

**ON THE HORN OF A DILEMMA:
Challenges to Euro-American Policy toward Africa,
With a focus on the Horn of Africa**

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Distinguished Guest Speakers, Fellow Academics and Practitioners, Human Rights and Democracy Activists, Ladies and Gentlemen.

I would like, first of all, to congratulate Dr. Mirjam Reisen and her colleagues at the EEPA for convening and organizing this important conference; and I thank them for inviting me.

I begin my remarks by asking some questions. I do so not only due to my training in the Socratic Method, but also because there are times when self-interrogation, both individual and collective, is a preferred method of arriving at the truth. I believe this is one of those times when we are in the midst of a transition full of uncertainties. It is more prudent to reflect and ask than to be assertive.

The first question I ask is: in terms of the themes of the conference, what are the challenges facing “donor” governments of the European Union and America and their development partners in the Horn of Africa? I also think that an item implied, though not mentioned, as part of the conference themes is conflict resolution. The order of priorities could arguably be put in the reverse—first conflict resolution, then democracy and human rights. Moreover, a third and implied theme is sustainable development since

development has been a constant topic of discourse among donors and recipients, for a number of years. I will address this subject later in the paper.

More Questions

The program has assigned me the role of helping to set the scene of the conference. I am taking the liberty of interpreting this role and especially the word setting to include a larger framework of analysis beyond the Horn of Africa sub-region, beyond the conflict pitting Ethiopia and Eritrea. You might call my taking liberty a kind of poetic license, but I promise not to run away with it. Again, even in connection with the larger setting, I am going to raise more questions than provide answers, as will be clear later. Some of my remarks, particularly as regards the issue of development, will be provocative in order to generate debate among the participants of the conference. A relevant question is whether state actors in the countries of the European Union share the optimism of the organizers of the conference.

Let me then begin my substantive remarks with a focus on the problem of conflict.

Conflict Resolution in a Region with Peace Deficit

Concerning conflict and conflict resolution, Africa in general and the Horn of Africa in particular, have been plagued with conflicts of one kind or another and there seems to be no room for optimism, for the foreseeable future. But let us be optimistic and imagine a framework of cooperation for mutual benefit in the long run. Obviously, our discussion, to be of value, has to begin with a realistic appraisal of the situation in the countries of the region. We need to begin by taking the world as it is before we can attempt to make it a better place.

Peace is a precious commodity; so much so that it is the form of greeting in several languages, including those of our region. Because it is such a precious commodity and essential for good life, peace is conceived as the norm and its absence as an aberration. But peace should not be conceived as simply the absence of war. It must include the absence of the threat of war. Recently the United Nations came up with the concept of human security which seeks to focus attention and redirect resources towards the

development agenda. Human security is defined in terms of a multi-faceted development agenda, embracing several dimensions of security: economic, political, food, health, environmental, personal and community. In short this represents a new conceptualization of security of people, making them secure from violent and non-violent threats to their lives and well-being.

The new conceptualization of security is the ideal. The reality in the Horn of Africa has been one of human insecurity involving conflict and consequent suffering. In order to have a firm grip of the reality in the Horn of Africa, it is useful to begin with a brief review of the recent history of the region. The Horn of Africa has often been cited as a metaphor for disaster. Conflict, which has been the dominant reality for over four decades, has consumed lives and resources and made a mockery of all talk of development. It is a region where one of the longest wars in modern times was fought, lasting thirty years. All the five countries of the Horn of Africa have been the scenes of conflict, some of them deadly and of long duration.

To start with Ethiopia, which is the core of the region both geographically and in terms of the conflicts in recent years, the government of the Ethiopian Peoples' Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF), which replaced the Dergue, made attempts at democratic restructuring of the Ethiopian state with a modicum of success but with many questions left unanswered regarding the promised democracy. In this respect, it is hoped that the debacle of the 2005 election will be rectified by the 2010 election. If this coming election does not heal the wound of the 2005 debacle and set the tone for multi-party democracy, we can expect more conflict.

In Eritrea, the government of the Popular Front for Democracy and Justice (PFDJ), the successor of the old EPLF, promised democratic transition from a government of military provenance to constitutional democracy. The PFDJ government has broken that promise. This is putting it mildly and will no doubt go down as one of the understatements of the year in view of the unelected leader's statement that there will be election in forty years! Meanwhile the devastating war with Ethiopia of 1998-2000 has introduced a new

dimension to the political situation in Eritrea, deepening the crisis with a proxy war being waged in Somalia involving a controversial Eritrean support of Islamic extremists.

