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Ethiopia's Convergence of Crises

TERRENCE LYONS

Ethiopia in 2008 faces challenges on multiple fronts. Prime Minister Meles Zenawi, who has been in power since 1991, in the past has demonstrated both resilience and the capacity to outmaneuver his rivals. This year, however, he faces a convergence of internal and regional crises that could unbalance Ethiopia and exacerbate conflicts across the region. Each of these challenges feeds and is in turn fed by the others. An explosive escalation is possible.

The ruling Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF), though it weathered unrest and instability that followed the country's disputed national elections of 2005, remains without the support of key constituencies in the cities and in the large central Oromo region. Meanwhile, the country shares an extraordinarily tense and militarized border with Eritrea, and the debilitated Algiers peace process that brought their 1998–2000 war to an end may now be beyond resuscitation. Ethiopia's December 2006 intervention into Somalia in support of that country's Transitional Federal Government has left the Ethiopian military bogged down in Mogadishu, facing a violent reaction but unable to withdraw. Another, interlinked conflict—within the Ogaden region of eastern Ethiopia, which is inhabited by ethnic Somalis—has developed into a humanitarian disaster.

To avoid a domestic political crisis, the ruling party must reinstate the relative political freedoms in place at the time of the competitive 2005 elections. Ethiopia can ill afford noncompetitive local elections in 2008 or boycotted national elections in 2010. The crisis along the border with Eritrea is particularly tense now; resolution of that conflict must begin with Ethiopia's accepting and implementing the 2002 border demarcation decision reached by the Eritrea-Ethiopia Boundary Commission that was established under the Algiers peace process. In Somalia, though Ethiopia has legitimate security interests at stake, stability cannot be achieved until Ethiopian troops withdraw. And the marginalization of Ogaden will only be resolved through political processes that incorporate local issues and leaders. If these interlinked crises continue to escalate, and amplify one another, there is the potential for a highly violent and chaotic transition in Ethiopia.

The United States has a particularly important role to play with regard to these crises. Washington and Addis Ababa have formed a close strategic partnership to counter terrorism in the Horn of Africa. This relationship, however, associates the United States with the regime and its policies in ways that are not helpful. Washington's calls for democratization and human rights in Ethiopia are not persuasive when high-level US officials also praise the regime's cooperation in the global war on terrorism. Ethiopia's continued obstruction of demarcating the border with Eritrea contributes to Eritreans' perception that Washington is hostile to them.

Moreover, while Addis Ababa and Washington share concerns regarding extremist Islamic groups in Somalia, their concerns are motivated differently. Ethiopia worries about the assistance that these groups provide to the regime's enemies in Eritrea and among Oromo and Somali insurgent groups. The United States is concerned about Somali links to Al Qaeda. The challenges that Ethiopia faces—challenges related to growing authoritarianism, escalating tension along the border with Eritrea, and protracted conflict in Somalia—are further complicated when Washington overlays on them its global war on terror.

FAILED ELECTIONS

In May 1991, the EPRDF defeated the brutal military dictator Mengistu Haile Mariam after a prolonged civil war and began a process of political

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transition. The EPRDF-dominated transitional government created new regional states, with every major ethnic group receiving its own state. (As a consequence, politics has tended to be dominated by ethnically based parties, including the EPRDF.) The transitional government then consolidated its authority by organizing and winning a series of elections. These elections, however, were uncontested because opposition parties boycotted the polls after facing harassment from the ruling authorities. The new regime also put in place disciplined, hierarchic party institutions that linked top political leaders in the capital with local officials at the level of the *kebelle* (neighborhood associations). Local civil servants were party members who used their control over land, fertilizer, and other critical resources to control the countryside.

The May 2005 elections, however, broke this pattern of carefully managed politics. These elections instead presented the Ethiopian people with a remarkable opportunity to express their political views by participating in a vote that for the first time in the country's history offered a meaningful choice. In contrast to earlier elections, opposition parties did not boycott but instead competed vigorously across the most populous regions. Live televised debates on matters of public policy, access for opposition parties to state-owned media, and huge, peaceful rallies in the final week of campaigning made it clear that these elections would represent a decisive moment in Ethiopia's political development. The voters seized this opportunity with a great sense of hope and turned out in overwhelming numbers to express their choices.

