Serving Somali and Regional interests
unilaterally and multilaterally

By Bereket Gebru 02/14/14

Although the fall of the Soviet Union in December 1991 was the biggest political change in the international system at that time, the period also saw the demise of a number of socialist regimes associated with it. The most notable of those changes for Ethiopians is the fall of the Derg on June 28, 1991 and its replacement by the Ethiopian People’s Revolutionary Democratic Party (EPRDF).

The resulting shift from a bipolar (two superpowers) international system to a multi-polar system dominated by the United States of America left the power balance tilting in favor of the capitalist west. The run up to the fall of the Soviet Union was characterized by regime changes in numerous countries in a way reflective of the international political reality. Buoyed by their triumph over the socialist block, the capitalists used their considerable might to dismantle what is left of the socialist states.

The next move for the international capitalist forces was to direct the rest of the world into bold economic, political and social directions they deemed important. Free market economic theory, democratization, multiparty political settings along with social ideas of a more liberal secular society have been shoved down the throat of the whole world. Such moves shortly led to the rise of anti-American sentiments that later developed themselves to armed and organized terrorist groups.

Somalia is one of those states that have been extremely affected by the above mentioned international conditions. Following the ousting of its President Mohammad Siad Barre in 1991, power struggle between clan warlords Mohamed Farah Aideed and Ali Mahdi Mohamed killed and wounded thousands of civilians.
The former British protectorate of Somaliland declared unilateral independence that same year.

Since then, Somalia has internationally become synonymous with the term “failed state”. The feuds between clan warlords took the lives of thousands of Somalis while displacing additional thousands from their homes. The US army sent troops while the UN tried to make its presence felt by deploying a peacekeeping force as early as 1992.

The presence of these forces, however, did not deter the Somali militias as they managed to terrorize the American forces with their attacks. That fact was stressed by the shooting down of two US helicopters in Mogadishu in 1993 and the killing of US army rangers in the battle that ensued. The publicity of such attacks and the resulting outcry by Americans to have their troops back led to the US mission’s termination in 1994. The UN peacekeepers also left having failed to achieve their mission of restoring order and safeguarding relief supplies.

The decade after the mid 1990s, along with international trends, saw the rise of Islamic fundamentalist terrorist groups in Somalia. The culmination of the ascendance of such forces was the Union of Islamic Courts that controlled Mogadishu and other parts of the South after defeating clan warlords. In October 2006, the UN reported that about 35,000 Somalis escaping drought, strict Islamist rule and the possibility of war fled to Kenya since the start of the year.

Left alone with barely any support from the international community, the then transitional government of Somalia established in 2004 was threatened by the Union of Islamic Courts. It was during such a crucial time that Ethiopia showed solidarity with its neighbor by sending military advisors to Somalia. That prompted the Islamists to declare “Jihad” against Ethiopia.

That, however, did not stop in the way of Ethiopia providing valuable support to its neighbor as it sent soldiers to train a new Somali national army and protect the
interim government. The assistance by the Ethiopian military forces was so effective that the Union of Islamic Courts abandoned its last strong hold – the southern port of Kismayo by January 2007.

The internal and external threats posed by the situation in Somalia

The failed state of Somalia has proved itself to be a threat to its people, its neighbors, and the world at large. With recent (2013) estimates of the Somalis killed by the conflict since 1991 averaging close to 700,000 people, sadly the period between 1991 and 2006 claimed the lives of hundreds of thousands of Somalis. Another hundreds of thousands, if not millions, of Somalis have also faced migration to all the four corners of the world – with their neighbors harboring the largest number.

In 2012, the UN reported that 260,000 Somalis died of famine between 2010 and 2012. The plight of those still living in their countries has also been very unstable as they strive to escape drought, strict Islamic rule and the possibility of war.

The Islamists have also kidnapped and killed government officials, journalist, and humanitarian and civil society workers. As early as 1993, Somali gunmen killed an Englishman working for UNICEF and an Irish nurse working for a charity called Concern. In 1997, armed Somali groups kidnapped 5 aid workers while the number doubled the following year. The situation was still similar in 2007 as a nurse and a doctor working for Medicine Sans Frontiers (MSF) were abducted in Bossaso to be released a week later.

Such kidnappings and killings of government officials, journalists and humanitarian workers made it harder for the already weak Somali government to address social needs, instate a sense of order in the country and appeal for increased international assistance towards such ends.

The absence of an entity with a monopoly of power within the vast territory that is Somalia for a long time has created favorable environment for internal and external
forces of terror. With support for these groups emanating from both state and non
state sources, Somalia has become the hub of international terrorism. The 2010
declaration of al-Shabaab of its alliance with al-Qaeda and its subsequent
notification of merger with the infamous terrorist group in 2012 is a clear admission
of theories and intelligence reports along that line.

With such notorious international forces of terror operating in Somalia, the
country’s state has posed clear social, economic and political security problems to
the region and the world at large. With al-Shabaab at its helm, the instability in
Somalia has especially left the region of East Africa troubled with security issues.

Al-Shabaab has repeatedly made viable threats and outright attacks against
neighboring countries like Uganda, Burundi, Ethiopia and Kenya. The terrorist
group has declared “Jihad” on Ethiopia while managing to carry out horrible acts of
terror in Uganda and Kenya.

