

# Conflict and Peace in the Horn of Africa

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## **Introduction: Global Shifts**

ROAPE has commissioned several special issues on the Horn of Africa in the last 25 years. The first in 1984 (No. 30), 'Conflict in the Horn of Africa', started off by characterising the hallmark of the region as 'manifold, violent social conflict . . .' Although by 1996 (No. 70), 'The Horn of Africa' looked forward hopefully to peace dividends emanating from the successful end to liberation wars within the region, and from the end of the Cold War which had been fuelling conflicts in this part of Africa, new conflicts within Somalia had already ruptured the state there. By 2003, the 'Horn of Conflict' (No. 97) emphasised the centrality of violence to the region's political economy.

This general labelling is just as appropriate to the present issue of ROAPE, which has been built up on an initial foundation of a set of articles on Eritrea and Ethiopia in collaboration with Kjetil Tronvoll and the Norwegian Centre for Human Rights at the University of Oslo. Although the contributions focus on the major confrontation between Ethiopia and Eritrea, this is only one of many dimensions of conflict in the region. Indeed, one central characteristic of the Horn is that analysis can start with any conflict situation – whether it be Eritrea and Ethiopia, Somalia, Darfur or Northern Uganda – and map out a trail linking to other countries and their internal or bilateral conflicts.

Some of the older conflicts have taken on changing forms and patterns, and new ones have emerged. Relations between Eritrea and Ethiopia are becoming more fraught but not yet violent, in turn impacting on most of their neighbours. Somalia is marked by a more polarised confrontation than the multiplicity of clan and other militia fighting suggests, and has been the scene of direct intervention by Ethiopia and indirect by the US; Eritrea was also involved in skirmishes with Djibouti in 2008 (Tadesse 2008). In one of the three major cleavages in Sudan, Darfur continues to involve open fighting. Peace initiatives, another characteristic of war zones, have abounded. Some are in place, if precariously (that between North and South in Sudan and on that country's Eastern Front, in post-election Kenya); others have been unravelling (for example, in Somalia); and others have not yet been delivered or are being set in train (in Northern Uganda, Darfur).

Any speculation of what might be in store in any region of the world at the end of the decade is forced to start by recognising how the world is undergoing shifts which may be as profound as anything seen in half a century, as a result of two coincidental events: the credit crunch in the global economy and the election of Barack Obama as US President from 2009. So it is inevitable that this Editorial begins by starting to tease out the possible implications for Africa and especially for the Horn of these two unfolding events. Some of the commentaries by participants at the US African

Studies Association Conference that immediately followed the elections are included for the benefit of readers outside the US. These offer views on the state of the debate on development thinking and can thus be seen as embodying 'advice' to the incoming administration rather than attempting to speculate what changes might or might not be expected in US dealings with Africa.

With regard to the Horn of Africa specifically, key questions about possible Obama policies are suggested, particularly by Lyons on the region as a whole, and by Menkhaus on Somalia. Will the approach of the US, and Europe for that matter, to the region and any of its problems continue to be based centrally on the 'global war on terror' (GWOT)? The temptations for the US to use this 'for-us-or-against-us' formula are greater in the Horn than elsewhere in Africa, given a superficial view of some of the cleavages there, and the proximity to the Middle East. But that perspective has in fact dictated the US taking sides over conflicts in the Horn – in relation to Eritrea-Ethiopia, and the US backing of Ethiopian intervention in Somalia, for example, in ways that are counter-productive to the purposes of peace. Some early initiatives of the Barack administration suggest that the misguided notion of a GWOT might even be ditched by the new White House. An indication may lie in the critical comments of the concept by the British Foreign Secretary, David Miliband, while in Mumbai in January 2009, and in Barack Obama's announcing plans for the closing down of Guantanamo Bay prison in his first week of office.

The doctrine of humanitarian intervention has been at the root of several interventions in the Horn: the original premise for US and UN actions in the 1990s in Somalia, and for peacekeeping missions and post-conflict rehabilitation in Eritrea, Ethiopia and Sudan before and since then. It has also helped shape the institutional mechanisms set up within the continent to handle the peace/security agenda. Thus, the regional body in the Horn, the Inter Governmental Agency for Development (IGAD), has been the main mechanism for pursuing peace agreements in Somalia and in the North-South Sudan war, and has done so by harnessing a range of international 'partners', while seeking to avoid being pushed out of the driving seat. The African Union (AU) has faced similar balancing acts in relation to Darfur and Somalia, where it has sent in peacekeeping missions. Diplomats associated with peace processes in Somalia, Sudan and Darfur have voiced concerns that 'partners' from the West have in fact hijacked agendas and dictated timing and tactics. But this formula of humanitarian intervention, with its view of riding to the aid of 'victims', does not always provide a close fit with local realities nor produce the intended results of peace and development.