A very chaotic vote-counting process, however, generated controversy, violent protests, and mass arrests. According to official results, the EPRDF and allied parties won 367 parliamentary seats (67 percent), while the opposition took 172 seats (31 percent), with 109 going to the Coalition for Unity and Democracy (CUD). This outcome represented a stunning setback for the incumbent party in relation to previous elections. But important leaders of the opposition refused to accept the outcome, despite the fact that the opposition's seats in the parliament had increased from 12 to 172. They claimed to have irrefutable evidence that massive fraud had taken place.

The Ethiopian people have acquiesced to power that they cannot overcome, but such compliance might evaporate quickly.

When the new parliament met in October 2005, some opposition leaders took their seats, but others, particularly leading members of the CUD, boycotted the assembly. This decision to opt out rather than accept their positions as leaders of the opposition within existing institutions represented an enormous miscalculation and a tragic missed opportunity to consolidate and then expand on important gains. Violence erupted in the first week of November, and most top CUD officials were arrested. Prosecutors formally charged some 131 opposition politicians, journalists, and civil society leaders with crimes, including genocide and treason. The EPRDF, by bringing these charges against its leading critics, effectively criminalized dissent and sent an unmistakable message that effective opposition would not be tolerated. The 2005 political opening had closed.

In July 2007 the main CUD leaders were convicted of treason, a capital crime in Ethiopia, but then were pardoned after they signed documents admitting responsibility for the 2005 violence. The damage, however, had been done. The CUD was shattered. The opposition coalition was always a quickly assembled and loose amalgam of various parties united by opposition to the ruling party. By 2008 it was further divided: between those who took their seats in the parliament in 2005 and those who were arrested and then released in 2007, as well as among those with links to various bickering factions within the influential Ethiopian diaspora.

The members of the opposition who took their seats in 2005 have found it difficult to play meaningful roles. Government restrictions on the media have made it difficult for them to communicate with their supporters (creating a vigorous rumor mill and fostering a culture in which extreme views posted on internet sites serve as the main form of political speech). Most fundamentally, the opposition's supporters in the countryside have faced arrest and harassment, leaving the opposition unable to organize among its own constituencies. This seems to be particularly true of Oromo opposition parties such as the Oromo Federal Democratic Movement and the Oromo National Congress.

The 2005 political opening and subsequent crisis demonstrated the influence of the Ethiopian diaspora, particularly in North America, on

politics within the country. Key leaders of the diaspora, who had advocated boycotts of elections in the past, urged the opposition to compete in 2005. After the crisis over the vote tabulation and the violent demonstrations, however, many in the diaspora endorsed the strategy of boycotting the parliament. Some have articulated a categorical stance defining compromise with the EPRDF as betrayal, thereby reducing room for opposition leaders in Ethiopia to maneuver or to engage in peaceful political activities.

Local elections and by-elections for seats held by those who boycotted the parliament in 2005 are scheduled for April 2008, but it remains doubtful that the main opposition parties will participate. The opposition in parliament has made its participation in future elections conditional on a series of demands relating to access to mass media, reform of the National Election Board, and participation of domestic and international monitors. Most fundamentally, even those opposition parties that have participated in the parliament argue that local EPRDF officials must be forced to stop practicing violence and intimidation against the opposition.

Fragile regime

Civil society groups and the media also have faced harsh restrictions and harassment. Leading websites and blogs have been blocked. Daniel Bekele and Netsanet Demissie, leaders of two prominent nongovernmental organizations, were convicted in December 2007 in a trial that Amnesty International characterized as "no more than the criminalization of free speech" and as having "a chilling effect on civil society activism."

The opposition has been marginalized, both by decisions it has made and by ruling party repression. Yet the EPRDF still faces fundamental challenges regarding two large constituencies—urban residents and the Oromo people—that are essential for any Ethiopian regime that hopes to govern successfully. In the May 2005 elections, the opposition CUD managed a virtually complete sweep in Addis Ababa and the other main cities. And the EPRDF's Oromo wing, the Oromo People's Democratic Organization, has failed. After 17 years within the ruling coalition, it has not developed a significant base of support among the Oromo, who represent 40 percent of Ethiopia's population. The party remains in power in the region only through intimidation and ever more pervasive systems for monitoring the population. Many Oromo remain loyal to the insurgent Oromo Liberation Front (OLF), despite that organization's inability since 1992 to organize openly within the country.

Without a basis for support in the Oromo region or in the urban areas, the EPRDF's ability to govern is inherently precarious and depends on force, which alienates the population further. Force has reestablished order in the short run, but it is not sustainable in the long run. There have been early signs that dissent is growing in the military and among government officials. In August 2006, for example, Brigadier General Kemal Gelchu defected, along with some 100 troops, to join the OLF, claiming that the only language the EPRDF understands "is force, and we're going to challenge them by force."

