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## **U.S. Policy in the Horn of Africa**

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## Abstract

This Working Paper provides the Keynote Address by Ambassador David Shinn, presented at the conference on State, Economy and Society in the Horn of Africa held on October 3, 2014, sponsored by the Africa Working Group of IGIS. His remarks summarize the major themes of U.S. policy towards the Horn of Africa from the end of World War II through the Obama administration. Over the years, the United States has invested considerable political capital in the Horn. The relationships among the countries in the region are such that it is almost impossible to be actively engaged and maintain good relations with all of the countries at the same time.

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The problems of the Horn of Africa include economic inequality, political marginalization, poor governance, ethnic tension, competition for scarce resources including water and arable land, periodic drought, and poverty. Contributory factors are porous borders, widespread availability of weapons, corruption, a poor record by governments on human rights, and interference in the region by organizations and countries outside the Horn. The Horn is also located on a Muslim/Christian religious fault line. The Horn has posed a serious challenge for U.S. policy for more than three quarters of a century.

The Cold War determined U.S. policy in the Horn until the beginning of the 1990s. The United States concentrated its economic and military support on Ethiopia's Emperor Haile Selassie, who was a reliable ally of the United States. The U.S. military maintained a critical communications station known as Kagnew outside Asmara, which at the time was part of Ethiopia. In the mid and late 1960s, Ethiopia received the United States' largest economic and military assistance program and hosted the largest American embassy in Sub-Saharan Africa.

In 1974, the military junta led by Mengistu Haile Mariam seized power. As Ethiopia slipped into the Soviet camp, the United States looked for a new ally in the Horn. The Soviet Union turned its attention to Ethiopia, Somalia's traditional enemy. This opened the door for the United States to replace Soviet influence in Somalia, which had a long-standing irredentist policy aimed at incorporating Somali-inhabited parts of Ethiopia and Kenya and all of Djibouti. Ethiopia and Somalia became classic examples of pawns in Cold War policies with the Soviet Union supporting Ethiopia and the United States allied with Somalia.

By the late 1970s, Sudanese President Gaafar Nimeiri had become a Cold War ally of the United States. By the end of his regime in the mid-1980s, the largest American economic and military assistance program in all of Africa was in Sudan, which had replaced the position formerly occupied by Ethiopia. The U.S. oil company, Chevron, discovered and was developing Sudan's oil wealth. These close ties to the Nimeiri government resulted in the reluctance of the United States to support John Garang's Sudan People's Liberation Movement (SPLM), which began operations in 1983 with the goal of toppling the Nimeiri government.

The 1985 overthrow of Nimeiri, as he was en route to the United States for a meeting with President Ronald Reagan, led to a rapid decline in relations with Sudan. Sudan's military coup in 1989 and installation of an Islamic government led by Omar al-Bashir led to deep concern in Washington and progressively worsening relations between the United States and Sudan.

The end of the Cold War coincided with dramatic political developments in the Horn. There was a new Islamic government in Sudan. In 1991, the left-wing Mengistu government fell to rebel forces that became known as the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) and a secessionist movement in Eritrea. The same year, opposition groups removed Said Barre from power in Somalia and northwest Somalia, known as Somaliland, unilaterally declared independence. In 1991, Eritrea achieved de facto independence and two years later held a referendum that ratified secession from Ethiopia.

In 1991, the United States played a key role in helping to broker the departure of Mengistu from Addis Ababa, the replacement of his regime with the EPRDF, and the independence of Eritrea. The United States quickly developed cordial relations with both Ethiopia and Eritrea and strengthened personal ties with Ethiopian Prime Minister Meles Zenawi and Eritrean President Isaias Afewerki.

In 1992, at the end of the George H.W. Bush administration, the United States led a large, international military coalition to end a horrific famine in Somalia, which had no national government and had become a failed state. The negative U.S. experience in Somalia caused it to minimize engagement in the country throughout the rest of the 1990s.

Due to concerns about Sudan's growing support for terrorist organizations, U.S. relations with its Islamic government deteriorated in the 1990s. Osama bin Laden moved his headquarters to Khartoum late in 1991. The United States put Sudan on the list of state sponsors of terrorism in 1993; this was followed by a major U.S. sanctions regime against Sudan. Under pressure from the United States, the Sudanese government asked bin Laden to leave Sudan in mid-1996, when he relocated to Afghanistan. U.S. policy towards Khartoum became increasingly hostile as the al-Bashir government continued to support several terrorist groups and U.S. domestic advocacy groups urged a harsher policy towards the government.

Close ties to Meles, Isaias, President Yoweri Museveni in Uganda and Vice President Paul Kagame in Rwanda led to a personalization of African policy in the second Clinton term. In 1998, the unexpected outbreak of war between Ethiopia and Eritrea brought a quick end to the Clinton administration's focus on these four leaders. At the beginning of the Ethiopia-Eritrea conflict, the Clinton team tried to follow a balanced approach towards both countries, angering each one in the process.

Relations were worsening with Sudan, especially following the 1998 al-Qaeda bombings of the U.S. embassies in Nairobi and Dar es Salaam and the mistaken belief in some quarters that Sudan had something to do with the bombings. In retaliation, the U.S. launched a cruise missile attack following the embassy bombings on a pharmaceutical factory in Khartoum suspected of producing chemical weapons. This was the low point in U.S.-Sudan relations.

The Bush administration took office when the Horn was not a high foreign policy priority. Following the terrorist attacks of 9/11, that view began to change. The war on terrorism drove U.S. policy throughout the region, although in Sudan, the United States also played a major role in the North-South peace process and worked hard to end the crisis in Darfur. Counterterrorism was about the only U.S. policy in Somalia during the Bush administration.

