy, development, Ethiopia's vulnerability to the "Greater Somalia" ideology has been greatly diminished.

On the other hand, the disintegration of Somalia had in itself brought ever-growing danger. The crisis in Somalia had allowed religious extremism to take hold and it had become a haven and conduit for terrorists and extremists. Anti-peace elements started using the country as a base and place of transit in order to threaten Ethiopia's peace.

At the time, several regional and international efforts to bring peace and reconciliation had failed and many nations decided to prevent spill-overs from Somalia's crisis rather than seek a solution to it.

Ethiopia, however, chose a proactive approach. The government clearly articulated its direction in the 2002 National Security and Foreign Relations Policy document as follows:

*Our proximity to Somalia would be beneficial to our development if there were peace and stability in Somalia. Peace can come to our region if a government committed to fighting disorder, terrorism and extremism in cooperation with its neighbours is established in Somalia. Some circles say that the establishment of such a government in Somalia would once again resuscitate the ideology*

*of "Greater Somalia" and that peace, democracy and development in Somalia would, in that case, not benefit Ethiopia.*

*This view is fundamentally wrong and dangerous. First, of all, from now onwards, our country safeguards the unity of its peoples not by denying them options but by helping them recognise and confirm in practice, the option based on equality, mutual development and democracy.*

*As a result of this, we have created the condition whereby Ethiopian Somalis, no matter whether the ideology of "Greater Somalia" is revived or not, would choose to live in equality and unity with their other Ethiopian brothers and sisters. As our development and democratisation process gains momentum, our vulnerability to the effects of this and other similar slogans will be much reduced. Furthermore, it should be underscored that, since it has been the cause of much suffering first and foremost to the people of Somalia, this slogan of "Greater Somalia" has been discredited and its chances of revival are indeed very slim. In light of the encouraging political and economic situation in Ethiopia, the fact that Somalis live in both countries would actually ensure that they serve as a bridge that creates strong connections between the two countries, rather than as a factor of suspicion.*

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On the contrary, Somalia's peace and democracy was recognized as advantage to Ethiopia. Since such a situation would make it possible for Ethiopia, in alliance with the new Somalia government, to stamp out anti-peace activities originating from Somalia. Both countries can work together to jointly develop river utilization plans. The way would also be clear to promote strong educational and cultural ties and interdependence in light of the educational and other related

activities that are carried out in the Somali language within the Somali Region of our country.

By creating strong relations between the two countries regarding the use of ports and rivers, commerce, culture and so on, and seeing to it that the two peoples are benefiting from this, one could be sure that the peoples would resist activities designed to harm the relations that are proving to be so beneficial to them.

Ethiopia would also gain direct economic advantages from this situation; in addition, when Ethiopia's eastern border ceases to be a source of threat, overall economic development would be enhanced.

That is why, Ethiopia's major objective in Somalia has always been to see the establishment of peace and democracy, and based on that, the development of strong economic, cultural and political ties between the two countries.

However, Ethiopia was aware that despite her wish and policy, peace and democracy cannot be realized through her efforts only. As the Policy put it:

*Although we will do all in our power to contribute to the peace and stability of Somalia, as it is in our interest to do so, the responsibility to establish peace in that country principally rests on the Somali people and the political forces there. In addition to this, those external forces which can influence events should see to it that they use their authority to contribute to bringing about peace and democracy in Somalia.*

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The events of the last ten years in Somalia have not been encouraging, but we should not give up hope that peace and democracy will eventually come to Somalia. The country has disintegrated into different areas, and while some are comparatively, calm others are in continuous turmoil. Those who reap benefits

from the absence of authority - a number of Somali groups, some traders, religious extremists, and their foreign friends - are bent on sabotaging in one way or another any effort aimed at bringing about peace in Somalia. Although the Somali people long for peace, they have not been able to break out of the web of obstruction put in place by those who oppose peace and change.

Although the international community wishes to bring about peace in Somalia, it is evidently not ready to exert all its efforts to realise this. Thus, it appears to us that the condition of instability in Somalia is likely to persist for some time. Therefore our policy should not be limited to contributing to the emergence of peace and democracy only and, based on that, to forging strong ties; rather, it should also address what we should do if instability and turmoil persist.

*Our fundamental policy remains to persistently work towards the birth of a peaceful and democratic Somalia.....*

*We have to work in cooperation with the Somali people in the region, and the international community as a whole, to weaken and neutralize those forces coming from any part of Somalia to perpetrate attacks against our country. Obviously the solution to all of this is the prevalence of democracy, and everything must be done to assist in reaching this solution.*

*At the same time, however, we need to receive the understanding and support of the people of Somalia and the international community regarding what we are facing. While maintaining the principle of non-interference in the internal affairs of Somalia, we have to ensure our right to safeguard our peace and defend ourselves.*

In line with the Foreign Policy direction, Ethiopia made various efforts, sacrifices and played decisive role to stabilize Somalia both in direct military intervention as well as mobilizing regional and international efforts.

Ethiopia first entered Somalia in 2006 to remove the now-defunct Union of Islamic Courts (UIC), which had ruled most of southern Somalia for six months that year.

