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Eritrea and *Al Shabaab*: *Realpolitik on the Horn of Africa*

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Eritrea and Ethiopia are neighbors on the Horn of Africa. They share common languages, ethnicities, tribal structures and religious traditions. By outward appearances, they should co-exist symbiotically, like Canada and the United States. Instead, they resemble the Koreas – each at the other’s throat with no prospect for reconciliation on the horizon. Eritrean political culture over the past fifty years has spawned a national psyche consumed with fear and hatred of all things Ethiopian. That same culture has isolated Eritrea from the African Union (AU), the UN and the United States, and has driven the country into alignment with destabilizing regional forces for which it has no pre-ordained cultural affinity. Principal among Eritrea’s unlikely allies is *Al Shabaab*, the al Qaeda-affiliated militia prosecuting the Islamist insurgency in Somalia and an expanding terror campaign in greater Africa.¹ This article reviews the genesis of this strange alliance and explores potential military solutions.

Eritrea: The Land and Its Peoples

Eritrea is approximately the size of Pennsylvania. The country has a long coastline along the Red Sea on the east and a desert border with Sudan to the west. To the south lies the ill-defined, battle-scarred boundary with Ethiopia. Eritrea shares a small border with Djibouti to the southeast.² Eritrea’s 3.6 million people represent nine ethnic groups who speak various Semitic and Cushitic languages, creating cultural ties to peoples across its three political boundaries. A slim majority of the nation is Christian. Most other Eritreans follow a moderate version of Sunni Islam, with a small number practicing traditional animism.³

Absent from Eritrea’s ethnic and religious make-up is any ideological or religious predisposition for the violent political Islamism of the Muslim Brotherhood of Egypt, the Wahhabi movement of Saudi Arabia, or the Deobandi and Taliban movements of south central Asia. At no time in Eritrea’s history has the country sought to install Islamic law as the source of civil order (*sharia*), establish a government that unites the clergy and civil bureaucracy (the caliphate), or invoke *jihād* as the basis for waging war against its adversaries.⁴

¹ Eritrea also appears to have aligned itself with tribal separatists in Ethiopia, Djibouti and Sudan. A full analysis of those associations stands beyond the scope of this paper.

² United States Department of State, *Eritrea – Country Study*, January 2010. Also at <http://www.state.gov/p/af/ci/er>.

³ Id. Two ethnicities, Tigrinya and Tigre, make up four-fifths of the population and speak similar Semitic languages. Tigrinya and Arabic are the most frequently used languages in commerce and government.

⁴ For a discussion of these terms and a general synopsis of the recent history and components of the global jihadist movement, see David Kilcullen, *Countering Global Insurgency*, November 2004, *passim*. Also at <http://smallwarsjournal.com/documents/kilcullen.pdf>.

Eritrea's secular political culture, not its religious traditions, has led the country into its alliance with *Al Shabaab*.

Eritrea's Modern History

Through the 19th and 20th centuries Italian kings and fascists dispatched armies, bureaucrats and businessmen to occupy and colonize Eritrea. Italian hegemony ended at the beginning of World War II when the United Kingdom evicted Mussolini's forces. In 1952, Eritrea and Ethiopia were united into a federation. Eritreans in the middle and professional classes saw the UN resolution recognizing the federation as a breach of prior international pledges to acknowledge Eritrea as sovereign. Ethiopia, the more economically and politically advanced of the two countries, soon dominated the federation.⁵ A series of measures restricting Eritrean autonomy culminated in 1962, when Ethiopian emperor Haile Selassie dissolved the federation, dismissed the Eritrean parliament and annexed the country. The result was an Eritrean insurrection against Addis Ababa that lasted nearly three bloody decades and saw atrocities inflicted upon civilian populations.⁶

Through the 1960s the Eritrean Liberation Front (ELF) led the resistance. In the 1970s, a small cadre of ELF members splintered off to form the Eritrean People's Liberation Front (EPLF). With present-day Eritrean premier Isaias Afweke as its helm, the EPLF ascended to become the dominant force within the Eritrean rebellion until the war's end two decades later. A 1974 coup removed the Ethiopian emperor from power. The Derg, a Soviet-sponsored Marxist junta comprising leaders from the prior regime's military and security establishments, filled the vacuum. Despite this upheaval in national leadership, Ethiopia persisted in its campaign to subdue the Eritrean rebels. Derg offensives scored some tactical successes but failed to crush the insurgency. Like other sophisticated insurgent cadres, the EPLF recognized that so long as it held out – so long as it did not loose – it was winning, and time would work to its benefit.

