

A Week in the Horn
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Somalia – a tragic reminder of the need for more international action now

Yesterday, two suicide car bombs exploded inside the headquarters of the AMISOM peacekeeping mission in Mogadishu, killing nine soldiers including the deputy force commander. It was the worst attack suffered by AMISOM since it was deployed in 2007 but an AMISOM statement stressed the Mission remained resolute in its commitment to support the Somali people and the government in their peace and reconciliation efforts. Responsibility for the attack was immediately claimed by Al-Shabaab as revenge for the death of Saleh Ali Saleh Nabhan, a leading Al Qaeda terrorist working with Al-Shabaab. Saleh Ali Saleh was killed on Monday near Barawe (Brava) in Lower Shebelle region in a helicopter strike by US commando forces from off-shore. Salih Ali Salih was a key figure in training of Al-Shabaab, and had been involved in the terrorist bombings of the US Embassies in Kenya and Tanzania in 1998 when over 250 people had been killed. He was also linked to the attempt to shoot down an Israeli airliner and a hotel bombing in Mombasa in 2002.

In a statement yesterday, the Government of Ethiopia strongly condemned the attack on AMISOM's headquarters, pledging to continue to do everything possible to assist the TFG and AMISOM to stem terrorist violence. It offered its condolences for this appalling act of terror to

the Somali Government, to AMISOM, and the people of Somalia, as well as to the families of those killed. The statement noted that the murderous acts of Al-Shabaab and its international recruits continued to threaten the prospects of peace for Somalia, and even more widely. It was important these terrorist actions should not scare off supporters of the peace process. The attack on AMISOM headquarters underlined the urgent necessity for the international community to renew its commitment to peace in Somalia. The statement recalled that some had been prepared to give Al Shabaab and its allies the benefit of doubt for the sake of peace. Yesterday's terrorist attack was a stark reminder that groups such as Al Shabab do not have the slightest interest in any national reconciliation effort. As the Joint statement of the EU, IGAD, the UN, the Arab League, the US and Norway clearly put it, the attack is "further demonstration of their complete disregard for human lives" and it "is not only an attack on the AMISOM peacekeepers, but also on the ordinary Somali population who they were helping." The statement further expressed the international community's pledge that it "will not be deterred by such criminal acts and will continue all our efforts to ensure the return of peace and stability into Somalia." The international community must now match its words of condemnation with immediate and appropriate action to keep the prospects of peace in Somalia alive.

And the way forward for positive change in Somalia was outlined by the special session of the Assembly of the African Union on the Consideration and Resolution of Conflicts in Africa, held in Tripoli, Libya on 31st August 2009. The Assembly agreed in its Plan of Action to deploy the three remaining battalions authorized for AMISOM by the end of the year, and requested member states to make the pledged troops available as soon as possible. Member states were also asked to provide the TFG and AMISOM with funding, troops, equipment, logistics and training. The special session recommended an integrated focus on training for Somali security forces and police, and requested the AU Commission, member states and partners to coordinate this with the TFG. Recognizing the contributions of neighbouring countries, the special session requested them to continue consultations with the AU Commission and support AMISOM in every way possible. The special session asked the AU Peace and Security Commission to extend the mandate of AMISOM to allow for increased assistance to the TFG and the expansion of authority outside Mogadishu and include Somali's airspace and territorial waters. The special session encouraged the TFG to promote reconciliation and an all inclusive political process engaging all those armed groups willing to renounce violence. In addition, the special session decided that targeted and mandatory sanctions should be implemented against those leading efforts to destabilize the TFG and against any other actors fuelling the conflict or undermining

peace and reconciliation in Somalia. Collaboration with the UN Monitoring Group was recommended to ensure that sanctions could be effectively implemented. The special session also urged closer collaboration and coordination between the AU and its partners, including the UN, to encourage a speedy implementation of sanctions against 'spoilers', the imposition of a no-fly zone and a naval blockade to prevent the flow of arms and other support to extremists in Somalia, in line with relevant AU and IGAD decisions.

It needs no emphasis that what the latest suicide bombing has confirmed is that there are forces in Somalia, supported by those who are referred to as spoilers in the Tripoli Plan of Action, who will never be ready for national reconciliation and the peaceful resolution of the conflict in Somalia.

The incorrigible Human Rights Watch

Recently, *the Week in the Horn* informed its readers that a delegation of Human Rights Watch visited Ethiopia to discuss modalities for a constructive engagement. At the time, Ethiopian Government representatives informed the visitors that active and transparent engagement is the policy of the Government of Ethiopia but they remained highly sceptical that Human Rights Watch was at all capable of a balanced and objective assessment of the situation of Human Rights in Ethiopia. It has not taken long for this legitimate reluctance to be confirmed publicly by the representative of HRW in the UK.