At the end of 2002, the United States established CJTF-HOA at a former French military base in Djibouti. The stated mission was to disrupt and defeat international terrorist groups posing an imminent threat to the United States, its allies, and their interests in the region. Djibouti took on an importance for U.S. policy that it never had before. Today, CJTF-HOA has grown to about 4,000 military and civilian personnel.

Ethiopia, which itself felt threatened by extremist groups, became an increasingly important ally in U.S. counterterrorism policy in the region. The United States found it increasingly difficult to maintain cordial relations with Eritrea as its ties with Ethiopia strengthened.

In Sudan, following progress on the North-South peace process and signing of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) in 2005, there was a serious prospect for the normalization of relations with Sudan and eventual removal of U.S. sanctions against Sudan. The United States played a key role in encouraging both Khartoum and the SPLM to sign the CPA; this was the Bush administration's signal political achievement in its African policy. While there was progress on ending the conflict

between Sudan and South Sudan, the outbreak of conflict in Darfur in 2003 ended prospects for the normalization of relations between Sudan and the United States.

The United States welcomed Khartoum's willingness to move forward with the CPA and its cooperation on counterterrorism. But there were always new issues, first Darfur, and subsequently conflicts in Abyei and Southern Kordofan along the North-South border that prevented normalization of relations with Sudan. The heavy focus on Sudan's North-South peace process and the Darfur crisis by the Bush administration and, to a considerable extent, by the Obama administration sucked all the diplomatic oxygen out of the air. It was difficult to get high-level attention on other issues in the Horn, except for Somalia when it became a center for extremist activity.

In 2006, Somalia became a major issue for U.S. policy in the Horn when a group of Islamists threatened to seize power in Mogadishu. The United States made a policy blunder when it financed a group of discredited Somali warlords who took the name Alliance for the Restoration of Peace and Counter-Terrorism (ARPCT) to attack the Islamists. The Union of Islamic Courts (UIC), which included both moderate and extremist elements, defeated the ARPCT by mid-2006 and quickly seized control of most of central and south Somalia. While it was anti-Western and hostile to Ethiopia, the UIC reestablished law and order.

The Somali Transitional Federal Government, which was located in Nairobi and had the support of the international community, invited Ethiopian forces into Somalia to remove the UIC. By early 2007, Ethiopian troops forced the UIC out of Mogadishu and most of Somalia. Eritrea seized upon the conflict in Somalia and Ethiopia's direct involvement to put pressure on Ethiopia. Still smarting from the fact that Ethiopia had not returned Badme as required in the binding arbitration, Eritrea supported extremist groups in Somalia that opposed the Ethiopian intervention. This Eritrean action, in addition to hostile actions towards its neighbor to the south, Djibouti, caused a further deterioration in U.S.-Eritrea relations. The United States and Eritrea are barely on speaking terms today.

The independence of South Sudan in 2011 left the international community, including the United States, excessively optimistic about the prospects for a democratic South Sudan. While 75 percent of Sudan's oil wealth went to the new country, Sudan retained control of the infrastructure for exporting oil. There were serious unresolved issues between South Sudan and Sudan. Then an internal power struggle broke out in Juba in December 2013. The situation has deteriorated into a complicated ethnic conflict that poses a new challenge for U.S. policy in the region.

South Sudan has become an enormous foreign policy disappointment for the United States, which played a key role in its achievement of independence. It has lectured the South Sudanese President, Salva Kiir, and the principal rebel leader, Riek Machar, and placed sanctions on military commanders from both sides of the dispute.

U.S. policy in Somalia has had somewhat more success. It continues to support the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM) and the new Somali Federal Government (SFG) that was established in 2012. Together, they have removed al-Shabaab from much of Somalia, although it continues to move freely in rural parts of south/central Somalia. Washington also remains concerned about the ability of the SFG to establish a viable government in Somalia that has the support of the Somali people.

The United States has cordial relations with Somaliland, which in 1991 declared its unilateral declaration of independence. On the other hand, it is not prepared to recognize Somaliland's independence until the African Union does so.

The principal interest remains counterterrorism and security as demonstrated by the growth at CJTF-HOA in Djibouti. The United States and Djibouti recently signed a new ten year, \$70 million annual lease for the facility. U.S. contributions to the anti-piracy effort in the Gulf of Aden and Western Indian Ocean have also become an important part of U.S. policy.

Security interests usually trump concerns about human rights, particularly in countries that are supportive of U.S. policy. One common thread through U.S. policy in the Horn since the end of World War II has been to provide assistance to counter hunger and famine. In terms of lives saved, this effort and the more recent programs aimed at combatting HIV/AIDS have been America's most successful policies in the region.

U.S. trade with and foreign direct investment in all countries in the Horn are modest. Its largest trading partner in the region is Ethiopia, which in 2012 had about \$1.5 billion in trade with the United States. Its trade with other countries in the Horn barely registers statistically. No American oil company is active in the region and only a small number of American companies have offices or production facilities in the Horn.

The challenges for U.S. policy in the Horn remain huge. From the perspective of American policy, relations today with the governments of Ethiopia, Djibouti, and Somalia are good. They are poor with Eritrea and Sudan and complicated with South Sudan because of the recent outbreak of internal conflict there. The interrelationships of the countries in the Horn are such that it is virtually impossible for a country as engaged politically and militarily in the region as the United States to have good relations with all of them at the same time.