In Somalia, early in 1990, President Siyad Barr's regime was overthrown and the successor government found itself unable to command a following among most Somali clans. Consequently, Somalia, one of Africa's few homogeneous nations, became a living example of the Hobbesian condition of war of each against all, with no central government to ensure law and order. Civil society organizations have been creative—as only the Somali can be—in working out strategies of survival and even made several attempts at national reconciliation. But without success, so that today, almost twenty years after the overthrow of the Siyad regime, Somalia is still a nation in search of a state. The Weberian definition of a state is an institution that exerts a monopoly over the legitimate use of violence in a given territory. By this definition, there has been no Somali state since 1991.

In Sudan, a devastating civil war, one of the most murderous in the world, came to an end with a Comprehensive Peace Agreement that gave a federal autonomy to the South with a right to decide its future in a referendum. Meanwhile a rebellion in Darfur has resulted in mass exodus to escape atrocities—one of the worst human suffering in modern African history.

Lastly, Djibouti, which was once an island in a sea of regional conflicts, was sorely tested in the late nineteen nineties in terms of its stability as ethnic-based disputes concerning power sharing between the Somali Issa and the Afar, led to rebellion. Djibouti's relative stability in the past and the resolution of its conflict may be attributed to the wise policies of its leadership, which had maintained a fair balance in governance between the two ethnic groups. Recently, Djibouti has accepted a significant American military presence in the wake of the rise of Alqa'ida and Islamic extremism affecting the security of the region.

Spin-offs from these sad developments include human displacement on a large-scale, starvation, suffering and an inevitable mass exodus with an army of refugees dependent on emergency assistance to meet their basic needs. If there is any rationale for a radical reappraisal of the sad reality of the Horn region, it is this condition of human tragedy. There is a need now as ever before, to articulate a bold vision for reconstruction; a vision that encapsulates the fundamental requirements for overcoming the destructive legacy of conflict and attaining enduring peace, stability and economic prosperity. We are not talking about a poor region as some might suppose. On the contrary, despite the incidence of periodic droughts, it is a region with immense potential. Lying astride the northwest Indian Ocean and the Red Sea, across the oil-rich Arabian-peninsula and the Gulf region, it has been a crossroads of history between Africa and Asia. The combined effect of history and geography is reflected in the region's demographic makeup, culture, national identities and religion. Its close proximity to the cradles of Christianity and Islam facilitated the early spread of these two religions, which acted as centralizing and harmonizing agents, albeit punctuated with occasional conflicts. They have both left an indelible mark on the life of the peoples of the region.

As things stand now, faulty development policies have been exacerbated by disastrous politics. The latter may be summed up as the politics of domination and exclusion, which have engendered conflicts, drawing foreign intervention and a massive flow of costly arms into the region. The militarization of the region and the consequent brutalization of society have had a destabilizing effect. Political instability has characterized the region against a grim background of economic stagnation, social unrest, and ethnic cleavage. A debt-ridden region is also burdened with the cost incurred in the purchase of arms used for unnecessary wars and/or in the build-up of costly military and security forces.

Why this predicament?

Several studies have been made as to the causes of these crises. A major part of the cause may be traced to the colonial legacy of irrational division of peoples and territories and the consequent tension built along the borders. But this can only be part of the cause. To take the most recent example of conflict arising out of a border dispute, namely the 1998-

2000 war between Eritrea and Ethiopia, can it be seriously argued that the border dispute was the only, or even the principal, cause of that disastrous war? Consider the facts. The governments of the two countries are lead by men who were close friends and allies during the war against the Dergue. Although some disputes had arisen on the issue of currency, immediately before the outbreak of the war, the two governments were considered among the closest allies, and currency issues do not send people to such a major war in which not less than ninety thousand people were killed. Leaving the real causes for historians to sort out as well as apportion blame, all we can say now with confidence is that a small strip of land called Badme and the disputed border cannot be the real cause of the war. We can safely generalize by simply stating that the causes have to be searched in the political economy and social structure of our post-colonial states, as well as in the background and psychology of the respective leadership of the two countries.