The EPLF reaped the fruits of its patience in 1988, when a crumbling Soviet Union cut off aid to the Derg. War materiel became scarce and Ethiopian morale plummeted. Soon the Derg was forced to withdraw its troops from their garrisons in Eritrea's western lowlands.⁷ By May 1991, the Derg's leadership was in hiding in Zimbabwe. Under a U.S.-brokered armistice, EPLF forces occupied the Eritrean ports and countryside and established the Provisional Government of Eritrea (PGE) with Afweke as leader. The EPLF Central Committee rapidly morphed from an insurgent/terrorist cadre into the nation's *de facto* legislature. In 1993, a UN-monitored referendum produced a popular decision in favor of full independence. On May 24, 1993, Eritrea declared itself free and democratic, a development feted by the international community as a rare instance of progress that stood in stark contrast to the chronic chaos in nearby Somalia.⁸

Some in the EPLF had espoused Marxist ideology. (Traces of economic collectivism remain visible in the country's centrally-controlled economy and its mobilization of youth and military units to work on infrastructure projects.⁹) Soviet patronage of the hated Derg and the inglorious collapse of the Soviet Union, however, remained fresh in the country's collective

⁵ United States Department of State, *Eritrea – Country Study*, January 2010. Also at <http://www.state.gov/p/af/ci/er>.

⁶ Id.

⁷ Id.

⁸ Id.

⁹ Id.

memory. Thus, the EPLF pronounced its commitment to constitutional democracy and a free-market economy. Not coincidentally, these two planks happened to be conditions for monetary assistance from the United States.¹⁰

The Rise of a Rogue State

After declaring independence, the Transitional National Assembly installed Afweke as the country's President. At the same time, the EPLF established itself as the country's sole political party, the People's Front for Democracy and Justice (PFDJ). The PFDJ announced a four-year transition period during which it would draft and ratify a constitution, legalize political parties, enact protections for an independent press, carry out elections, and install a permanent constitutional government.¹¹ The "temporary" transition period is now in its seventeenth year with no end in sight. The PFDJ runs Eritrea as a one-party dictatorship with Afweke at the center of a cult of personality. In September 2001, the PFDJ implemented a crackdown against dissidents who called for implementation of the constitution and free elections. Summary arrests and the shuttering of independent media followed.¹²

The PFDJ has rationalized the perpetuation of the transitional government on the perceived mortal threat posed by Ethiopia, a chimera conjured up on the grim memory of the 1988-2000 border war between the neighbors that featured World War I-style trench warfare and acts of terrorism, producing 80,000 casualties.¹³ After the shaky ceasefire was announced, the UN Security Council sought to de-escalate tensions through the deployment of a monitoring mission, the United Nation Mission Ethiopia Eritrea (UNMEE).¹⁴ UNMEE lacked the authority and forces to enforce the peace. UNMEE could not, and thus did not, contain Eritrean belligerence on the border, allowing Ethiopia justify its own noncompliance with the ceasefire. In 2008, the toothless UN mandate was permitted to lapse and UNMEE ceased to exist, marking an inglorious end to the international community's willingness to put boots on the ground to keep the peace.¹⁵

Eritrea continues to perpetrate acts of aggression along the disputed border, prompting occasional retaliation by Ethiopia.¹⁶ Eritrea also incites domestic instability within Ethiopia.^{17 18}

¹⁰ Id.

¹¹ Id.

¹² Id.

¹³ "Eritrean Says Ethiopian Troops Attacked Disputed Town Located Along Border," *Agence France Presse* (World Service in English), January 3, 2010.

¹⁴ United Nations Security Council Resolution 1661 (March 14, 2006). Also at <http://www.un.org/en/peacekeeping/missions/past/unmee/resolutions.html>.

¹⁵ United Nations Security Council Resolution 1827 (July 30, 2008). Also at <http://daccess-ods.un.org/TMP/1039091.html>.

¹⁶ As one recent example, on January 3, 2010, Eritrea's foreign ministry publicly accused Ethiopia's ruling Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF) of attacking Eritrean positions on its side of the border in the Zalambesa region. Eritrea boasted of killing ten of the Ethiopian attackers and repelling the assault. "Eritrean Says Ethiopian Troops Attacked Disputed Town Located Along Border," *Agence France Presse* (World Service) (in English), January 3, 2010.

¹⁷ "Benishangul People's Liberation Movement (BPLM)," *Jane's World Insurgency and Terrorism*, July 31, 2008. A Muslim-fundamentalist insurgent group, the small and shadowy BPLM purports to represent the ethnic Benishangul people of northwestern Ethiopia, who are predominantly Sunni. Eritrea has been identified as providing at least indirect support to the BPLM.

