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Publication date:
2009

Document Version
Publisher's PDF, also known as Version of record

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DIIPER RESEARCH SERIES

WORKING PAPER NO. 17

Saving the Horn of Africa from its elites: What prospects for the future of peace in the region[1]

Fantu Cheru[2]

I want to thank the organizers of this 'Africa Day' event for inviting me to deliver this Keynote Address at this very important gathering. It would be a bit presumptuous to call my talk a keynote because as I speak to you right now, diverse actors on the ground in the Horn of Africa are rewriting the political map of the region in dramatic fashion. The political dynamics in the Horn at this particular minute will look very different when I am done with my lecture 30 minutes from now.

I accepted the invitation with great hesitation, just to be frank with you. Coming to a gathering to discuss the treacherous, depressing and senseless politics of the 'Horn of Africa' is just like blindly stepping into a 'slaughter house'' through I must admit, that the people I see in front of me don't look like threatening monsters.

For many years, I have avoided to go to any gathering that has to do with the Horn of Africa. I have long concluded that any workshop or conference on the 'Horn of Africa' simply amounts to a 'dialogue of the deaf'. We are prepared to keep killing each other; we are prepared to sacrifice the lives of millions of our innocent citizens not because we disagree over some noble ideas such as democracy and self-determination or even a clearer ideology--- these conflicts are essentially all about elite-elite struggles for power for constructing their own version of new patronage system—though these conflicts are often framed in the language of self-determination or democracy and human rights, etc.

I came here today not to deliver one of those *'feel good'* lectures about the conditions in the Horn of Africa. Rather, I came to deliver the bad news. The Horn of Africa continues to suffer conflict, human rights abuses, and political instability. The aspirations of the long-suffering citizens of the region for

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democracy, human rights and human security continue to be frustrated. ***What are the objective conditions on the ground that sustains this crisis of mindless proportions?***

--The Horn of Africa is undergoing radical structural changes, with serious economic, political and social consequences (even if some of this might turn out to be positive).

- A considerable number of countries in the Horn of Africa are facing new crisis and conflicts. Unfinished wars (Somalia, Eritrea-Ethiopia, Darfur, etc.) The problems appear intractable. Where progress has been made, it has become fragile.
- Consolidating democracy and good governance remain elusive
- Different tendencies in state formation—from federalism in Ethiopia to state collapse in Somalia; authoritarian tendencies in Eritrea and Ethiopia; Sharia rule in Sudan and Somalia; incipient democratic autonomy in South Sudan as a result of the peace dividend.

What are the other contradictory tendencies in the region?

- On the one hand, all the countries in the region with the exception of Eritrea and Somalia—i.e. Ethiopia, Sudan, Kenya, Uganda—are experiencing positive economic growth.
- On the other hand, ***Arab politics*** has penetrated the region in many ways and complicating political dynamics in the region. This manifests itself in several ways: (Eritrea, Somalia and specially Djibouti are getting pulled).
- The ***spread of terrorism*** is likely to be there for the foreseeable future. Muslims in Ethiopia constitute the largest segment of the population in the region—more than the total Muslim population of Sudan, Somalia, Eritrea and Djibouti combined.
- ***Fundamentalism*** is penetrating the Muslim population of Ethiopia, presenting the state with a major security challenge. This will continue to have a major influence on Ethiopia's public expenditure priorities.
- ***Mobility of people*** has dramatically increased—from Hargessa in Somalia to North Sudan, millions of people are on the move. Guns, drugs, crime syndicates, terrorist and extremists move across porous borders easily in a region where state capacity has been very weak.
- Djibouti has increasingly aligning itself with the Gulf politics and less and less with IGAD. After the sale of its port to the Dubai Port Authority, the government has literally turned its back on Africa and sees itself as part of the Gulf. This creates greater tension between lands locked Ethiopia and Djibouti.

With all these difficult and complicated political shifts, the region is at a crossroad. ***Who is winning? Who is losing out? No one knows!*** The balance of power is shifting radically, with severe implications to the countries of the region and to other external powers. In this influx and shifting political environment, Ethiopia is playing a major role by default. This fact represents a strategic challenge to the West on how to engage the Ethiopian state. While questions are raised in the west about the authoritarian tendencies of the Ethiopian regime, attempt to punish the regime through sanctions or isolation is more likely to destabilize the region further than to advance the peace and security agenda.

The overall political condition in the region does not impart durable solutions to the conflicts and the building of a potent sub-regional architecture for peace and security is virtually nonexistent. The obstacles to peace and security in the Horn include: (1) the lack of internal peace in most countries, (2) the fact that internal conflicts are rarely contained within the borders of one country, (3) the absence of a stable and consensual regional power order, (4) the disputed legitimacy of states and governments and the inability of democratic processes to provide that legitimacy, (5) dependency on foreign financiers and especially the U.S., and (6) the lack of autonomy of the key multilateral intuitions, such as IGAD and AU.