The broad question of whether intervention can be justified, on humanitarian or other grounds, has to be faced. It is understandable to be shocked by massive and seemingly uncontrollable atrocities against civilians or severe repressive measures, but a small step to see them as 'intolerable' – as so many, even of those on the 'left', are doing in relation to Darfur, Somalia or Zimbabwe – and thus crying out for something to be done. But then there is the rub. By whom and by what means? Archbishop Tutu has just said it is time for 'the West to step in' in Zimbabwe. But who, operationally, is the 'West'? Are they even willing? What has their track record of intervention been like? In the Horn it has been 'mixed' to say the least, as contributions to this Issue bring out, and in the Somalia case counter-productive in ending violence or instituting any kind of governance. This is not a prescription for accepting the unacceptable, but recognition of the need for solutions devised and led from within Africa, in which international agencies and Western powers can contribute. This formula has been often enunciated in the Horn, but rarely followed completely.

It remains to be seen how far the change of administration in Washington leads to a reconsideration of policies based on the tired doctrines of the 'GWOT' and humanitarian intervention. Concretely this could open up new opportunities in the Horn. Might the US reopen a dialogue with Eritrea, which feels beleaguered, which may unlock the stalemate in the peace process with Ethiopia and dampen the proxy dimension of conflicts? The Eritrean President welcomed Obama's victory and expressed a hope that US policy in the Horn of Africa would indeed 'change' with Obama in office, although it is unlikely that the US will drop Ethiopia as their main regional 'partner' even if events are no longer viewed through the prism of the 'war on terror'. Another hope would be for there to be a shift in US strategy to Somalia, as an alternative to siding with the one set of warlords. The West seems to have played a decisive role in the resignation of the intransigent President Yusuf of the Transitional Federal Government (TFG) in late 2008. They seem to be giving backing to the new government set up in mid-February 2009, under President Sheikh Sharif Sheikh Ahmed, a former moderate leader of the Union of Islamic Courts (UIC), after parliament was expanded to include members of his moderate Islamist ARS (Alliance for the Re-Liberation of Somalia). But will other interventions there be positive: greater resources for demobilisation and alternative livelihoods, or some recognition and support of Somaliland, for example?

We have been unable to assemble anything like the same coverage of the other scenario – speculation on the impact of the global credit crisis is clearly of even greater consequence and which indeed will shape and constrain the Obama impact. These limitations are not just to be measured in terms of fewer resources available for Africa, nor in whether there will be enough political will when it comes to operationalising good intentions, but very much to do with the objective process of weakened US clout in the world political economy. There seems to be a general recognition, including in policy-making circles in Washington even before Obama's ascension, that its dictates are not decisive; other actors will be part of the equation, not least in the Horn of Africa. What is in store as a result of a global financial and economic crunch still in its early stages is even more opaque and complex than what might be in Obama's mind, and thus difficult to fathom. Peter Lawrence provides a preliminary set of questions that must urgently and will for certain occupy the attention of contributors to this Review for the next decade. What his prioritisation of issues implies for this region are a reduction of remittances to countries, especially Somalia and Eritrea, that are especially reliant on them; a collapse in commodity prices that has been the main motor behind the boom in African economies, particularly in Sudan; the predicted decline in the flow of development aid is likely to mean in particular less available for any 'peace dividends', and thus in turn undermine existing agreements such as those between North and South in Sudan or the several in the throes of negotiation, in Darfur, Eastern Sudan, between Eritrea and both Ethiopia and Djibouti, and in Northern Uganda.

## **The Ethiopia-Eritrea Conflict as a Major Fulcrum**

The Eritrean-Ethiopian conflict that started in 1998 with the border war has remained tense since the termination of the UN peacekeeping mission to Eritrea and Ethiopia (UNMEE) and the pull-out of all troops and observers during the summer of 2008. Eritrean and Ethiopian troops are only a few metres apart on certain sections of the border and some incidents of cross-border shootings have been reported. Otherwise the 'war' is currently fought by words and through proxies. The physical demarcation following the decision by the Eritrean Ethiopian Boundary Commission (EEBC) continues to be

in deadlock, with Eritrea rejecting any delegation or envoy that will 're-open' the decision through new talks, while Ethiopia dismisses the virtual demarcation as 'legal nonsense', and is steadfast in its position not to accept demarcation directly as prescribed by EEBC. In a statement at the end of 2008, the Ethiopian Foreign Ministry noted that 'the ball is in Eritrea's court' and that 'Ethiopia may have reached the end of the road in terms of what can be expected of its contributions to peace'.<sup>1</sup>

At the time of writing it is difficult to foresee any developments – other than a regime change of one or both of the two protagonists – that may influence the two governments' entrenched positions. It is also difficult to predict how Eritrea's ongoing conflict with Djibouti and Ethiopia's pull-out from Somalia will influence the dynamics of the Eritrean-Ethiopian conflict.