¹⁸ Ethiopia's vulnerability to subversion, particularly that perpetrated by Eritrea, is exacerbated by Ethiopia's system of "ethnic federalism," a constitutional structure that expressly allocates political power and regional hegemony to its various ethnicities. This arrangement, designed with the laudable purpose of giving constitute ethnic groups a measure of local autonomy and a clear voice in Ethiopian national governance, has created cultural enclaves that can be exploited by Eritrean elements of the same

In a familiar pattern, Ethiopia has reciprocated by supporting the Alliance of Eritrean National Forces (AENF), a patchwork of dissidents, ELF insurgents and jihadists arrayed against the Afweke regime.¹⁹ Eritrea's regional isolation continued to calcify in early 2010. Ethiopia and Sudan put aside their own decades-long rivalry in agreeing to cooperate to prevent Eritrea from conducting "terrorist" operations against their countries during their upcoming electoral seasons.²⁰

Eritrea's regional mischief is the product of internal dynamics. Over the last two decades, Eritrea's political culture has been wholly redefined by the PFDJ, whose methods were forged in the fires of four decades of guerilla warfare. PFDJ strongmen are survivors; they know how to exploit an opportunity for maximum practical benefit. Eritrea's modern history has presented them with just such an opportunity. The 1998 border war with Ethiopia, international economic sanctions, the failed UN peace process, decades of oppression at the hands of the emperor and the Derg, and even the distant experience of colonization under the Italians combine to create a reservoir of anger and grievances. The regime exploits these grievances to perpetuate domestic paranoia; they cast the nation as surrounded by legions of foreign enemies and international conmen, and as infiltrated by their agents. Afweke and the party leverage the resulting sense desperation to justify internal oppression and regional belligerence. Through its domination of the media, the party has ensconced itself and Afweke in the Eritrea public mind as the country's only vanguards against treasonous domestic subversives, intractably hostile neighbors and a repressive world order.²¹ The PFDJ has militarized Eritrean society, establishing open-ended military conscription of the nation's youth, a tack likely to yield generations indoctrinated with blind loyalty to the PFDJ and Afweke.²²

Eritrean foreign policy is anchored in the mantra that international and non-governmental organizations are part of an Ethiopian-inspired conspiracy to hinder the country's economic development. The regime casts the U.S. as a Western imperialist accomplice to this anti-Eritrea enterprise, and for its evidence, points to the American military presence in Djibouti and its support for Ethiopia's 2007 incursion into Somalia.²³ In sum, Eritrea's political culture has devolved into a secular fascism rooted in loyalty to Afweke and the party.²⁴ If the history of other fascist regimes provides any insight, then we can expect that Eritrean fascism, if left unchecked, will continue to corrupt Eritrean society and to menace its neighbors on the Horn of Africa.

The PFDJ and Al Shabaab: Odd Bedfellows

Eritrea and Ethiopia are waging warfare by proxy in Somalia. Ethiopia invaded Somalia in 2007 with U.S. support and evicted the Islamic Courts Union (ICU), an Al Qaeda affiliate. Ethiopia now supports the Somali Transitional Federal Government (TFG), which is recognized

ethnicities (particularly the Tigrinya and Tigre) to destabilize Ethiopia internally. See International Crisis Group. *Ethiopia: Ethnic Federalism and its Discontents*, September 4, 2009, *passim*. Also at <http://www.crisisgroup.org/home/index.cfm?id=6300>.

¹⁹ "Alliance of Eritrean National Forces (AENF)," *Jane's World Insurgency and Terrorism*, February 1, 2005.

²⁰ "Ethiopia, Sudan Vow to Resist Eritrean Aggression in Horn of Africa," *Pan African News Agency*, January 2, 2010.

²¹ Human Rights Watch, *Service for Life: State Repression and Indefinite Conscription in Eritrea* (New York: Human Rights Watch), 2009. Also at <http://www.hrw.org/node/82284>.

²² Ben Rawlence, "Eritrea: Slender Land, Giant Prison," *OpenDemocracy*, May 8, 2009. Also at <http://www.hrw.org/en/news/2009/05/06/eritrea-slender-land-giant-prison>.

²³ "Eritrea," *Jane's Country Study*, November 26, 2009.

²⁴ For a general discussion of fascism, see Matthew N. Lyons, "What is Fascism? Some General Ideological Features," at <http://www.publiceye.org/eyes/whatfasc.html>.

by the UN and U.S. The African Union Mission Somalia (AMISOM), a peacekeeping force of 4,000 troops from neighbouring African nations, is struggling to protect the nascent TFG and key infrastructure from *Al Shabaab*, an Islamist insurgent militia comprising hard-line remnants of the ICU, foreign fighters, and newly-radicalized Somali recruits.²⁵ *Al Shabaab*, a designated terrorist organization affiliated with Al Qaeda,²⁶ controls large swathes of southern and central Somalia and has contained AMISOM and Somali government troops to just a few blocks in the capital city of Mogadishu.²⁷

Al Shabaab's commander, the American-born Abu Mansour al Amriki, has declared that the militia will wage *jihad* against "enemies of Islam," to include the TFG and the nations that contribute forces or support to AMISOM. On the evening of July 11, 2010, *Al Shabaab* made good on its promise by launching two synchronized bomb attacks in Kampala, Uganda, slaughtering 76 hapless civilians as they watched the World Cup games at two public locations. *Al Shabaab* promptly took credit for the attacks. On the following day, Ugandan authorities arrested three Kenyan nationals and indicated that more arrests would follow.²⁸