The Horn Today
Let me start with a review of the state of affairs in the region.

Somalia
--Somalia has been the site of continuous rounds of crisis since the 1970s, when the 1974 drought followed by the 1977-78 Ogaden war with Ethiopia began a long period of internal displacement, refugee flows, and deteriorating food security in the country. The state of complete collapse of central government in Somalia since 1991 has compounded these problems. Somalia's serial crisis over the past thirty years has, in turn, created considerable hardships for its neighbors. Hundreds of thousands of Somali refuges have fled into Kenya, Ethiopia, Yemen and Djibouti. Flows of arms from Somalia have militarized communal conflicts across the eastern Horn. Criminal violence and lawlessness have intermittently swept parts of Eastern Africa.

Somalia has eluded all aspects to find a political settlement and is once again in a state of turmoil that threatens the security of its neighbors. Broadly speaking, warlordism, the question of Somaliland, Political Islam and the occupation and hegemonic control of land and resources in the deep south of the country have been the main obstacles of peace and reconciliation since the collapse of government in 1991.

Of course, understanding the Somali crisis requires more than the casual familiarity with conflict among Somali clans. Clans do not generate conflict; rather it is the politicization of clanism by opportunistic elites that create conflict.

Beginning with the Islamist takeover of Mogadishu in 2006 and the subsequent Ethio-American invasion, Somalia has reverted to a familiar pattern of parochial competition for power and resources. The identification of the Transitional Federal Government (TFG) leadership as a narrow political and clan coalition, rather than an inclusive government of national unity, has left many Somalis feeling disenfranchised by the transitional process. The Council of Somali Islamic Courts (CSIC)'s primary clan constituencies remain largely hostile to the TFG and, like many other Somalis, resent the presence of foreign troops on Somali soil.

The Ethiopian regime wants its troops to be replaced by an AU force. However, other African countries have been reluctant to contribute to such a force, initially to exceed eight battalions. Even if this is to happen, the AU troops will be seen as propping up the TFG. Opposition forces will consider them to be hostile, legitimate targets.

Since the collapse of the CSIC, kinship has once again asserted itself as defining characteristics of Somali politics, and opposition to the TFG is, for the time being, anchored primarily in clan rather than ideology. Broadly speaking, this involves a Darod-dominated TFG and a Hawiye-based opposition, although the situation is far more complex. The common perception is the TFG's federal agenda is designed to maximize Darod clan interests.

Regardless of clan affiliation, many Somalis were shocked and angered by Ethiopian and American military intervention in Somalia, and remain deeply opposed to the presence of foreign troops in Somali soil. These sentiments translate into opposition to the TFG, which they hold partly responsible for this situation.

Widespread social and political opposition to the TFG has rendered much of southern Somalia unstable, and provides space in which various armed opposition groups, including some with links to terrorism, continue to operate. Instability and violence in Somalia will likely persist until the TFG takes urgent steps towards political reconciliation. Unfortunately, the TFG seems to perceive political reconciliation in terms of persuasion and cooptation. It has not demonstrated its willingness to engage in real 'social reconciliation' involving power sharing arrangement that addresses the underlying causes of conflict.

In short, Somalia is likely to remain a source of refugee flows, small arms flows, illicit cross-border economic activities, and possibly terrorist activity for some years to come. And due to counter-terrorism patrols, Somalia's border areas are now heavily militarized, creating less permissive conditions for humanitarian missions there. Refugees are now under close scrutiny as neighboring states seek to prevent radical Islamists from gaining entry into their territory.

Eritrea
Coming into independence after a long and bitter liberation struggle, Eritrea's existence as an independent state has been deeply affected by the attitudes, which this experience entrenched in the mentalities of its leadership. Eritrea's catastrophic engagement in war with Ethiopia, which at a stroke destroyed the prospects for what had until then appeared to be quite a promising start to its independence existence, affected its relations with its other neighbors.

One common element was the new state's acute sensitivity to its territoriality, which extended to a brief military flare-up with Djibouti, and to the occupation of the Nanish islands in the southern Red Sea whose possession it contested with Yemen. Neither of these disputed assumed anything like the intensity of that with Ethiopia. The dispute with its neighbors helped to establish Eritrea's reputation in the region as a bad neighbor. Eritrea has become a persistent destabilizing force in the region, hosting various armed opposition groups. While one cannot rule out a return to war with Ethiopia, insiders point out an eminent political collapse in Eritrea, which could end up sending millions of refugees to Ethiopia, Djibouti and Sudan.