On one level, Ethiopia is in a process of democratization that has transformed the country since 1991. Elections are held regularly, the parliament includes multiple political parties, the prime minister faces questions from lawmakers, and opposition leaders openly meet with foreign diplomats and the international media. On a more essential level, however, political space in Ethiopia is an illusion. A 2007 poll conducted by Gallup found that only 13 percent of Ethiopians have confidence in the honesty of their elections, 25 percent have confidence in the judiciary, and 28 percent have confidence in the national government. These numbers are approximately 30 percentage points lower than the average for sub-Saharan Africa and suggest that the population has resigned itself to—but not endorsed—the regime's authority.

The 2005 elections demonstrated high levels of opposition to the EPRDF, which is in decline after 17 years in power, but they failed to initiate an orderly political transition based on peaceful multiparty competition. Unless reforms are introduced, it is likely that Ethiopia will face another round of noncompetitive elections in both the 2008 local elections and the 2010 national elections. The Ethiopian people have acquiesced to power that they cannot overcome, but such compliance might evaporate quickly if the regime stumbles or is perceived as weak. Without a strong popular base, furthermore, the regime is vulnerable to increased pressures from neighboring states.

On the borderline

Ethiopia's domestic political dilemmas are more dangerous, and potentially more explosive, because of escalating tensions along the Ethiopia-Eritrea border—and, increasingly, because of the violent conflict in Somalia. The OLF and the Ogaden National Liberation Front (ONLF) operate out of

Asmara (Eritrea's capital), and Addis Ababa characterizes its domestic rivals as agents of regional "terrorists," meaning that the Ethiopian regime's domestic and foreign threats are linked. In fact, if Ethiopia's regional conflicts with Eritrea and within Somalia were resolved, the country's issues of domestic political reform could be tackled directly.

Ethiopia faces serious insecurity along its northern border, as its long-running conflict with Eritrea remains deadlocked. The EPRDF and the Eritrean People's Liberation Front, led by Isaias Afewerki (now Eritrea's president), cooperated in the struggle against Mengistu's regime in Ethiopia. By 1998, however, relations between the two countries had degenerated. Disputes between Addis Ababa and Asmara arose over, among other things, landlocked Ethiopia's access to Eritrean ports, questions of how the new Eritrean currency related to the Ethiopian currency, and the precise location of their poorly demarcated border. In May 1998, after a series of military skirmishes, Eritrean armed forces attacked the disputed border town of Badme. A bitter full-scale war quickly developed. The violence generated considerable casualties and huge costs on both sides. An estimated 70,000 to 100,000 people were killed between 1998 and 2000, 1 million were displaced, and a generation's worth of development opportunities was squandered.

Violence in Mogadishu remains chronic, and the UN classifies Somalia as the world's worst humanitarian emergency.

After a period of military stalemate and unproductive negotiations, Ethiopia launched a major offensive in May 2000, breaking through Eritrean defenses and forcing Eritrea to pull its troops back to the positions they had held before May 1998. In December 2000 the parties signed the Algiers Agreement, which created a temporary security zone along the border (to be patrolled by the United Nations mission in Ethiopia and Eritrea) as well as the Eritrea-Ethiopia Boundary Commission (which would delimit and demarcate the border).

In April 2002 the Boundary Commission ruled that the symbolically important town of Badme was on the Eritrean side of the border. Ethiopian leaders strongly objected to the ruling and did everything short of resuming hostilities to delay compliance. Eritrea, frustrated both by Ethiopia and by what it considered international appeasement of Addis Ababa, placed restrictions on the UN mission. This led the UN to withdraw its forces from nearly half the sites where they had been deployed. In November 2005 the UN Security Council passed Resolution 1640, which threatened to impose sanctions on Eritrea unless the restrictions were lifted. Eritrea did not comply.

In November 2007 the Boundary Commission gave up its efforts to coax the two parties to cooperate in completing the last stages of border demarcation, and instead presented a final map that set the border according to coordinates, a "virtual" demarcation that Ethiopia did not accept. While Badme was not the underlying cause of the conflict, both regimes used it as the marker of who had "won" or "lost" the war, and hence whether the terrible sacrifices each had made in the conflict were justified or in vain. Control of this small desolate town therefore became linked directly to the political fortunes—even the survival—of both regimes.