Economically, Ethiopia is more capable of weathering the current stalemate, while the Eritrean economy is stagnating, due in large part to the stalemate. However, it is unlikely that a popular uprising against the regime in Eritrea will be seen, given the omnipresent security system. It is possible that a regime change may emerge from within the middle-level military leadership, or as a consequence of a new all-out war with Ethiopia. Unfortunately, if President Isaias Afewerki is pushed sufficiently into a corner by foreign or domestic pressures then the latter may be the only solution for him to sustain his position.

In addition, Ethiopia has an interest in a continuation of the status quo, as it will continue to administer and occupy Badme, and the conflict may be used, there as in Eritrea, to further their political control in the country and region. But, if the Eritrean proxy war becomes too much a 'nuisance' for the Ethiopian Peoples' Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) – and they obtain a solid international backing – they may take upon themselves the task to remove Isaias from power.

If civil society organisations are severely repressed in Eritrea it is interesting that there has been a parallel, albeit less complete, movement in Ethiopia. An important recent example of this is the new restrictive NGO legislation (Aalen and Tronvoll). The law also restricts the type of activities and projects a foreign NGO can undertake or support. *Inter alia*, it will be prohibited for foreign NGOs to engage in what often form part of their core activities: human rights; conflict resolution and reconciliation; citizenship and community development; and justice and law enforcement services. The measure may be a reaction to the monetary support received by the opposition during the 2005 elections from the (mostly US based) diaspora, and the fear among top EPRDF echelons of a foreign supported 'velvet revolution' removing them from power in 2010. The draft proclamation has received broad criticism internationally, as it will undermine or alter the work of more or less the whole civil society sector in the country – both 'foreign' and 'domestic'.<sup>2</sup> Taken together, the controls over NGOs in Eritrea and Ethiopia are among the harshest in Africa, and, when combined with the politicisation of public administration down to local level, severely restrict any opportunities for worker or peasant-based opposition within either country. The activities of trades unions are similarly heavily constrained with many leaders being regularly intimidated and detained without trial, especially those of the Ethiopian Teachers Association (ITUC/CSI/IGB: 2008, Annual Survey of Violation of Trade Union Rights).

The post-2005 election process and the implementation of the 2008 local elections (postponed from 2006) offer disquieting signs on the future of liberal democracy in

Ethiopia. In 2008, state sponsored harassment and intimidation made it impossible for the opposition to register candidates, forcing the main opposition contenders to withdraw from the electoral race<sup>3</sup> and producing a result in which only three of a possible 3.6 million local and by-election seats were taken by opposition candidates! A repeat of this in the general election of 2010 will eliminate any real alternatives for the Ethiopian electorate, only a symbolic vote to 're-confirm' the power of the EPRDF. For many opponents of the government the re-arrest of UDJ President Birtukan Mideksa at the end of 2008 confirms their expectation of such an outcome and, as we go to press, official reports of arrests of plotters against the government accused of having links to the opposition group Ginbot7 add fuel to such an expectation. The more restrictive political space in the country may also push disaffected opponents, especially youth, towards support for the armed opposition groups. Yet Ethiopia's critical position as a major mixed faith nation in the Horn, with broad Western sympathies, means international protests against repression in its domestic policies are muted and allows the government to dismiss them. This ignoring of worsening repression was reinforced in 2009 when Meles Zenawi's personal international standing was still such as to have him invited by Gordon Brown, nominated by the AU, and as current chair of NEPAD, to attend the G20 March summit. In turn, this gives him a stature in dealing with the heads of state in Sudan and Somalia (having met both in the first four months of 2009) and in remaining intransigent towards Eritrea, and thus propels Ethiopia toward the position of 'regional hegemon' in the Horn, which may or may not assist in the gradual construction of some sort of regional stability.

### **Somalia: Rotting Corpse or Phoenix Awakening?**

One specific arena where the antagonisms between Ethiopia and Eritrea spill over into 'proxy wars' is treated by Ken Menkhaus' article, which both reminds readers of the origins and main dimensions of the 17 years of conflicts in Somalia, but also brings out the new and more global features of the new dynamics, and their even greater humanitarian toll. He sees external policies as having become more determinant – and their being misinformed and based on wrong calculations means they are even more drivers of conflict today. We might add that the US' one-eyed concentration on the GWOT has specifically led to the same widespread rendition of 'suspected terrorists' as seen in other arenas of the world being replicated in and around Somalia (*Chicago Tribune*, 24 November 2008). Immediate prospects for peacemaking are further cast in doubt as a result of two further destabilising happenings as this Issue goes to press. Any minimal authority that the TFG may have possessed was undermined by a major split within it, involving President Abdullahi Yousuf replacing the Prime Minister without the approval of parliament. Yousuf was blamed for this dangerous division by most of the TFG's supporters, including Ethiopia, Western powers and the AU; even the usually cautious IGAD made a statement in December threatening sanctions unless the PM was restored. Eventually, under this pressure Yousuf himself resigned on 29 December 2008, the parliament was expanded to incorporate a component from the Alliance for the Reliberation of Somalia (ARS), and a new President, formerly from the UIC, was chosen.