The Challenge of Democracy

The absence of democracy engenders the condition for what I have called the politics of domination and exclusion. Logically, therefore, the way out of such condition lies in the establishment of a government system based on democracy, that is to say, on the consent of the people—a system under which the government is chosen by and accountable to the people. In other words, there is no getting away from the need to install a democratic system of government. To this must be added the imperative of the companion and inseparable principle of the rule of law. Let me briefly state my understanding of the meaning of these two fundamental principles, starting with the rule of law.

The rule of law is opposed to the rule of force. As a principle of governance, it denotes the supremacy of law over arbitrary power. And a legal (constitutional) principle that links the rule of law to democracy is the principle that everyone is equal in the eyes of the law. A related principle is that no one is above the law. Now we all know that there are many parts of the world today in which the equality principle does not apply. We have a long way to go before this critical principle of democracy and constitutional law can be universally applicable. But overall, humanity has accepted it as a fundamental principle.

It has been declared in numerous international conventions starting with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 1948 as well as other, more recent, international legal instruments. In practical terms, such a principle requires institutions and mechanisms that guarantee its application. Hence the doctrine of the separation of powers. Hence also the independence of the judiciary for only a judiciary independent from the influence of the executive and legislative branches can guarantee the application of the rule of law.

As for democracy, there are two critical elements. One is popular participation in the election of candidates to the National Assembly, to the position of the Chief Executive and to other elective offices. There is a general consensus among scholars that the expansion of electoral democracy in most countries around the world is the single most important political development of the late twentieth century. Electoral democracy is defined as a political system whose most powerful decision makers are selected through relatively fair, honest, periodic elections, in which candidates can compete and in which virtually all the adult population is eligible to vote.

The other element is the requirement of freedom of speech and press. The existence of different political parties in which the people can have choices from among different competing ideas and programs is an essential precondition for a healthy democratic politics. To those ends, freedom of the press is critical for meaningful pluralist politics. Without such freedom, the elements of participation and competition will be negated in that people may not be able to express their preference in a meaningful way.

The need for democracy should not be subject to debate; for we live in the democratic epoch. Only a few extremists now dispute the fact that democracy is the most desirable political system. It has taken over two hundred years of philosophical discourse and political struggle for the democratic idea to gain universal acceptance. Even autocrats pay lip service to democracy, today. But it is still facing challenges, even in the mature democracies where low turnouts in elections have become a problem. When it comes to its application in “developing” countries, there are many obstacles to overcome. Indeed this is one of the challenges facing “donor” countries as to the terms and conditions they

impose in their policies of assistance to the “developing” countries. It is conceivable that the Chinese challenge may add complications to this problem. More on this below.

The Response to the Challenge

Clearly, the challenge of peace and democracy in the context of the preceding discussion is immense. Nor is it open to question as to the need for the countries of the Horn of Africa to get out of the present predicament. The question is how. What do the governments and peoples of the region have to do in order to get out of perennial cycles of conflict and be on the path to sustainable development, democracy and good governance? And what role can the international community play to that end? It is my sincere hope that this conference among other initiatives will help pave the way toward answering this question and ensuring lasting peace and justice in the region.

To start with the governments and peoples of the region, we need to ask whether there is the will for change as well as the wisdom and clarity of vision to achieve the common objective. The objective is a durable peace based on justice and tolerance of diversity in each of their respective states and among them. A durable peace is a precondition for meaningful cooperation and sustainable development. And, in my view and that of many observers, democracy is an essential condition for peace and hence for sustainable development and cooperation. This seems to me the simple truth of the matter, but the task is daunting and there will have to be a determination to be equal to the task. At the moment, the evident lack of wisdom and clear vision is such that one can easily be tempted to give up hope. For the most part, the region’s leaders are part of the problem, given their inordinate ambitions, destructive rivalry and disastrous policies and politics. Much needs to be done before we can say with certainty that the imperatives of peace and democracy can be achieved soon.

But hope springs eternal, as the saying goes. With regard to peace, one can hope for a modest beginning in cooperative efforts, which had begun with so much promise between Eritrea and Ethiopia, for example. Even in the aftermath of the murderous war, it is possible that cooperation in critical areas for mutual benefit can be resumed. If the

people are to be taken as the objective of all development, we need cooperation instead of wasteful competition. To that end, the historical and cultural bonds tying the peoples of the various countries, reinforced by shared experiences in the material condition of life, can provide the initial impetus.