Within Somalia, the group has reportedly brought "security" to occupied areas in a manner reminiscent of Taliban "security" in Afghanistan and Pakistan. A zero-tolerance standard for petty street crimes finds enforcement in sentences of dismemberment imposed by *sharia* courts.²⁹ Morality police extract silver fillings and gold teeth as impermissibly "decorative." They publicly flog women for wearing brassieres, which are deemed to be "deceptive" and thus sinful.³⁰ *Al Shabaab*, on cue from Al Qaeda's central leadership, has launched a global agenda. A 2006 report to the UN Security Council described the deployment of hundreds of Somali fighters to Lebanon to support of Hezbollah's aggression against Israel.³¹ In late 2009, *Al Shabaab* announced the formation of a Somali *Al Quds* ("Jerusalem") brigade to

²⁵ *Al Shabaab* is Arabic for "the Youth." The force had its beginning as the youth movement that operated under the ICU. The group's name and origin bear a striking if coincidental similarity to those of the Taliban, a term that means "The Students," in reference to the origins in the Deobandi and Salafist madrassas of Pakistan.

²⁶ The U.S. Department of State named *al-Shabaab* a Foreign Terrorist Organization (FTO) and a Specially Designated Global Terrorist (SDGT) on February 26, 2008. See <http://treas.gov/press/releases/hp1283.htm>. *Al Shabaab* reportedly has released a video message swearing allegiance to Osama Bin Ladin. See <http://occident.blogspot.com/2009/09/leaps-bounds-rapid-evolution-of-harakat.html>.

²⁷ In a move reminiscent of the mission creep that ultimately doomed the U.S. intervention in Somalia in the early 1990s, Ugandan and other AMISCOM "peacekeeping" forces were recently reported to have gone on the offense with TFG troops against *Al Shabaab* militiamen in the capital, raising questions in African news media about the feasibility and legitimacy of AMISCOM against the increasingly potent insurgency. The Ugandan periodical *The Independent* recently voiced this dwindling faith in AMISCOM: "All these developments raise the question: can Uganda and the AU do with 3,500 soldiers what the UN failed to do with 38,000?" In the same article, the Ugandan president rejected any notion that his nation's forces were on or would go on the operational offense to engage *Al Shabaab* forces, insisting that Ugandan forces' focus is exclusively on "reconstruction." See Obed K. Katureebe, "Eritrea's entry changes face of Somalia conflict," *The Independent (Uganda)*, July 21, 2009. Also at <http://www.independent.co.ug/index.php/cover-story/cover-story/82-cover-story/1290-eritreas-entry-changes-face-of-somalia-conflict>.

²⁸ "Three Kenyan Men Charged with Uganda Bomb Attacks," BBC News – Africa (July 30, 2010). Also at <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-10821630>.

²⁹ Obed K Katureebe, "Eritrea's entry changes face of Somalia conflict," *The Independent (Uganda)*, July 21, 2009. Also at <http://www.independent.co.ug/index.php/cover-story/cover-story/82-cover-story/1290-eritreas-entry-changes-face-of-somalia-conflict>.

³⁰ "Whipped for wearing a 'deceptive' bra: Hardline Islamists in Somalia publicly flog women in Sharia crackdown," *The Daily Mail (UK)*, October 26, 2009. Also at <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/worldnews/article-1220864/Whipped-wearing-deceptive-bra-Hardline-Islamists-Somalia-publicly-flog-women-sharia-crackdown.html#ixzz0cXBiojPI>.

³¹ UN Monitoring Group - Somalia. *Report to the United Nations Security Council Pursuant to Resolution 751 (1992)*, October 16, 2006. Also at <http://www.un.org/sc/committees/751/mongroup.shtml>.

fight Israel.³² These developments serve as a clear example of Al Qaeda's strategy of aggregating regional conflicts into its globalized campaign against the West.

The PFDJ has become a key supporter of *Al Shabaab*. And there is the paradox: Eritrea's secular fascist politics provide no obvious ideological basis for the regime's alignment with Somali jihadists. Indeed, Eritrea claims to struggle with internal Islamist insurrection,³³ an assertion credited by U.S. Government early in the Global War on Terror (GWOT) when it hailed Eritrea as a stalwart ally in the fight against al Qaeda.³⁴ Even so, Eritrea's provision of war materiel to the Somali militia is well documented. For example, a 2006 report by the UN Monitoring Mission to Somalia catalogued multiple episodes of Eritrean facilities being used for bulk air and sea deliveries of small arms, mortars, anti-aircraft weapons, mines and medical supplies to Somalia's jihadists. Eritrean dismissals of the UN report as "fabricated" do not survive the report's exacting details: tail numbers of Eritrean aircraft, detailed inventories of individual shipments, and the identities of Eritrean traffickers and financiers. The report also charged that Syria, Libya, Iran, Hezbollah and elements in Saudi Arabia and Egypt have funneled weapons shipments to the ICU and *Al Shabaab* through Eritrea in order to conceal their violations of the UN arms embargo.³⁵