A second dramatic announcement came from Ethiopia, stating that they would withdraw their occupying forces by the end of 2008, as they did only a few weeks beyond that deadline. Even those, like us, who thought that the original intervention was ill-conceived and even counter-productive, have to recognise that the short-term consequences of withdrawal, in the absence of adequate AU and UN 'peacekeeping', and a

peace agreement that leaves out one major part (*al Shabaab*) of the former Islamic Courts Union (UIC), are likely to be a worsening of the instability in Somalia (although evidence in January 2009 is that *al Shabaab* is meeting more internal local resistance as the common enemy, Ethiopia, withdraws).

Two other immediate areas where the impact of the Eritrea-Ethiopia confrontation can be signalled for future attention are Somaliland and the Somali Region (Ogaden) of Ethiopia, both of which have been affected by the Ethiopian intervention in Somalia proper. One repercussion of the confrontation between the UIC and the forces of Ethiopia and the TFG in Somalia has been the spread of bombings in the latter part of 2008 into Puntland in the north-east and Somaliland to the north-west. These normally peaceful areas now face the threat of a wider expansion of the escalating violence in Somalia, fuelled as it is by outside intervention. This potential for undermining peace and stability in Somaliland has gone unnoticed in international media and in calculations of international actors, including the UN. Indeed, the world's ultimate peacekeeper has a dismal record of ignoring and sometimes undermining the stability of Somaliland ever since its declaration of independence in 1991, as documented in Lewis's new primer on Somalia (2008). Yet the process of an internally brokered peace agreement, constitution-making and state-building and Somaliland's other considerable achievements in the political and social realms since the mid-1990s should be closely studied for its lessons for Somalia and the region as well as on its own terms. The book by Bradbury (2008), reviewed in this Issue, is especially welcome as it is the first overall evaluation in the English language of what Somaliland has accomplished, and what it offers to the region. That record cannot be ignored since it constitutes an exemplar of the other dimension of conflict: the search for peace – one that is indigenous, and thus a most powerful counter to the dismissive pessimism about the inevitability of violent conflict in the Horn.

The huge Somali Region of Ethiopia (administrative Region V) has clan connections with Somaliland, and through migration for grazing and trade, with contiguous parts of southern Somalia. It is not surprising that there have been knock-on effects there as a result of the intensification of, and shifts in, struggle in Somalia following the Ethiopian incursion in late 2006. Not only have there been displaced people coming into the region but the long-standing opposition of the Ogaden National Liberation Front (ONLF) to the government in Addis Ababa, and the 'low-level insurgency' against it have flared up, which in turn have been fuelled by Eritrea. Repression by the Ethiopian forces has intensified through attempts to close the border and curtail cross-border trade in livestock and food and exports such as gum Arabic and khat, which have literally been a lifeline for the people of the Ogaden (Healy 2007). Accusations have been made (Human Rights Watch, 2008) that Ethiopian counter-insurgency has included collective punishments, the use of famine as a weapon and the indiscriminate extra-judicial killings of civilians. But after some months, the Ethiopian Minister of Foreign Affairs took the trouble to issue a 47-page refutation (26 November 2008) of the HRW Report. On the other hand, the HRW report was also criticised by ONLF. Some of the allegations had been substantiated by satellite images of the burning of villages in a report by the American Association for the Advancement of Science (12 June 2008). Whatever the impact of political measures on food insecurity and living conditions, they have been aggravated by drought and locust infestation, as well as food price increases and crashing of animal prices as people sought to dispose of livestock. But humanitarian efforts to alleviate the situation have also been political measures: UNHCR was asked to leave the Gode area (where refugees were coming in from Somalia proper), and food delivery



flights of the UN Humanitarian Air Service were suspended at the end of 2007. These political processes in Region V add up to one major element in the overall retreat into repression by the Ethiopian regime, which is highlighted in the Tronvoll and Aalen article.