Today the Eritrea-Ethiopia border remains highly militarized. The Algiers Agreement is unraveling. The Boundary Commission has ceased operations. The UN mission has lost its capacity to monitor the border. And Eritrea routinely violates the temporary security zone. In January 2008, the UN secretary general warned that the UN mission would have to withdraw soon unless Eritrea allowed fuel shipments to the peacekeeping force. Eritrea argued that the Boundary Commission's virtual demarcation had brought an end to the border conflict and that the continued presence of the UN was "tantamount to occupation."

Despite these tensions, the stalemate and ceasefire along the border remain stable. Asmara and Addis Ababa each believe time is on its side and that there is no need to act immediately. These strategic calculations—not the UN mission—are likely to keep the border frozen. At present, Ethiopia retains control of Badme, while the UN mission and the temporary security zone are on the Eritrean side of the border. Ethiopia is comfortable with this status quo and is unlikely to break the stalemate militarily. It believes the Isaias regime is likely to collapse soon. In any case, a significant Ethiopian intervention across the border would generate a severe international reaction.

Eritrea, for its part, remains committed to the principle that the international community should—and therefore in the end will—compel Ethiopia to abide by the final, binding Boundary Commission decision. Although Asmara engages in

brinkmanship, harasses the UN, and uses bellicose rhetoric, it ultimately looks to the international community to implement the border decision. It is nearly inconceivable in any event that Eritrea could force Ethiopian troops back from their current positions and hold territory for a significant period of time. And Asmara believes that the EPRDF regime is on the verge of collapse. The possibility always remains that a skirmish or accidental incursion might spark a wider conflict. Even a small chance of a catastrophic (if unintended) war deserves significant international attention. It appears more likely, however, that the stalemate on the border will continue, while conflict escalates and spreads in Somalia and elsewhere in the region.

Horn of plenty of trouble

Conflict in the Horn of Africa erupted in December 2006, as a dramatic Ethiopian military intervention in Somalia shook the entire region. Ethiopian troops supported the Somali Transitional Federal Government in its rapid and surprising advance against the Union of Islamic Courts—an advance that succeeded in ousting from power the Islamists who had controlled Mogadishu since June of 2006 and had received support from Eritrea.

In late 2006 Addis Ababa saw emanating from Somalia dangers linked to Eritrea and to internal Ethiopian insurgent groups such as the OLF and the ONLF. These regional and domestic adversaries had increased their military presence in areas controlled by the Islamic Courts. Key leaders within the Islamic Courts sought to provoke Ethiopia into war by making irredentist claims regarding the ethnic Somali–inhabited Ogaden region. These threats were more rhetorical than real, since the Islamic Courts lacked the means to force Ethiopia to withdraw from Ogaden. Even so, Addis Ababa felt compelled to act—less because of the Islamic Courts' ideology and their ties to Al Qaeda than because of the safe haven that Ethiopia's enemies found in Somalia, and the risk that the threats represented by Eritrea, the ONLF, and the OLF would increase over time. Ethiopia preemptively provided the military might needed to drive the Islamic Courts out of Mogadishu, abolish the Ethiopian insurgents' safe haven, and bring the transitional government to power in the Somali capital.

Since then, the transitional government and its Ethiopian allies have struggled to establish order. Remnants of the Islamic Courts have reorganized in Asmara as the Alliance for the Reliberation of Somalia, and militia fighters have engaged in a violent campaign against Ethiopia and its allies in Mogadishu. The transitional government has not been able or willing to reach out to key constituencies, most notably the powerful Hawiye clan leaders entrenched in Mogadishu, as well as many of the moderate leaders within the diverse Islamic Courts movement. Moreover, the presence in Somalia of troops from Ethiopia, the country's historic enemy, has provoked a violent, nationalist response. Today Addis Ababa seems stuck. Ethiopia has called for an African Union force to replace it in Somalia but only a token force has been deployed, with prospects for enlargement of that force seeming remote. Violence in Mogadishu remains chronic, instability has spread to the autonomous Puntland region in the northeast, and the UN classifies Somalia as the world's worst humanitarian emergency.

Meanwhile, the Somali region of eastern Ethiopia remains restive. It erupted into brutal conflict in 2007, and intensified attacks by the ONLF and search-and-destroy missions by the Ethiopian military and allied militias displaced much of the region's population. Ogaden has long been a disorderly frontier zone, where Addis Ababa's control has been sporadic and politics has been shaped by ties between Somalis in Ethiopia and the clans to whom they are related in Somalia. (The ONLF was part of Ethiopia's initial transitional government in 1991 but was soon displaced by rival Somali parties with closer links to the EPRDF; the ONLF then initiated a low-level insurgency.)