To make matters worse, Eritrea's economy is slowly grinding to a halt. Remittances keep whatever left of the economy (about 34% of GDP). The private sector has collapsed; there are no jobs and no spare land. For now it make sense to keep young people occupied in the military if only for fear that the social consequences of releasing them could be much worse than the economic problems caused by mobilization. At the end of open hostilities with Ethiopia in mid-2000, some 300,000 young men and women were mobilized. As of last year, barely 100,000-armed combatants have been demobilized.

On the other hand, the international community has embraced Ethiopia—despite its bad human rights record, whereas Eritrea has been locked into a downward spiral of intensifying isolation and resentment.

For the time being, Eritrea and is unfortunate people remain in the impasse created by their own government, a situation that is likely to continue until the sudden release of built-up tensions or the providential demise of is present

leader. Eritrean citizens themselves can only undertake any solution to the political deadlock in Eritrea. Attempt to impose a government from outside could only be counter-productive. Until then, the regional and global community can only sit and wait, while taking every precaution to insulate the rest of the region from Eritrea's problem.

Ethiopia-Eritrea Conflict
The border dispute between the two countries has a consequential and close link to the prevailing lack of peace and security in the Horn. This is not the place to go into the tangled and extremely depressing history of the conflict up to the present time. The dispute is essentially political and 'egotistical' and not exclusively territorial or legal; therefore, it could not be resolved solely through the instrumentality of international law.

Ethiopia has achieved regional hegemony and has been able to garner the support of major actors outside of the region. This is resented by Eritrea and Somalia. They perceive Ethiopia's hegemony as intimidating and have found radical Islam as a unifying factor to oppose Ethiopia's hegemonic position.

Sudan
Sudan appears to be at a critical juncture poised between the threat of disintegration, and the promise of genuine unity within a restructured national framework. It is a country situated at the confluence of Arab and Africa cultures, and the whole Africa integration project hinges on the success of Sudan.

One of the most significant developments, that affected Sudan during the last three decades, has been the progressive fragmentation of Sudanese politics into northern and southern divides. The turmoil in the South, Darfur, the Nubian Mountains, had been the most obvious manifestation of this trend.

While the immediate spark of the current political crisis is Darfur and the stalled efforts to resolve the conflict there, the repercussions have far-reaching impacts on the entire country. It is unhelpful to simplify the conflict in Darfur as one between ethnic groups—Arabs against Africans--; rather than a competition over scare resources to sustain the livelihoods of pastoralists (mainly but not only Arabs) and farmers (mainly African groups of various ethnicities). The conflict is also about power and control, both in Darfur itself and the central government in Khartoum. Unlike the conflict between the North and the South of Sudan, religion has not been a factor in the conflict in Darfur, the predominant faith being Islam among Africans and Arabs. Intermarriages have been commonplace. Together with the lack of fertile land and water (perpetuated

by desertification) we also find power, influence and distribution of resources as the pivotal issues that are related both to the causes of the conflict and the solution to it.

The Darfur Peace Agreement included a stronger provision for a cease-fire than the previous agreement brokered by Chad in 2004. Only one of the SLA faction, the one led by Minni Minawi, signed DPA. SLA/Wahid and JEM/Ibrahim considered the agreement to be rushed and premature, lacing in power and wealth sharing. Their central demands concerned the level of compensation for victims, the disarmament of Janjaweed, the regional status of Darfur and the representation of Darfurians in the national government.

Since the Darfur agreement was concluded in May 2006, the rebel movements have split into new factions as well as new alliances. Divisions are also developing between Darfurians living outside and the military commanders on the ground. This further complicates the problem. Civilians are now more exposed to armed banditry, and humanitarian workers are hampered by increased insecurity. Even the African Union Mission has not been spared from rebel attack as well as from the Janjaweed.

While the Darfur Peace Agreement (DPA) has virtually stalled (some rebel groups refuse to sign in), implementation of the CPA is limping. The process of democratization and the implementation of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement are in serious jeopardy. Indeed, reactions to the Comprehensive Peace Agreement and attitudes towards it varied widely. Critics charge that the agreement has been badly formulated and its implementation has been even worse. Parties to the CPA are backtracking from their commitments. The *Monitoring and Evaluation Commission* has not become functional so does the *Joint Defence Core*. Border demarcation also remained a thorny issue. The situation has deteriorated since the death of John Garang. (Mention the 4 pillars). The other independent commissions—***federal constitutional commission***; ***Electoral Commission; Disarmament and Demobilization Commission; and Reconciliation Commission***—are very important instruments, but a strong international commitment to support them is needed if the transitional tasks are to be fulfilled.

The solution to the conflict in Darfur is dependent on several different and interlocked conditions. First, a solution needs to be seen from a national context, where the CPA, the Darfur Peace Agreement and the peace agreement for the East should be mutually linked and reinforced. In this respect, the successful implementation of the CPA is central to all. In this context, the elections scheduled for 2009 could prove both a unifying and dividing factor, unless prepared in a transparent manner.