The internal logic of Eritrea's support to *Al Shabaab* may be divined from the histories of other nations that adopted totalitarian political cultures. National Socialist Germany for a time partnered with its ideological arch enemy, the Soviet Union, when it made practical sense to do so. The same Nazi regime made common cause with Japan, despite Hitler's fetish with "Aryan" racial superiority. Saddam Hussein's secular regime funnelled millions of dollars to the families of Hamas suicide bombers who had attacked Israel, and Abu Musab al Zarqawi, the eventual commander of Al Qaeda in Iraq, found sanctuary in Iraq after being wounded in Afghanistan. Libyan despot Colonel Muammar Gaddafi made common cause with the Provisional Irish Republican Army, providing guns and explosives; far from being a stakeholder in Irish Republicanism, Gaddafi provided Irish with guns, explosives and training for no reason other than to be a thorn in the side of the UK. Kim Jong Il's regime, unburdened by the puritanical brand communism that the "Hermit Kingdom" purports to practice, freely leverages the market dynamic of supply and demand by peddling weapons, drugs and counterfeit money to any nation or group with hard cash in hand.

History teaches that when a one-party dictatorship becomes its own *raison d'être*, ideology falls by the wayside. Short-term accommodations that serve the immediate practical needs of "the Party" and "the Leader" (*Das Fuhrer, Il Duce*, "the Dear Leader," *etc.*) trump ideology every time.

³² In November 2009, Al Shabaab announced the creation of a new military unit, Al Quds Brigade, with the mission of attacking Israel and "free Islamic holy places." The group, according to its new commander Abdifatah Aweys Abu Hamza, is prepared to "transfer and expand our fighting in the Middle East so we can defend Al Aqsa mosque from the Israelis." See http://www.adl.org/main_Terrorism/Shabaab_Threatens_Israel.htm.

³³ "Eritrean Islamic Salvation Movement," *Jane's World Insurgency and Terrorism*, July 31, 2008. The Eritrean Islamic Salvation Movement (EISM), formerly known as Eritrean Islamic Jihad - Revolution Council (EIJ-RC), seeks to overthrow the PFDJ regime, religious freedom and the establishment of Arabic as the official language. Militarily weak, the EISM has been subsumed by the AENF, the hodgepodge of opposition groups sponsored, paradoxically, by the anti-Islamist government in Ethiopia.

³⁴ Department of Defense Public Affairs Office, "Eritrea Could Teach U.S. Much to Combat Terror," (December 10, 2002). Also at <http://www.defense.gov/news/newsarticle.aspx?id=42407>.

³⁵ UN Monitoring Group - Somalia, *Report to the United Nations Security Council Pursuant to Resolution 751 (1992)*, October 16, 2006. Also at <http://www.un.org/sc/committees/751/mongroup.shtml>.

This historical pattern explains the Eritrean-*Al Shabaab* alliance as one of rank mutual convenience. The Afweke regime benefits from the chaos on Ethiopia's extended eastern border, which wastes Ethiopian treasure and drains Ethiopian combat power that might be deployed on the Eritrean-Ethiopian frontier. The resulting condemnations by Ethiopia and the international community provide material to the regime's spin doctors. Finally, arming *Al Shabaab* militiamen serves Eritrea's interests in undermining the credibility of the AU and UN. For its part, *Al Shabaab* has readily suspended its Islamist purism by accepting shipments of guns, bombs and other materiel from a secular Afweke regime that reportedly battles Islamist cadres within its own borders. It seems that even pious Islamist terrorists will look the other way when there are practical reasons to do so.

On December 9, 2009, the UN Security Council imposed the latest in a series of sanctions on Eritrea for its continuing provision of war materiel to insurgents in Somalia (as well as for ongoing aggression against Djibouti).³⁶ In a predictable expression of manufactured paranoia, its Eritrea's UN Ambassador denounced the sanctions as based on "fabricated lies mainly concocted by the Ethiopian regime and the U.S. administration."³⁷

Is there a Military Solution?

There is a strong international consensus that the Eritrean regime has become a menace to its own people and a threat to the Horn of Africa and beyond. But few easy solutions present themselves. The failure of UNMEE to de-escalate tensions, the inability of UN sanctions and monitoring to stifle the flow of weapons through Eritrea into Somalia, the AU's faltering efforts in Somalia, and UN and U.S. failures in that country in the early 1990s converge to illustrate a pattern of international paralysis in the region. Continued inaction will serve only to encourage the PFDJ regime and its jihadist ally in Somalia.