Another dimension of the new patterns of conflict involving Somalia illustrates one reality of globalisation: that Africa is not always on the receiving end; initiatives from Africa can sometimes have a worldwide impact. We refer to the piracy business, which gradually built up unnoticed from a side-line for fishermen, some even suggesting it became a defensive mechanism against over-fishing by foreign fleets, into a major, well organised and financed business. Its impact on the 20 per cent of all global shipping going through the Gulf of Aden into and out of the Red Sea finally and dramatically captured world-wide publicity in 2008 with the capture of a massive oil tanker and an arms shipment, and led to alarmed calculations of the scale of its impact on global trade links and profitability. Suddenly there are fleets and protection task forces from Russia, EU, India, Canada, NATO and the notorious US-based private military firm, Blackwater (see ROAPE 118), all joining existing US Operations in the Red Sea, and even a maritime security patrol zone. Yet this fire power may not achieve much as it is constrained by the limited legal powers it has both under the International Law of the Sea, and by the absence of any law or law-enforcing state in coastal waters (see Leymarie 2008). Recent initiatives by international powers have seen them seeking a fig leaf of authorisation – from the Kenya Government which has taken court proceedings against pirates captured by foreign navies and attempts to get Somalia's TFG to follow suit, to getting authorisation from regional states and the UN to conduct anti-piracy operations on land. How the pirate flotillas and their backers operate is set out by Leymarie and by Middleton (2008). But they are, in turn, linked back to internal Somali and regional political dynamics. Although the financier organisers are just warlords who have diversified, and reputedly have some links with the administration of Puntland which is the base of the controversial ex-President of the TFG, Abdullahi Yusuf, they seem to be in it for the money not the politics. However, various actors seek to take opportunistic advantage of the situation and efforts to interdict them: Puntland using it as a bid to get recognition, Somaliland offering port facilities for the operations, Eritrea making statements about pirated vessels 'pillaging marine resources' or engaging in their own illegal acts, giving some justification for piracy (quoted in Leymarie 2008).

## **Multiple Conflicts in Sudan**

Many of the interactions that can be traced through a web, meshing the different countries of the Horn, lead in turn to the largest territory in the region, and in Africa, Sudan. The country has had to contend with a multiplicity of violent conflicts ever since Independence, which deserve close and continuing attention. The most dramatic in scale, between North and South, did reach some kind of denouement in 2005 with the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) negotiated under the auspices of the (then) seven-country regional body, the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD). In general, the peace has held, despite taxing moments concerning the withdrawal of troops behind the North-South border, the definition of that border and now of the demarcation of population by the April 2008 Census, which is likely to be the basis for controversy because it will affect proportions of representation and of allocation of oil revenues, and publications of its results have so far been withheld. There have also been controversies about the borders, revenue allocation and future

status of those three territories, technically in the North, which were the subject of special agreements attached to the CPA – especially in the oil-rich area of Abyei where fighting broke out in mid-2008. As the dates for elections for a self-determination referendum in the South are beginning to hover in the near rather than the distant future, supposedly before July 2009, tensions will build and make the peaceable fulfilment of these provisions of the CPA more difficult. Among other determinants of that scenario will be the commitment, or lack of it, of those who signed up as guarantors of the implementation – including the US, UK and other Western and regional powers, and IGAD and the AU. Here it is worth pondering the implications of the presumed loss of direct political influence of the Christian right under a US Democrat administration, for their obsessive view of Sudan as a ‘crusade’ meant they were the most powerful lobby, insisting on Sudan and the situation of the South being a US priority concern. But whatever external investment and diplomacy is or is not forthcoming, peaceful implementation is constrained by the limitations inherent in the CPA itself. One that has long been recognised by most analysts is the fact that it is far from ‘Comprehensive’ – although Darfur and the several other conflicts and tensions in Sudan are connected, the Agreement does not deal with them, indeed, the lack of mechanisms for an overall democratisation in an accord between two authoritarian governing entities precludes solutions to other conflicts. Indeed, a major new area of tension has been building up in the province of South Kordofan, another ‘border’ area between North and South, and bordering Darfur. Less subject to comment has been the fact the CPA did not require a wholesale disarmament and demobilisation of the two armies, only of militias, although there was supposed to be ‘proportional down-sizing’ and a regrouping of forces across the North-South border, and the formation of some unified national military units. Eventually, 2008 saw the working out of a donor-funded package for demobilisation and reintegration in both North and South, although it is yet to be implemented. Perhaps most worrying for those inside and outside the country, who look forward to a resolution that retains a united Sudan, is the absence of any process of actual reconciliation between armies and peoples.

Meanwhile, a general peace formula to resolve the divisions in Darfur remains unrealised. A Peace Agreement was signed in 2006, but only by one of the four armed opposition movements, as well as the government. Most informed observers agree that the diplomatic methods of the West, imposing a sharp and arbitrary deadline for movements to sign up, was what precluded a really comprehensive agreement. Since then, despite a temporary cease-fire, recent reports from UN bodies offer the same picture, although on a reduced scale, of mass killings of civilians, forced displacement and systematic rape that were reported by the first investigations of the International Criminal Court (ICC) in 2003. There is little difference between accounts of what is happening, although analysts disagree about who or what circumstances must take the main blame, and there is major debate about what can be done to stop human rights violations and to make and keep peace.