Islamic Court Union, a cluster of diverse extremist and terrorist groups was becoming strong enough to threaten the government and literally hundreds of moderates were assassinated and murdered in Mogadishu, including many professionals, civilians, former soldiers and police.

The world was watching silently and almost no one was willing to risk its resources to contain the looming regional danger.

Indeed, the government of Ethiopia took the decision to intervene in Somalia in 2006 solely in light of national interests and depending on its own finance from the national treasury. It was several months after Ethiopia chased UIC from Mogadishu that other nations became encouraged to join in.

However, there are some who tried at the time and still try to downplay Ethiopia took the far-sighted decision and implemented the operation on her own.

However, that was unequivocally confirmed in the diplomatic telegrams about the confidential meetings between Ethiopian and United States government officials that had been published by Wikileaks in 2012. Those telegrams that were written by from US Embassy Addis Ababa provided minutes of the meetings were held between top level government officials of Ethiopia and U.S in 2006 regarding Ethiopia's planned intervention in Somalia.

It would be sufficient to cite two telegrams to show the circumstances of Ethiopia's decision.

The Oct. 14, 2006 telegram shows that PM Meles Zenawi was cautious of the reaction of the international community, which is not one expects from a person allegedly doing the homework of a superpower.

The telegram was a report of a meeting of the Prime Minister with Commander of the Combined Joint Task Force – Horn of Africa (CJTF-HOA) Rear Admiral Richard Hunt, US Business Executives for National Security (BENS) President and CEO General Charles Boyd, U.S. Air Force (Ret.), and Bennett McCutcheon Michele Huges from Joint Forces Command.

The telegram says:

*Absent of an international solution, Meles explained that Ethiopia is prepared to do battle with the UIC in Somalia. Meles indicated that before making a final decision he will wait for the November United Nation's Security Council meeting where he hopes a favourable decision will be made to lift the arms embargo and deploy the IGAD/Ugandan battalion.*

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The telegram shows Meles hoped for an “international solution” than Ethiopia intervene and was waiting for the Security Council meeting “before making a final decision”. This statement, if not true, would have been nonsense to the officials that know who makes the decision.

Similarly, the Nov. 29, 2007 telegram indicates that Ethiopia did not request financial support from the U.S. The telegram summarizes a meeting between the Prime Minister and Senator James Inhofe, a full member of the Senate Committee on Armed Services, Congressmen Ander Crenshaw, Robert Aderholt,

Dan Boren, Tim Walberg, and Mike McIntyre as well as Congressional staff members, and Ambassador Yamamo.

According to the Telegram:

*The Prime Minister emphasized that it was the fight against terrorism that forced Ethiopia to take military action in Somalia against the Council of Islamic Courts and affiliated militias last year and he noted that it was a unilateral decision based on Ethiopia's interests.*

*Meles emphasized that Ethiopia did not request financial support from the U.S. for that endeavour, but noted that Ethiopia derived adequate satisfaction from the strong U.S.-Ethiopia cooperation since then as it was evident to Ethiopia that the U.S. "was in the same trench" as Ethiopia. Ethiopia is fighting terrorism in its own interests, he stated, "we will do it with or without the U.S., but we prefer to do it with you."*

*Meles said to them that the war was "a unilateral decision based on Ethiopia's interests" and that "Ethiopia did not request financial support from the U.S." and no one objected his statement.*

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Following Ethiopia's footsteps regional countries and the international community launched massive effort to stabilize Somalia. Thanks to the joint operations of IGAD and the new Somali National Army, Al Shabaab had been weakened and the movement of goods and the population's access to aid had increased.

The recent formations of the Jubba and South West administrations showed momentum towards the country's Vision 2016. The re-election of Sheikh Mohamed Ahmed Islaan as president of Jubaland last month was another

milestone that in effect brought the process of the Addis Ababa Agreement, signed two years ago, to a conclusion. The agreement involved the reconciliation of all communities in the Juba region; the formation of regional assembly; the drafting up and passing of regional constitution; integration of militia forces into the National Army; among others.

Nonetheless, there is still more to be done. Despite the gains made, there are several challenges still facing Somalia in terms of peace and stability, economic and social development, the formation of regional administrations.

The current political and security gains in Somalia would be more meaningful if there is greater support to the Federal Government of Somalia as well as the regional states and administrations to provide the much needed social services to the populations in those areas recently recovered from Al-Shabaab.

The international community should assist AMISOM troops and the Somalia Security Forces to expand their operations and immediately recover the remaining areas controlled by Al Shabaab. Similarly, international partners and organizations need to increase the level of financial, material and technical assistance to Somalia.

The government of Somalia itself needs to take several crucial steps. It needs to establish in the rest of the regions an inclusive interim federal regional administrations and assemblies. It should rapidly develop a roadmap and engage with federal states and interim administrations to agree the modalities and timelines for the integration of forces and establishment of Regional Police.

It needs to step up effort into ensuring an all-inclusive electoral process in 2016, by expediting the outstanding legal and administrative processes required to deliver an electoral process within the mandated Constitutional timeline. An interconnected tasks that path the way to the adopting a Final Constitution.