The conflict between the ONLF and Addis Ababa escalated sharply last year, fueled by Ethiopia's intervention in Somalia and by alleged links between the ONLF and Eritrean agents operating in the areas of Somalia controlled by the Islamic Courts. Most dramatically, the ONLF attacked a Chinese oil exploration site in the Ethiopian town of Abole in April 2007, killing 74 civilians (including 9 Chinese workers). The Ethiopian military responded with a brutal campaign of violence, collective punishment, restrictions on food aid and trade, and forced relocation of civilians into protected villages. By summer, a major humanitarian emergency had developed in Ogaden.

Addis Ababa believes it can no longer neglect Ogaden or tolerate disorder there, and that harsh military control is imperative. The government believes this for two reasons. First, it sees Ogadeni insurgents as part of a regional network of threats in which domestic opponents such as the ONLF and the OLF are linked with Eritrea and the Islamic Courts. Firm military control of the region is

needed to prevent this set of enemies—Eritrea in particular—from using Ogaden as a base from which to attack the regime. Second, interest in international oil and gas exploration in the area has risen despite the ONLF attack on the Chinese oil site. In order to protect contracts it has signed for natural resource exploration, the central government must control the region. Indeed, the ONLF has warned international oil firms against exploiting "our people's natural resources."

Ethiopia's brutal military campaign in Ogaden has forced the ONLF underground. And although war in Ogaden will not topple the EPRDF regime, conflict likely will be fueled for many years by increased militancy and resentment against Addis Ababa among the Ogadeni. This, taken in combination with threats emanating from Mogadishu and Asmara, could cause the smoldering conflict in Ogaden to escalate rapidly.

Regional pressures, which are intertwined with Ethiopia's domestic political crisis, are growing and have the potential to explode. Ethiopia's intervention into Somalia displaced the Islamic Courts, but Addis Ababa has not found a way to build a stable ruling coalition in that country—nor has it found an exit strategy. The violence in Ogaden stems both from the inherent political challenges of this historically marginalized region and from the spillover of strife in Somalia. Taken together, the conflicts in the region clearly fuel—and are in turn fueled by—growing authoritarianism within Ethiopia.

Ethiopia is embedded within a network of conflicts that links Somalia, Ogaden, and Eritrea.

Washington's dilemma

Despite these escalating pressures on the EPRDF regime, Washington has pursued a high-profile partnership with Addis Ababa, one that entangles the United States in Ethiopia's regional conflicts and in its growing authoritarianism. The United States maintained close relations with both Ethiopia and Eritrea in the mid-1990s. The Clinton administration saw Prime Minister Meles and President Isaias as exemplars of a new generation of African leaders committed to political, social, and economic development. More substantively, both leaders shared the administration's hostility to the National Islamic Front regime in Sudan. The status of both men declined in Washington when war broke out between Ethiopia and Eritrea in 1998.

In recent years, US relations with Ethiopia have become very close while relations with Eritrea have degenerated. Washington views Addis Ababa as a "key strategic partner" in the Horn of Africa and in the war against terrorism. In late November 2006, as conflict between the Islamic Courts and Ethiopia was on the verge of erupting, then-US Ambassador to the UN John Bolton circulated a draft resolution authorizing Ethiopia to send troops into Somalia in support of the transitional government. The final resolution authorized only non-neighboring states to intervene, but the message from the United States was clear from the first draft: Washington had no objections to Ethiopia intervening in Somalia.

In December 2006 Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs Jendayi Frazer ratcheted up the rhetoric and characterized the Islamic Courts leadership as "extremist to the core" and "controlled by Al Qaeda cell individuals." Many saw Ethiopia's subsequent intervention in Somalia as an example of the United States "subcontracting" its war on terror to a regional ally, but Addis Ababa likely would have acted with or without Washington's approval.

The United States, however, promoted the impression that it was working hand in hand with Ethiopia. In January 2007 the US military command received what it believed was "actionable intelligence" that several high-level Al Qaeda operatives in Somalia were moving in a convoy toward the Kenyan border. US warplanes attacked the convoy (though the intended targets were not killed). Today some US officials maintain that they receive high-value intelligence from Ethiopia; others argue that most of what Washington gets is compromised because of Ethiopia's own security agenda in the region.