In July 2008 the Prosecutor of the ICC recommended that a warrant be issued to hold the President of Sudan, Omar al-Bashir, for war crimes in Darfur. This initiative has evoked intense debate. A range of different views by informed specialists from Sudan and outside have been usefully brought together by the US Social Science Research Council in a summary of a blog debate they hosted (de Waal 2008). In terms of analysis of actual events, the debates are less about the terrible actions against people in Darfur, although the Government of Sudan (GoS) claims that the situation on the ground has improved, but more about how far the nature of the



conflict and the actual violations are solely attributable to GoS, acting in a consistent and orchestrated way. Some maintain scepticism about the pragmatic political value of the ICC issuing a warrant, on the grounds that it is a classic case of the demands of justice clashing with those of stability and peace (Justice Africa 2008). For those who see a realistic possibility of a comprehensive peace agreement, perhaps encouraged by diplomatic pressure, a beleaguered al-Bashir regime is unlikely to sign up. The AU in fact responded to the ICC Prosecutor's application for a warrant by a resolution suggesting a postponement in considering it, in order to allow time for negotiations. Notwithstanding, the ICC endorsed the issuing of a warrant in March 2009, although, significantly, it rejected one of the three grounds in the Prosecutor's recommendation, that of genocide. In response, the registration of 16 of the international NGOs providing aid in Darfur was revoked, fostering a wide range of criticism of the wisdom of the ICC action, or at least its timing. Others, of course, argue that pursuing the application will not only provide pressure, but also more broadly signal that not even a head of state is beyond prosecution for war crimes and human rights violations.

## The Articles in this Issue

The starting point of this Issue is an extended account by Terence Lyons of the background to the conflict between Ethiopia and Eritrea which broke out in 1998, following which the failure to reach a resolution acceptable to each side has had a major impact on the entire Horn region. Lyons recounts events leading up to the conflict, examines the causes and the consequences, the latter particularly for Eritrea where the continuation of tensions with Ethiopia over the border demarcation justifies the prolongation of a severely authoritarian government, where political debate and dissent is heavily suppressed and, indeed, 'criminalised' (also characterised in the article by Reid as 'the politics of silence'). Increased authoritarianism has also been evident in Ethiopia (examined in greater detail in the article by Aalen and Tronvoll), partly also in a drive to control and limit opposition which is often suspected of having links with armed groups supported by Eritrea. The disagreement over the border dispute, together with certain more fundamental underlying differences for which the border problem has become a highly emotive symbol, has also coloured each country's approach to foreign policy, particularly in Somalia where their respective interventions overlie and contribute to the complex interplay of local factors. The consequence for that country is a veritable 'witches brew' in which

*the intermeshing of domestic insecurities, interstate antagonisms, and global policies create regional 'security complexes' in which the security of each actor is intrinsically linked to the others (Lyons: this Issue).*

Ethiopia's entry into Somalia in late 2006 marked a significant change in regional dynamics and provided a gift to Asmara as it clearly diverted Ethiopian military resources from potential action at the disputed northern border with Eritrea, and made it easier to portray Ethiopia as perpetuating its historical imperialist ambitions in the region. It also identified Ethiopia as a US ally, and in opposition eyes, a proxy for the USA in supporting the weak puppet government of the TFG, hence raising the legitimacy of Eritrean support of the opposing Islamic movements, consistent with emerging diplomatic ties by Eritrea with Yemen, Sudan and Iraq while also conveniently supplying channels for support to armed opposition groups within Ethiopia such as the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF) and ONLF. However, although Ethiopia's presence in Somalia identified it with US motives in seeking to pin down al-Qaeda

connections in that part of the world, Lyons is surely right (together with other observers such as Menkhaus, also in this Issue) in surmising that Ethiopia would probably have entered Somalia in any case, both in response to the directions in which the Islamic Courts appeared to be moving in late 2006, and in order to control incursions from Somali territory by the OLF and ONLF. The result is that Somalia has become an arena where bitter local rivals circle each other in the absence of any effective centralised state – where there is no monopoly of power in the classic sense, and where the conflicting interests of regional actors such as Ethiopia and Eritrea combine with the looming presence of the United States in its ‘war on terror’ (or ‘overseas contingency operations’) to create a vortex of forces and alliances the outcome of which, for the entire region, is highly unpredictable. Although Lyons also points to the lobbying significance of the Ethiopian and Eritrean diaspora communities, especially in the USA, and to US reservations in classifying Eritrean activities as ‘terrorist’ related, hence implying that doors are still open for negotiated solutions, he can only conclude that it is the local dynamics that are fundamental to any resolution of the many overlapping problems.