In July 2010, al-Shabaab carried out a bomb attack on two bars where crowds were
watching the football world cup finals in the Ugandan capital Kampala killing 70
people in total. One of the bars was the Ethiopian Village Restaurant.

The other most notable attack carried out by al-Shabaab is the September 2013
Westgate Shopping Mall attack in Nairobi, Kenya. The four day siege of the
shopping mall frequented by foreigners claimed the lives of more than 70 people
including the attackers. The act drew the attention of international media. One of
them reported: “The operation appears to have involved a handful of militants and
was clearly well-planned. Not only were the attackers able to establish a base inside
the mall from which to launch their attack – killing and injuring many and taking
some hostages – but they were able to hold out against the Kenyan security forces
for several days, maintaining their position inside the mall and apparently hiding
in air shafts to escape detection.”
The international threat al-Shabaab and its preceding terrorist settings in Somalia pose is best demonstrated by the now decade long rife piracy off the coast of the country’s Indian Ocean border. Piracy off the Somali coast became rampant especially since 2004 with it getting to its peak in 2010. Pirate attacks on ships worldwide hit seven-year high in 2010, with Somali pirates accounting for 49 of 52 ships seized.

The intensity of the pirate attacks of the Somali Coast has been steadily decreasing after the UN Security Council unanimously voted in 2008 to allow countries to send warships into Somalia's territorial waters to tackle pirates, following appeal by the European Union. The US, NATO and others deployed ships to Somali waters later in the year as pirates became more audacious.

Somali pirates hijacked the fewest merchant ships since 2004 last year as armed guards and naval patrols helped deter and repel attacks on a trade lane linking Europe to Asia. The number of vessels seized off the East African country’s coast fell to two in 2013 from 14 in 2012, the International Maritime Bureau, a London-based group tracking sea crime reported recently. The decrease helped to drive global piracy down to a six-year low. The cost of Somali piracy to the global economy was about $6 billion in 2012 and $7 billion the year before, according to an organization called Oceans Beyond Piracy.

**AMISOM**

With such wide ranging problems coming out of the malaise in Somalia, handling the crisis could not just be left to Somalis alone. With the rapid strengthening of the Union of Islamic Courts in 2006 and their subsequent march to control the capital, Mogadishu, the United Nations Security Council authorized the African Union to deploy a peacekeeping mission with a mandate for six months.

The year 2007 saw the introduction of The African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM),
“An active, regional peacekeeping mission operated by the African Union with the approval of the United Nations in Somalia. It is mandated to support transitional governmental structures, implement a national security plan, train the Somali security forces, and to assist in creating a secure environment for the delivery of humanitarian aid. As part of its duties, AMISOM also supports the Federal Government of Somalia's forces in their battle against Al-Shabaab militants. AMISOM was created by the African Union's Peace and Security Council on 19 January 2007 with an initial six-month mandate. On 21 February 2007 the United Nations Security Council approved the mission's mandate. Subsequent six-monthly renewals of AMISOM's mandate by the African Union Peace and Security Council have also been authorized by the United Nations Security Council.”

Having successfully carried out its duties of training Somali government soldiers and assisting them in the fight against the Union of Islamic Courts, the Ethiopian troops completely pulled out of Somalia by January 2009. As AMISOM’s mandate had a peacekeeping focus until July 2010 when the AU decided to expand the mandate to a peace-enforcement focus that would allow the mission to engage al-Shabaab, a radical offshoot of the Union of Islamic Courts formed in 2006, more directly, the presence of Ethiopian forces till January 2009 helped the cause of the government and AMISOM.

That fact became vivid once the Ethiopian troops pulled out in 2009, as Islamic insurgents launched an onslaught on Mogadishu besides advancing in the South. The role Ethiopian troops played to provide cover to AMISOM and government
forces coupled with the mandate and capacity gap noticed after their departure is proof of the complementary role Ethiopian troops played in the struggle to restore peace, security and the rule of law back to Somalia.

Composed of troops from Burundi, Djibouti, Kenya, Sierra Leone and Uganda, the AMISOM has been serving its purpose despite its lack of mandate and other capabilities. The recent union of 4,395 Ethiopian troops to the force would obviously soar the strength of AMISOM in man-power and equipments.

The inclusion of Ethiopian troops in AMISOM is expected to answer the latter’s request of helicopters, uniformed personnel and other logistics to the United Nations Security Council that passed resolution 2124/2013 in November, 2013 to increase the uniformed personnel from 17,731 to a maximum of 22,126, as well as to expand the logistical support package.

AMISOM said the inclusion of the Ethiopian forces will free up other units to stage a long-awaited offensive on al-Shabaab bases in the far southern regions, with Kenyan units advancing from the south, and Uganda and Burundi pressing from the north.

On top of the above mentioned benefits of Ethiopia’s inclusion in AMISOM, the latter would significantly benefit from the former’s extensive experience in handling terrorist groups in the post 1991 Somalia. The 2011 reintroduction of Ethiopian forces in the fight against al-Shabaab at the request of the Somali government is the result of its demonstrated sweeping moves against the terrorist groups. Therefore, the inclusion of Ethiopian troops in the AMISOM outfit has a multitude of benefits to achieve the mission at hand.