Peacekeeping?

Peacekeeping operations cannot make the PFDJ regime behave. "Peacekeeping" consists of military operations undertaken *with the consent of all major parties* to a dispute, designed to monitor and facilitate the implementation of an agreement and support diplomatic efforts to build long-term stability.³⁸ The intractable Eritrean regime is not about to consent to monitoring by foreign forces (or to anything else not devised by the PFDJ itself). Moreover, any peacekeeping effort aimed at the Eritrean question – by the AU, UN, United States Africa Command (AFRICOM) or other force or coalition – will by definition lack the authority to force Eritrean compliance with the Somalia weapons embargo or forebear from aggression on the Ethiopian and Djibouti borders. In fact, a toothless peacekeeping force will make matters worse. The very presence of foreign troops arrayed around Eritrea – even if there for "peacekeeping" – will fuel the regime's propaganda machine, rationalizing the continuation of its internal repression and regional destabilization.

At the tactical level, peacekeeping forces operate under restrictive rules of engagement (ROE), all too often making them ripe targets for asymmetric attacks that they cannot preempt and witnesses to atrocities that they cannot stop. In 1995, well-trained but ROE-constrained

³⁶ United Nations Security Council Resolution 1907 (2009). Also at <http://www.un.org/sc/committees/751/mongroup.shtml>.

³⁷ Atitya Chhor and Richard Roth, "U.N. Security Council Hits Eritrea with Sanctions," *CNN*, December 23, 2009. Also at <http://www.cnn.com/2009/WORLD/africa/12/23/un.eritrea.sanctions/index.html>.

³⁸ Department of Defense Joint Publication (JP) 3-07.3, *Joint Tactics, Techniques and Procedures for Peace Operations* (1999).

Dutch peacekeepers retreated when they took fire from Serbian troops, and then looked on from the sidelines as Serbians massacred 8,000 Bosnian men and boys.

Peacekeeping efforts in Africa have fared little better, as currently evidenced by the deteriorating security conditions in Somalia and Sudan. Canadian Lieutenant General Romeo Dallaire's work *Shake Hands with the Devil* provides a gripping, at times infuriating, account of the failure of peacekeeping in Rwanda. Brave UN peacekeepers under Dallaire's command found themselves hobbled by a restrictive mission statement and a risk-averse and indecisive UN bureaucracy. The peacekeepers soon took heavy casualties. (In one instance, ten Belgian paratroopers were massacred.) Despite the peacekeepers' sacrifice, security conditions deteriorated. Contributing nations scrambled to withdraw their contingents, and the mission finally collapsed. In its wake, Hutus and Tutsis murdered each other on an unprecedented scale. In 100 days, nearly 1,000,000 people were hacked to death by machete.^{39 40}

Peacekeeping has inherent limitations, and suffers from a particularly weak track record in Africa. It would constitute little more than folly to consider more peacekeeping as a means of cooling tensions on the Ethiopian-Eritrean frontier or stopping the flow of weapons into Somalia. The jihadist cancer in the region is growing exponentially. The time for blue-helmeted "monitoring" is over.

Operation Eritrean Freedom?

Eritrean support to *Al Shabaab*, combined with *Al Shabaab's* evolution into one of Al Qaeda's operational formations, might be read to justify invoking the authority granted by Congress following the 9-11 attacks to initiate U.S. combat operations against the PRDJ regime in order to prevent it from continued support to *Al Shabaab*.⁴¹

The nature of such operations would be offensive, at least early on and at the tactical level, due to the need to seize the initiative by disrupting Eritrean weapons trafficking activities and border attacks.⁴² One possible purpose of offensive operations could be to complement Eritrea's economic and diplomatic isolation, already achieved by sanctions, by physically quarantining Eritrean transportation facilities to prevent support from flowing to *Al Shabaab*. To the extent that the desired end state would be the *permanent* disruption of Eritrean weapons trafficking into Somalia, however, an effective blockade of the country would require an open-ended commitment of forces. The country's complex geography makes effective physical isolation a daunting operational task.

Offensive operations might aim to destroy the regime's centers of gravity – leadership figures, party buildings, military and security forces and installations, state-controlled media facilities – in order to force the PFDJ to stop funneling support to *Al Shabaab*. Finally, offensive operations might seek to remove the regime altogether, as in the instances of Operation Enduring

³⁹ Romeo A. Dallaire, *Shake Hands with the Devil: The Failure of Humanity in Rwanda* (New York: Avalon, 2003).

⁴⁰ For a brief account (by this paper's author) of German army operations in Afghanistan in 2008 illustrating the folly of dumping peacekeepers in the middle of a war zone, see Vincent G. Heintz, "Clausewitz, Anyone?" *National Review Online*, September 24, 2009, at <http://corner.nationalreview.com/post/?q=MmE4MGM5ZThkY2U2MWUzZmE1N2ExZDcxMWZhOWZmZjY=>.