There then follow two articles that examine the Ethiopian position in more detail. In the first of these, Christopher Clapham places the policies and practices of the Tigrayan People’s Liberation Front (TPLF), which is the dominant element of the EPRDF, firmly in a tradition of centralised authoritarianism, having its roots in the monarchist structures of the highland regions of Amhara and Tigray in the nineteenth century, which continued throughout much of the twentieth century under Haile Sellassie, and which remains manifest today despite the administrative decentralisation associated with the creation of a federalised state in 1991. The degree to which this legacy in itself is affecting the nature of the emerging modern state in Ethiopia is a matter of debate, but it cannot avoid reference to the ethnic variety of the peoples that were consolidated within the boundaries of what became the Ethiopia of today, and therefore to the practical imperatives, faced by any Ethiopian Government, of now holding together this mosaic of rival ‘nations’ where their various nationalisms are reinforced by ethnically-based federalism. This is the context in which Christopher Clapham chooses four key areas for an examination of the strengths and weaknesses of the TPLF. These are the internal arena of the regime, highlighting the isolated position of Meles and the TPLF within the top levels of government; the national arena, and the growing influence of opposition (albeit severely constrained) in the towns; the arena of ‘nationalities’ and the regional tensions created by ethnic federalism; and finally, the international arena, including Ethiopia’s activities in the wider Horn context. This thematic characterisation captures the essence of the (often self-generated) constraints that channel the actions of the TPLF in the direction of ever increasing authoritarianism. Although personalities cannot explain everything, Clapham additionally makes the interesting point that, in contrast to Haile Sellassie for example, or even to Mengistu, Meles Zenawi is seldom seen in public and remains a distant figure to the masses of the population. One consequence of this is that there is very little drive from the top to promote a popular sense of ‘Ethiopian’ nationality, leaving ethnic rivalries and jealousies to fester and to seek outlets in opposition politics aligned to regional rather than national agendas.

The argument usually presented to the rest of the world by the Ethiopian Government is that ‘democracy’ is new to Ethiopia and involves a transition that has to be managed, if necessary by temporary authoritarian control over those deemed to be abusing their freedom to choose. Interestingly, although Clapham makes the point that the TPLF must ‘manage’ democratic transition peacefully if it is to sustain any long-term

legitimacy, the aftermath of the 2005 elections illustrates not simply a failure by the TPLF leadership to 'manage' without resort to violence, but also a failure to foresee the true nature of their vulnerability. This does not mean that the TPLF should be granted the benefit of the doubt about their intentions as this would be a concession belied by the pattern, tracked by Aalen and Tronvoll in the second article on Ethiopia, of a steady increase in the extent and nature of authoritarian state control, both before and after the 2005 elections. The series of alterations to the electoral law, restrictions on parliamentary rules, extension of political control down to *kebele* (smallest local government unit) level, expansion of governing party membership, the weakness of parliament, and the 2008 regulations on foreign funding of NGOs (especially those working in the area of human rights), all adds to public perceptions that the regime is concerned primarily with its own survival and even, in some quarters, that there is a hidden agenda of a 'greater Tigray' being planned for the longer run. There can be no doubt of the fact that the situation is being managed, but the object of this 'electoral authoritarianism' points only in one direction, which is the continuation in power of the TPLF/EPRDP. The threats (perceived or actual) to the government which prompted this trend, the fears at the top which it exposes, and the ever increasing restrictions on political freedoms lead Aalen and Tronvoll to suggest, controversially, that the only effective means of opposition now available are increasingly those of armed resistance, apart from exile and diaspora campaigning.

Meanwhile, the dispute between Ethiopia and Eritrea remains unresolved, which is a matter of less immediacy for Ethiopia than for Eritrea where the continued maintenance of a large standing army is creating a generation of disillusioned youth recruited for indefinite national service either as soldiers or as low paid civil employees. Although it is customary to present the situation as one of stalemate, it is not necessarily the case, as Reid argues in his article on Eritrea, that the perception of a 'politics of silence' in that country, induced by repression, does not mean that subtle and important shifts are not underway. In a series of interviews with, of necessity, un-named informants, Reid presents a picture of a society in waiting, but a society whose fear of any alternative in the short term has generated a resigned patience, tempered by residual respect for the struggles of the past, and hoping in due course for a peaceable transition to a new more liberal leadership.