However, the history of conflict of the last few years does not warrant optimism in the short run. Accordingly, the involvement of international actors is probably going to be necessary if only in a catalytic role. Certainly, a great deal of development assistance as well as debt forgiveness is needed. The question becomes what kind of role and under what terms and conditions. Leaving to experts on foreign policy to deal with specific roles in this respect, is it possible to generalize on what needs to be done by reference to the policy and experience of other countries? What kinds of terms and conditions can the international community insist upon in their assistance policy to help the countries of the Horn of Africa set on the path of peace, cooperation and sustainable development? As already noted, peace and stability is a precondition. Is democracy also a required precondition?

My own answer is a categorical yes.

Sustainable Development and the Emerging Contest

A controversial question concerning sustainable development is: what kind of partnership is envisaged under the conference theme? Is it in the neo-liberal—World Bank/IMF—mold? One of the requirements of that model has been a diminished role of the state in a strategy of privatization? One wonders if the role of the state has perhaps been reinstated in the context of recent developments. I ask this last question in view of the emerging Chinese challenge in Africa's economic life, which may be changing the equation in North-South relationship. A cursory view of the Chinese activities of the past few years in terms of the volume of investment and import-export trade in several African countries gives ground for hope—hope that is mixed with some questions as to the implications.

The recent developments concerning the Chinese advent to Africa—the rapidity of its occurrence in many countries and the intensity of the involvement—raise questions on its

future implications for Africa. Its historic significance in international relations cannot be overemphasized. I hope it will not be considered immodest of me if I suggest a term that appropriately characterizes the Chinese challenge of the preexisting dominant, Western-based strategic and socio-economic paradigm. I am referring to a new, robust competitor to what has been known as the **Washington Consensus**. Does the emergence of China as an economic giant imply a paradigm shift, or at least a contest between China and the United States and its European allies? To put it bluntly, are we witnessing a contest between:

the Washington Consensus and the Beijing Colossus?

And what are the implications of this contest for African peoples in terms of economic development on the one hand, and democracy and human rights on the other? In my view, and in the view of many observers, the World Bank-IMF model (the Washington Consensus) has been tried and found wanting in many respects. It has been tried for over three decades and failed to deliver the goods for many countries of Africa. In contrast, the emerging Chinese challenge may conceivably accelerate the economic development of Africa particularly in building much-needed physical infrastructures. However, it is far from clear whether this augurs well in terms of democracy and human rights.

The question for the Chinese is: are they willing to calibrate their economic strategy (of trade and investment) to factor in the requirements of democracy and human rights? Judging by their record so far, and in view of the dominant role of the communist party in shaping all policy, the answer is not encouraging. Will their domestic politics of one party autocracy be reflected in their dealings in Africa? Will this reinforce autocracy and militate against democracy in Africa?

The related questions with respect to the European Union and the United States—the patrons of the Washington Consensus—are twofold. First, can they reconcile their democratic and human rights ideals with their geopolitical imperative? Secondly, can they match their democratic and human rights rhetoric with bread and butter issues? In other words, will they meet the challenge posed by the Chinese and devise policies and programs that accommodate Africa's demand for economic development?

The governments of Europe and the United States have for the most part insisted on democracy and good governance as condition of aid. The degree of success of these conditions in terms of transition to democracy and good governance is open to question, as is the ability of the aid donors to control implementation. The policies of the United States as exemplified by the programs of the United States Agency for International Development (US-AID) has been so much written about that I don't think there is anything I can usefully add. Instead, I will cite one prominent example of a European government that has had a long history of sensible aid policy in Africa—the government of Sweden.

The policy of Sweden in its partnership relationship with African governments can best be described as calibrated. It is based on a pragmatic definition of the concept of partnership. According to the Swedish definition of partnership for development assistance purposes, aid recipients are divided into two main categories, which are further sub-divided. The Swedes divide the aid recipient partners into democratic and authoritarian states. The authoritarian regimes are sub-divided into authoritarian and semi-authoritarian, and the democratic regimes are subdivided into stable democracies and weak democracies. A careful reading of the documents relative to this subject reveals a preoccupation of Swedish policy makers with the inherent contradiction involved in the notion of partnership on the one hand, and an insistence on universal values like democracy and the rule of law. Partnership implies equality and mutual respect between the two sides, which necessarily involves a willingness to take African views and goals into consideration. As the main document on this policy issue puts it, the policy for Africa should “support processes of change under African control that involve sustainable improvements in welfare for the majority of citizens and consolidation of their democratic influence.”