Secondly, the unstable political situation in Chad, with over 70 political parties and a host of rebel movements, must be stabilized. Third, it is crucial that all parties see a political solution as the only way out of the crisis. The rebel movements and leaders need uniting around a common political platform. Fourth, the underlying development causes of the conflict must be tackled. The longer it takes to agree on peace, the more the political demands and opportunities might shift and further complicate the conflict.

Are there any good news coming out of the Horn?

Depressing, as things seem on the surface, there are also some interesting developments in the Horn of Africa.

- First, citizens' aspirations for peace, security and good governance are higher than in the past, and those concerns are expressed through an expanded network of international organizations and civil society organizations.
- On the other hand, there are also dangerous currents blowing in the region when it comes to state-society relations. While civil society in Sudan and Ethiopia in particular has become more active, the political space for these organizations to operate is severely being restricted. The political, administrative and legal policy framework that is conducive to the growth of a strong, dynamic civil society is inadequate in Sudan and Ethiopia, and no space at all in Eritrea. While Ethiopia is currently considering a new NGO law, the Government of National Unity in Sudan has passed a new NGO law that is having serious implications to the operational freedom of NGOs. This law of *Organizations of Humanitarian and Voluntary Work Act* avails excessive discretionary power to the executive and deprives affected NGOs by the law to seek judicial remedy. Freedom of association, and especially the right to establish and operate a CSO, appears to be a privilege rather than a right that is guaranteed by constitution and international law.
- *International response*: donor commitment to post-conflict crisis in the Horn has significantly increased. This included a near doubling of assistance to Southern Sudan in 2005, following the signing of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement, with large shares of humanitarian and recovery support, alongside an increase in development assistance.
- The OECD-DAC has reached a broad consensus and established a set of principles for Good International Engagement in Fragile States. Several bilateral agencies are using these principles to guide their policies and aid allocations. The World Bank and the UN have developed operational guidelines for their staff in their joint effort to harmonize and align their interventions in their response to countries going through post-conflict or political transition, particularly in mobilizing and working with civil society organizations. This is particularly important in Sudan, where the service

delivery capacity of state institutions is minimal and enabling environment deteriorated. In view of this, a more vibrant civil society has a vital development role to play.

- The Africa Union and IGAD have also been active in peacemaking and peacekeeping though limited in their capacity to respond due to lack of resources. These sub-regional mechanisms need to be strengthened.

Conclusions

The political conditions for durable solutions to the wars of the Horn and the building of a robust sub regional architecture for peace and security have not existed and do not appear imminent. What are these preconditions? They include the following:

- Credible democratization in the largest states of the region;
- A resolution to internal conflicts;
- A stable subregional inter-state order;
- The existence of autonomous and capable multilateral institutions.

The major responsibility for addressing these political preconditions lies with the governments of the subregion. It is their failure to resolve their internal and inter-state problems that has allowed the region to become prey to external agendas.

Minimal requirements for securing peace in the Horn

- *Improving security***:** before any dialogue or reconciliation can begin, an environment that enhanced personal safety must in place. This is true for Somalia and Darfur.
- Deliver humanitarian assistance that responds to basic needs, focuses on aid on victims and does not undercut local capacity or distort the local economy.
- Increase governance and peacemaking capacity within key groups to strengthen the likelihood of a shorter, more lasting recovery period.
- Support job creation and school enrolment where possible, but with a special focus on undeserved populations and IDPs.

In the early recovery phase:

- *On the political front***:** support transitional justice and transitional governance arrangements at all levels;
- Advance national dialogue and tangible progress toward the country's future, the reconstitution of society, and implications for the future (new

constitutions, legal reform, structure of government, symbols of national unity),

- Support the establishment of functional national administration.
- ***On the economic front***: focus on reviving the economy, with emphasis on rehabilitation of basic infrastructure, job creation, market reform, establishing tax codes and banking services;
- Distribute seeds, fertilizers, tools, etc.
- On the social realm: reintegrate or resettle IDPs, provide protection and care for children, reunite families.
- ***On the Security front***: focus on establishing public security and security sector reform.
- Monitor respect for human rights and support abuse-prevention initiatives.

I feel embarrassed to give you a laundry list of prescriptions, but there is no other way to start. The problem is so complex that one has to start from somewhere. There are no ready-made solutions to the intractable problems of the Horn of Africa. We borrow a line from a famous African novel by the Ghanaian writer Ayke Armah, ***'The beautiful ones are not yet born'*** in the Horn of Africa. We need a whole new generation of Africans who can lead the people of the Horn of Africa to the Promised Land.

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