America's strategic linkage and intelligence-sharing with Ethiopia, in any case, complicate engagement and cooperation with Eritrea, the ONLF, and supporters of the Islamic Courts (as well as others in Somalia who object to Ethiopia's presence in their country). The United States relies too much on a single source of local intelligence in the Horn of Africa, and this hampers Washington's ability to track developments in the region.

While the Bush administration has developed closer links to the regime in Addis Ababa, key members of the US Congress have advanced a very

different policy agenda. Effective lobbying by the Ethiopian diaspora contributed to the legislative progress, albeit not the enactment, of the Ethiopian Democracy and Accountability Act of 2007. This legislation would have placed limits on US security assistance to Ethiopia, restricted visas for any Ethiopians involved in killing demonstrators, and authorized $20 million in spending over two years to provide assistance to political prisoners and human rights organizations and for programs to strengthen the rule of law. Critics of the Ethiopian regime, many of them mobilized by the violent aftermath of the 2005 elections, found effective entry points into the US policy making process by forming alliances with human rights advocacy groups and by reaching out to members of Congress who represent large diaspora communities.

The legislation seemed to be losing steam over the summer of 2007 as CUD leaders were released from prison, but rising concerns about human rights abuses in Ogaden then reenergized the bill's supporters. The measure was passed by the House of Representatives in late 2007—much to the public annoyance of authorities in Addis Ababa and officials at the US Department of State. However, the bill's slim prospects in the Senate—and the fact that, even if it became law, the White House could waive its provisions for national security reasons—make the legislation more symbolic than substantive.

Washington is pressing Ethiopia on implementation of the Algiers Agreement and on improving human rights, while simultaneously asking for cooperation with America's counterterrorism agenda. In December 2007 Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice traveled to Addis Ababa and urged Meles to "take concrete steps to lessen tensions" along the Eritrean border. She communicated the administration's objections to the legislation in Congress but noted that Ethiopia's policies in Ogaden made it harder to manage these concerns.

Meanwhile, relations between Washington and Asmara plummeted to new lows in 2007. A state department official characterized Eritrea as a country that "openly abuses its population and serves as a destabilizing force in the region." In August, Assistant Secretary Frazer said that Washington was "looking into" whether Eritrea should be added to the US list of state sponsors of terrorism. This designation triggers economic sanctions; in Eritrea's case it would be largely symbolic because Washington has already cut most non-humanitarian economic ties with the country. Nonetheless, the designation would be deeply offensive to Asmara. Eritrea regards itself as the first country to have engaged in war against terrorism sponsored by Al Qaeda (it battled the Eritrean Islamic Jihad in the early 1990s).

Washington feels it needs a close relationship with Ethiopia to pursue its strategic interests in the Horn of Africa. The relationship, however, comes with costs. As with other pivotal states in difficult regions that receive US support for security reasons (Pakistan and Egypt are examples), Ethiopia makes an awkward bedfellow that often pursues its own brutal agenda regardless of pressure from Washington. If the growing regional and internal pressures on Addis Ababa destabilize the regime, an uncontrolled and potentially very violent transition is possible. Such disorder would make pursuit of US security interests in the region much more difficult.

While the United States has paid high-level attention to Sudan and to issues of counterterrorism in the Horn of Africa, policies toward the Ethiopia-Eritrea border stalemate and toward authoritarianism within Ethiopia have been reactive, episodic, and largely unsuccessful. Washington needs a new diplomatic strategy in the region, one that recognizes these growing risks, as well as the links among the border stalemate, fragile and authoritarian regimes, and escalating proxy clashes in Somalia.

More violence ahead?

Ethiopia is the critical state in the Horn of Africa. But it is also embedded within a network of conflicts that links Somalia, Ogaden, and Eritrea. Today, regional pressures are increasing as the Algiers peace process continues to teeter, as the UN mission is on the verge of withdrawing from the Ethiopia-Eritrea border, and as Addis Ababa seems unable to end its military engagement in Somalia. Within Ethiopia, political liberties continue to be constricted by the aftermath of the dramatic 2005 election, as are prospects for meaningful electoral processes in future rounds of voting. In Ogaden, conflict has generated a humanitarian catastrophe and hostility from a generation of Ogadenis that will engender more violence in the long run. Ethiopia may be on a path that cannot be sustained. If these multiple sources of pressures converge and amplify each other, instability is likely. Even greater levels of violence and human suffering might be the result. ■