This preoccupation with equality and mutual respect is based on the fourth Lome Agreement. At the same time the Swedish aid donors understand that an insistence on universal values like democracy, good governance and the rule of law may not sit well

with some African governments. However, equality cuts both ways. African governments cannot avoid the application of universal principles like democracy and the rule of law, while insisting on equality when it suits them. Hence the calibrated and pragmatic approach to the subject represented by the categories mentioned before.

Although many African governments, including those in the Horn region are not (or are not fully) democratic, Swedish policy makers have decided on a new partnership policy under which the contradictions noted above must be resolved. A more refined definition of partnership as “an attitude, in form of co-operation that is based on shared basis of values and mutual trust” is designed to help in the resolution of the contradiction. If shared values have been jointly identified and agreed upon, the way should be cleared for joint objectives. Once agreements are signed, any deviation from them by the recipient party would be the subject of dialogue to resolve any difference in interpretation or application. African governments are expected to accept certain values as paramount. These would be the bases for resolving the contradiction. Nonetheless, the aid must be suited in ways that are proportionate to the nature of the state, depending on whether it is democratic or authoritarian. Thus, the less democratic a state, the more efforts should be directed at the individual and civil society levels. Under this partnership model, support for the ruling elite, commercial forces, and state institutions in authoritarian regimes, is excluded.

According to Swedish policy makers, the following values are considered preeminent and the objects of aspiration by all concerned.

1. Equality between all members of a society
2. Freedom of expression and organization.
3. Pluralism in society
4. A responsible and non-corrupt regime.
5. A system of division of power in public administration.
6. Democratic governance.

How does this work in practice? Have these values been embraced by recipient governments? Swedish policy makers expect these values to be linked to development aid agreements, as part of the terms and conditions. If no such values can be identified,

the work should probably be restricted and assigned to a level other than that of government-to-government co-operation.

Even so, in the protracted process of implementing a partnership agreement, there is bound to be friction. The Swedish model of dividing the recipients into autocratic, semi-autocratic, mature democracy and weak democracy will be helpful in dealing with friction. The donor will not say, “if you do not agree, I’ll pack up and go, and a pox to your house.” Instead, according to their new aid policy, Swedish donor will insist that the aid will be given to members of civil society, and not the government. Will the recipient government allow this? It depends on its need. Can Chinese economic intervention as mentioned above embolden autocratic governments and thus vitiate the values of the Swedish model? Time will tell.

Conclusion

I would like to conclude by making a few recommendations, which in part go beyond the Horn of Africa. As the summary review that I made in this paper of the nature and behavior of the states of the Horn of Africa region indicates, the states have not been part of the solution. Clearly, nation-building, the guiding ideology of the post-colonial state cannot be achieved and progress made, in the absence of a vision towards the ends of democracy and sustainable development. It can only be achieved with the creation of a political framework and social environment that ensures the participation of all citizens. Political inclusion and equitable distribution of resources are the key ingredients of a successful national policy. In other words, the problem of nation-building is linked to the problems of democracy and sustainable development. And more specifically, I offer the following thoughts.

First, speaking generally, African governments cannot reverse the major effects of the colonial legacy. Nonetheless, with respect to the market economy, I believe that the

forces driving globalization must be tamed if humanity and the precious gift we call earth is to continue in peace and decent life for all peoples.

Second, and related to the first, we have been condemned by history to live in an inter-dependent world. We therefore need, more than ever, an international body to help regulate the effects of this historical reality. We must preserve, protect and promote the United Nations. In terms of security, more reliance should be placed and more resources made available to the Security Council of the United Nations. There is no better alternative available to humanity at this time.

Third, we need a democratic challenge, demanding that the governments of the Horn of Africa be committed to and institute a democratic form of government in which the people will be truly masters of their destiny. To those ends, principles and mechanisms must be devised to hold governments accountable for their policies and actions. International and regional bodies must help in providing assistance so that such principles and mechanisms can apply in practice. We need to establish and maintain people-to-people relations to help make leaders accountable, for the interests of the people are one across national boundaries. This ideal is the building block for any future regional cooperation and eventual integration.

Fourth, is the absolute need for the rule of law. To that end, judges, lawyers, journalists and other professional groups should meet across national boundaries and establish associations of mutual support and assistance. The institutions of higher learning related to these groups such as law schools must also be encouraged to create exchange programs for students and faculty to study and meet for common goals.

Fifth, arms sale to Africa must be prohibited by the G20 governments and all arms manufacturers.