In a letter he wrote to the British Foreign Secretary David Milliband, HRW's representative expressed his "deep concern at the potential consequences of the Memorandum of Understanding (UK-Ethiopia MoU) signed by the governments of the United Kingdom and Ethiopia on December 12, 2008" providing for diplomatic assurances in respect of persons subject to deportation. The letter repeats HRW's allegations that such an arrangement will be detrimental to the deportees because of Ethiopia's human rights records. The letter is full of the usual invectives that it has always used in relation to Ethiopia.

Ethiopia and the UK enjoy excellent cooperation on wide-ranging fields. This long standing cooperation includes working for peace and security and immigration matters as part of a practical demonstration of the close bilateral relationship between the UK and Ethiopia. Such cooperation is undertaken through different bilateral instruments agreed between Ethiopia and

the UK. Such instruments of cooperation are consistent with the Constitution and Ethiopia's international human rights obligations.

HRW has chosen to launch the usual tirade of unsubstantiated attacks against Ethiopia using language that clearly betrays inherent bias rather than objective assessment. Ethiopia's Constitutional system provides the necessary institutional framework for the protection and promotion of human rights and fundamental freedoms in the country. Torture is illegal in Ethiopia. Ethiopia fully complies with its obligations regarding humane conditions of detention. Detention and correctional institutions are rigorously supervised and visited, including by outsiders. The rights of detainees to be visited by members of their families and others are fully respected in Ethiopia. Detainees captured during counter terrorism operations received the same treatment and many have testified to this. If indeed Ethiopia deserves to be accused of anything in this regard, it must be on the basis of being too lenient on detainees from such operations. What the Swedish newspaper Svenska dagbladet reported on its September 12, 2009 issue would say a lot in this regard. Swedish nationals of Somali origin whom Ethiopia released after having captured them in Somalia while working for terrorist groups such as Al Shabab were reportedly recently detained in Pakistan while trying to illegally enter the country for no other purpose than to join the terrorists there.

HRW vilifies Ethiopian institutions without any objective knowledge of the reality on the ground. HRW, far from understanding the reality in Ethiopia, it all too liberally gives the country different labels. HRW must recognize that its reports on Ethiopia have invariably lacked credibility based as they are on flawed methodology and political condemnation of the Government rather than genuine interest in human rights advocacy. In fact, the culture of human rights in most daily life of the country has taken firm roots in Ethiopia. Relevant legislations, including the Anti-terrorism and Charities and Societies laws, fully comply with the human rights requirements of the Constitution and international human rights obligations of the country. And human rights institutions, both public and non-governmental have been mushrooming. This is a trend that is bound to continue as the country forges ahead in its democratization process.

Views of Sub-Saharan Africa that need updating

Israel's Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister, Mr. Avigdor Lieberman was in Ethiopia at the beginning of this month as we noted in last week's Week in the Horn. It was the start of a five nation tour that also took him to Kenya, Ghana, Nigeria and Uganda—all in sub-Saharan

Africa. The visit was given much coverage coming as it did, as was claimed by many reporters—twenty years after the last such high level visit ever made by a senior Israeli official. But there was much speculation about the motives behind the trip. Every analyst worth their salt had myriad of versions of what the real intent of the visit was. Be that as it may, one could not help wondering how much of what was said about Mr. Lieberman's visit was in fact based—even if remotely—on a correct appraisal of the expectations and interests of each of the countries the Israeli delegation set out to visit. Particularly interesting perhaps is the two diametrically opposite versions advanced about the visit by both Israeli and Egyptian media. The analyses offered by *Haaretz* in Israel and *Al Ahram* in Egypt can—between them—exhaust the so-called *real motives* behind the visit. Of course, the lists offered by the two papers are not necessarily mutually exclusive as there seem to be fairly good number of areas where they appear to concur. Both, for example, appear to disregard the interests of the five Sub-Saharan African countries visited by the Israeli delegation. Both were very condescending and appeared to suggest that the countries needed extra protection from others or they needed to be salvaged by either Egypt or Israel.