⁴¹ Joint Resolution of Congress of September 14, 2001: "[The] President is authorized to use all necessary and appropriate force against those nations, organizations, or persons he determines planned, authorized, committed, or aided the terrorist attacks that occurred on September 11, 2001, or harbored such organizations or persons, *in order to prevent any future acts of international terrorism against the United States* by such nations, organizations or persons." [Emphasis added.] Also at <http://thomas.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/D?c107:1:./temp/~c107vLeECO::>

⁴² U.S. Army Field Manual (FM) 3-0, *Operations* (2008), pp. 3-7 to 3-10.

Freedom and Operation Iraqi Freedom. Whatever the purpose of offensive operations, the U.S. doctrine of Full Spectrum Operations (FSO) would require a robust, complex, protracted stability component with termination criteria that might not be satisfied for many years.⁴³

The risks of approaching the Eritrean question under the banner of the “Global War on Terror” (GWOT)⁴⁴ outweigh the possible benefits. To be sure, an attack spearheaded by U.S. forces and supported by some form of follow-up “Phase IV” stability effort would achieve decisive results in the short term. It is far from clear, however, whether such an attack would advance long-term regional stability. An offensive operation with any objective short of actually destroying the regime would feed the PFDJ propaganda machine and provide further incentive for it to align itself with anti-U.S. and anti-Ethiopian forces. A Bill Clinton-style, over-the-horizon missile strike (such as the 1998 cruise missile attack on the Al-Shifa milk factory in Sudan) would not destroy any meaningful targets, but would create a genuine risk of civilian casualties. The enduring result of such a “surgical” approach would be headlines accusing the US of inflicting such casualties, whether they happened or not.

Similarly, treating Eritrea as part of a pro-Islamist block would fundamentally misapprehend the country’s political culture and traditions. This approach would hand the region’s jihadists an easy propaganda win by providing images suggesting that the United States is out to attack Muslims in general. The PFDJ – ruthless, skilled in guerilla operations, and likely reinforced by *Al Shabaab* fighters with the same attributes – no doubt would oppose coalition forces with asymmetric tactics, producing civilian casualties within Eritrea’s Sunni population, further energizing PFDJ propaganda and jihadist recruiting efforts.

Finally, attacking and destroying the Afweke regime would invite other destabilizing regional actors to fill the vacuum. The presence of the Eritrean Islamic Salvation Movement (EISM) within Eritrea provides a ready-made cadre to radicalize elements within the indigenous Sunni population and wage a jihadist campaign.⁴⁵ Jihadist groups in nearby Sudan, Yemen and Somalia would eagerly support such an enterprise. A plurality of the Eritrean population might even be tempted with the notion of an Islamist regime that promises “order” as an alternative to the secular domestic actors and legalistic international organizations that for decades have delivered little but war, misery and oppression. After all, it was a popular thirst for security that led to the ascendancy of the Taliban in traditionally-moderate Afghanistan.

In short, a GWOT operation led by the U.S. might eliminate the PFDJ but might well ignite a second jihadist insurgency on the Horn of Africa.

Peace Enforcement?

Dr. David Kilcullen has proposed a strategic framework – disaggregation – that seeks to weaken and defeat the global jihadist movement by destroying its capacity to link local and regional disputes into its global agenda:

⁴³ Id., Chapter 3.

⁴⁴ Rightly or not, the term “Global War on Terror” has fallen into disuse under the current presidential administration. Even so, the term itself and particularly its negative connotations remain pertinent, as they would likely be invoked in our jihadist adversaries’ information operations if U.S. forces attacked the PFDJ regime under the 9-11 Congressional authorization to use military force.

⁴⁵ Id. “Eritrean Islamic Salvation Movement,” *Jane’s World Insurgency and Terrorism*, July 31, 2008.

Disaggregation focuses on interdicting [jihadist] links between theatres, denying the ability of regional and global actors to link and exploit local actors, disrupting flows between and within jihad theaters, denying sanctuary areas, isolating Islamists from local populations and disrupting inputs from the sources of Islamism in the greater Middle East.⁴⁶

A robust peace enforcement operation⁴⁷ executed under a strategy of disaggregation might achieve the near-term objective of stifling Eritrean support for *Al Shabaab* and set conditions for long-term stability and the integration of Eritrea back into the community of nations.

At first glance, doves might take relief at the presence of “peace” in the doctrinal term “peace enforcement.” They should not get their hopes up. By definition, peace enforcement operations are Full Spectrum Operations with an offensive component that involves *the actual application of military force* or the credible imminent threat of military force. Such operations seize the initiative and deliver decisive effects under permissive ROE that allow military forces to protect themselves, defeat adversaries and win. The decisive action and tangible effects that peace enforcement operations deliver enhance the credibility of the international coalition that executes them. Peace enforcement operations have both the purpose and the capacity to force an otherwise recalcitrant adversary to come to terms.