Reid extends his analysis to the state as well as society, seeking to go beyond mere condemnation of its repressive character and understand its aims and strategies in its own terms. In this approach he tends to explain the authoritarianism as a control mechanism necessary to tackle immediate major problems, and thus to see a chink of light which might allow some future though limited reform. Reid is revealing about the operation of power today, showing that the distinctions between party, state and the presidency are fudged and the mechanisms of policy making are opaque – making his task of detecting its strategies more problematic. However, whatever the intention, the extensive militarisation of society, especially through national service and the education system, has produced a massive haemorrhaging of young people escaping to neighbouring countries and further afield (HRW 2009). For those who remain, disillusionment and resentment are damaging their respect for the generation who fought for independence and who apparently are unable to engage in political compromise.

Meanwhile, the Eritrean economy sits in the doldrums, dependent on the patience and tolerance of the extensive diaspora community and its remittances (and tax payments) while that of Ethiopia has proved more buoyant despite severe problems of food security in many parts of the country, but bolstered by international aid, favourable

export prices (coffee, khat, cut flowers), and the multiplier effects of road and buildings construction in and around Addis Ababa. A particular tragedy for both countries is the loss of the Eritrean port of Assab (in favour of Djibouti) as the main conduit for Ethiopia's foreign trade, and thus as a major income earner for Eritrea. Although Djibouti and even Berbera in Somaliland have benefited from the continuing disagreement between Ethiopia and Eritrea, the same can certainly not be said of south-central Somalia.

Here the story is picked up in the article by Menkhaus in which the recent history of fluctuating coalitions, ever-dividing and regrouping militias, the dysfunctional and disconnected TFG, and the predictably counterproductive interventions of Ethiopia and the United States is illuminatingly summarised. He shows that the particular patterns of intervention by the UN (on humanitarian and state building grounds), by the USA (in its 'war on terror'), and by a powerful 'peacekeeping' neighbour (to control its boundaries and the scope for regional dissent) have rebounded negatively on each of them in widespread anti-Westernism and anti-Ethiopianism, while at the same time actually deepening clan, ideological and sectarian divisions within the country, rendering it no nearer to a harmonious solution than before. The underlying explanation for this, according to Menkhaus, is that by *misreading* Somalia as a post-conflict scenario, these actors have invariably intervened via cooperation with the TFG, thus identifying themselves with its partisan composition, and in effect inflaming the situation.

By January 2009 Ethiopia had withdrawn from Mogadishu, having previously announced its intention to remove its troops by the end of 2008 – in part disillusioned by the failure of the TFG to cohere, in part hoping that divisions within the Islamic opposition increases the likelihood of a negotiated compromise outcome, and in part perhaps calculating that if a reclamation of power by some variant of the Islamic Courts Union emerges then it will be easier to contain from within Ethiopia. An indication that the Ethiopian Government plans to withdraw from Somalia in order to concentrate its military and administrative resources in its own Somali region is seen in the robust response which the government made to the reports by HRW of atrocities in the Ogaden section of the region. That the Ethiopian Government has countered with its own detailed 'independent' report (Press Statement, Ministry of Foreign Affairs 26 November 2008), which it has widely publicised, may not be merely window dressing but an indication that it sees the presence of federal troops in the region as a 'long haul' and thus that a 'hearts and minds' approach cannot be ignored if Somali irredentism is finally to be repelled.

In the remainder of the issue are two articles, not on the Horn, but the contents of which have relevance to future policy making in regions such as this when they emerge from prolonged conflict. One on Sierra Leone, by Castaneda, analyses how an externally driven concentration on macroeconomic post recovery stability can effectively sideline the pressing need at the local level for an equitable distribution of microeconomic support of a volume sufficient to pre-empt a return to violence driven by poverty and exclusion. The second is a timely reminder, by Thomas, on the continuing relevance of the contributions of earlier thinkers, in this case of Paulo Freire and the application of the broader implications of his 'pedagogy of the oppressed' to the way in which social and economic policy of the ANC in post-apartheid South Africa has been dictated by the interests of the newly emerging elite, and of how his approach can provide a schema for a more grassroots based construction of policy.

## Endnotes

1. Ethiopian Foreign Ministry: A week in the Horn, 5 December 2008. Available from: [http://www.mfa.gov.et/Press\\_Section/Week\\_Horn\\_Africa\\_December\\_05\\_2008.htm](http://www.mfa.gov.et/Press_Section/Week_Horn_Africa_December_05_2008.htm)
2. See the analyses of the draft proclamations from Amnesty International (<http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/asset/AFR25/005/2008/en/78bed5cd-42b1-11dd-9452-091b75948109/afr250052008eng.html>) and Human Rights Watch (<http://www.hrw.org/pub/2008/africa/HRW.NGO.Law.Analysis.pdf>)
3. See Lovise Aalen and Kjetil Tronvoll, 2009. The 2008 Ethiopian local elections: the return of electoral authoritarianism. *African Affairs*, 1; and US Department of State, 2008 Human Rights Report: Ethiopia.

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