According to the Israeli press, in particular *Haaretz*, there was a considerable difference between the public and the less public elements of Mr. Lieberman's trip. The aims, according to *Haaretz*, included a rather patronizing intent to extend Israel's help to Africa, and especially to the countries visited, to tackle the problems of “hunger, health, and limited water resources”. The message appears to be that these Sub-Saharan African Countries are hopelessly poor. Obviously, with such desperately poor countries, establishing mutually beneficial relationship cannot be possible. Ambassador Haim Divon, who was Israel's former ambassador to Ethiopia for example, was quoted by *Haaretz* as defining Africa's needs as “countering hunger and the shortage of water, not arms” or as he puts it in a more Good-Samaritan way, Israel was more interested in “the feeding of the hungry and the quenching of the parched throats of Africa.” According to a senior Israeli foreign ministry source, African countries are “in great need and they will come to anyone who will extend an arm. If we don't do it, plenty others will.” The way these papers and the officials they quote put it, there is little to indicate there could—in the case of Mr. Lieberman's recent visit to Africa—perhaps have been an element of give-and-take of the sort self-respecting countries expect from a bilateral relationship with another country. But the Israeli media are not alone in this.

There was similar cynicism about Mr. Lieberman's trip on the part of the Egyptian press, too. Incidentally, *Al Ahram* called the visit an exercise in extreme cynicism and highly dangerous. It

is like these sub-Saharan countries needed special protection so that they'd be able to defend their interest. "Israel's military, security, economic and political tentacles have reached," the paper says, "every corner of Africa, cloning many different philanthropic façades in order to exploit Africa's hunger and desperation..." In what appears to be an attempt to outdo the Israeli press's largely exaggerated claims—condescending, no less, Al Ahram reminds the sub-Saharan African countries not to expect Israel to be a "safe haven for their wealth and future" or "to help them overcome the discrimination and inferiority complex that it claims the Arabs have perpetuated and nurtured." It also claims that Israel has attempted "since the 1950s to compromise Egypt's water security by consolidating its influence over countries straddling the sources of the Nile in the Central African Great lakes and the Ethiopian highlands." That Mr. Lieberman's recent visit includes three Upper Riparian countries of the Nile therefore must have been a treasure trove for proponents of this insulting thesis. To reiterate, what is being enunciated is the same notion that these sub-Saharan African nations are incapable of courses of action that would be in line with their fundamental national interests.

As one can see from the foregoing references, hardly any two versions of the same event can be more opposite. That there should be such difference in their respective views regarding the same phenomenon may not perhaps come as a surprise, though. Some even would consider that to be almost natural. But what one finds surprising is the similarity in the tones one would notice reading both versions—a tone that is anything but respectful toward the African countries Mr. Lieberman had to visit in his recent foray into this part of the continent. Whatever those competing claims are—and there is no claim that these views represent official policy—they seem to concur in assuming away any possibility of a genuine partnership that Israel and each of these African countries can build on the basis of mutual respect and mutual interest. Both are equally patronizing in their approach and condescending in their tone.

While we cannot speak for other countries, as far as Ethiopia goes, however, the visit was not just historic; but one that can boost the wide array of potentially rewarding cooperation and partnership that both nations have every reason to look forward to. Ethiopia, of course, has a legitimate interest in deepening its relations with Israel. Encouraging business links and the movement of people is crucially important for trade and overall relations. Apart from existing bilateral relations that Ethiopia enjoys with Israel, there are a lot more areas that can be harnessed to the benefit of both countries and their peoples. There's room for expansion of trade and cooperation on a number of areas. Ethiopia would certainly see the desirability of this, but it would need to be on the basis of a mutually beneficial relationship.

This applies to Ethiopia's relations with Egypt too. Both countries have many things in common and equally legitimate interest in deepening their ties. Apart from the Nile issue which can be the basis for establishing very strong mutually beneficial relations, there are various areas such as trade and development that both countries should capitalize on in the furtherance of their national interests.

Well, Ethiopia is, and has always been, prepared to forge friendly relations with any country on the basis of mutual benefit and mutual respect. As Al Ahram rightly observes—though in an accusatory note—Israel has an agenda shaped “by its own interests.” That's hardly surprising. Al Ahram's own views are largely based on Egypt's own interests. Altruism, after all, is always in short supply in international relations. At best, most countries engage on the basis of promotion of their own national interest but it is very clear that any realistic and satisfactory relationship must be based on the recognition of mutual interest if it is to last. No one should expect Ethio-Israeli relations—or any relation for that matter to be an exception. The visit should only be seen in this light.

To the extent that there are some who are inclined to think that Ethiopia could be used by a third country to stand in the way of their security, or their survival—whatever it is they believe is at stake, they should take the pain—no matter how difficult that may be—to consider for a moment that Ethiopia, too, has a national interest of its own. And knowing that it will not trade off its national interest for any measure of incentive—as any self-respecting nation should—won't be bad either. And the failure to appreciate this can only be a display of sheer conceit and arrogance.

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