In the context of Eritrean support for *Al Shabaab*, any peace enforcement operation would center on compliance with the Eritrean-Ethiopian ceasefire and the embargo on shipments of war materiel into Somalia. Thus, such an operation would prepossess the “Legitimacy” called for by the U.S. Department of Defense’s Principles of Joint Operations.⁴⁸ By limiting its scope to suppressing the regime’s destabilizing regional conduct (border aggression and weapons trafficking), however, a peace enforcement operation against Eritrea might be less susceptible to manipulation by PFDJ and jihadist propagandists than a GWOT-style assault, at least in terms of effects in the global media. (Enemy propaganda efforts would still manipulate Eritrean and Islamist audiences through all phases of the operation.) Most importantly, a properly authorized, resourced and executed peace enforcement operation would isolate (disaggregate) the PFDJ regime from its Islamist ally in Somalia, an endstate consistent with Eritrea’s underlying, non-jihadist culture.

But there are limitations. Peace enforcement focused on the ceasefire and anti-trafficking sanctions would present similar operational challenges as those posed by a “quarantine” executed as an offensive operation. Moreover, the operational plan would have to address account the contingency that the PFDJ regime might collapse, requiring a deployment of ground forces into Eritrean territory to execute stability operations. A historical example of such an operation is found in the U.S. and NATO air war on the Slobodan Milosevic regime and the follow-on (and ongoing) stability operation in Kosovo. For these reasons, peace enforcement against the PFDJ would thus hinge on the faithful application another principle of Joint Operations, Perseverance,

⁴⁶ David Kilcullen, *Countering Global Insurgency*, November 2004 (as published online by *Small Wars Journal* at <http://smallwarsjournal.com/documents/kilcullen.pdf>).

⁴⁷ Peace enforcement involves the application of military force, or the threat of its use, normally pursuant to the international authorization, to compel compliance with resolutions of sanctions designed to maintain or restore peace and order. JP 3-0, *Doctrine for Joint Operations* (1995).

⁴⁸ Id.

which calls for the political commitment necessary to execute protracted stability operations in order to attain the national strategic end state, in this instance, a stable Horn of Africa.⁴⁹

The Way Ahead

Only by decisive action can the international community begin the process of resuscitating the moribund diplomatic measures to foster long term peace. By contrast, steps that fall short of compelling Eritrean compliance with the ceasefire and the Somalia arms embargo will perpetuate the image of those diplomatic measures as a farce. This can only serve to widen the Eritrean-Ethiopian abyss and further galvanize the incongruous alliance between the Afweke regime and *Al Shabaab*.

If there is a potential military solution, its ultimate decisive point will not be stopping the flow of weapons to Somalia, though clearly this will be a key operational and tactical task in the short term. Long-term stability will be achieved only by the de-escalation of Eritrean-Ethiopian tensions and normalization of relations. The image of Ethiopia as Eritrea's existential enemy is the PFDJ's center of gravity, the source of its power, and the font of the country's poisonous political culture. If the international community can functionally contain and suppress that toxin, then the Eritrean motive to partner with *Al Shabaab* will wither and pass.

In particular, securing the Eritrean-Ethiopian border is a critical step in a long-term strategy of full de-escalation. The border must become a very dangerous place, a lethal environment, for malignant actors. Given the history of the conflict, this will likely require an internationally-recognized protracted peace enforcement mission that is authorized and obligated to use force to deter, preempt and defeat cross-border raids, and that is prepared to stabilize Eritrea's interior if the regime falls. At the tactical level, that means offensive operations within the rubric of Full Spectrum Operations. Field commanders must be free to deter, disrupt, and when needed, destroy those engaged in acts of aggression on the border. This kind of flexibility will compensate for the economy of force that will have to be practiced due to the complexity of the terrain and the inevitable limits on the numbers and types of forces available.

At the strategic level, U.S. policy makers and commanders must approach the Eritrean question with their eyes wide open to a key fact: the PFDJ's alliance with *Al Shabaab* is driven by a *realpolitik* of opportunity and convenience. The solution must be just as pragmatic. It must drive a wedge between the PFDJ regime and Somalia's jihadists. If our operational planning misapprehends Eritrea's Sunni minority as some cultural predisposition accounting for the PFDJ-*Al Shabaab* alliance, then any associated intervention will be self-defeating; the misapprehension, potentially self-fulfilling. Rather than pulling these noxious actors apart, a simplistic estimate of the situation will further conjoin them and potentially ignite an Islamist insurgency within Eritrea itself.

All of this is easier said than done. But as the people of Kampala learned in July 2010, more anemic peacekeeping missions and unenforced sanctions on the Horn of Africa will only embolden region's destabilizing forces to the detriment of long-term regional and global security.

⁴⁹ Id.

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