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Report on the current position with regard to the Security Sector in Ethiopia

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Abstract

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Introduction

Located within one of the most volatile, conflict-ridden, drought-prone and poorest regions of Africa — the Horn of Africa — the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia is currently faced with a daunting challenge of transforming its political and economic systems for sustainable development.

Having come out of decades of wasteful military dictatorship, civil war, border war with Somalia in the late 1970s and with Eritrea by the end of the 1990s, and bedevilled by acute food shortage due to chronic drought, Ethiopia has remained one of the weakest economies in the world requiring urgent reforms. Multilateral and bilateral assistance from the international community (the UN, the World Bank, IMF and some donor countries and non-state actors) have increased dramatically since the end of the later part of the end of the 1990s.

Context for Security Sector Reform

Ethiopia in Modern Historical Perspective

Ethiopia is the oldest independent country in Africa, without having experienced colonialism, apart from the period between 1936 and 1941 when it was occupied by Italy. Although the origins of Ethiopia as a kingdom date back to the Axumite civilization beginning in the first millennium BC¹, the history of modern Ethiopia began with the centralization of its administration from 1850.² However it was Emperor Haile Selassie who acceded the throne in 1930 that commenced a deliberate policy of welding the different ethnic groups in the kingdom into a strong centralized state with aspirations to modernization.

After nearly four decades of imperial rule, Selassie was removed from power in a violent military coup in 1974, thus ending a long history of monarchy. The ruling junta (the Derg), led by Colonel Mengistu Haile Mariam, came into power within in an international strategic environment of the Cold War and declared Ethiopia a communist state. Backed by formidable military support from the communist bloc (chiefly former USSR and Cuba) the Derg unleashed a reign of terror for 17 years. With a highly centralized polity in its firm grip, the Derg renounced any pretensions to democracy, pursued gruesome zero-tolerance towards dissent and brutally excluded consultation with the public. Ethnic identities and expressions were outlawed and ruthlessly suppressed by state violence, as the Derg ruled by maximum dictatorship, intimidation and cold human rights violations.

As the security forces and the police were systematically turned into the agencies of Mengistu's reign of terror, the various ethnic-based opposition groups moved into self exile in neighbouring countries

Concerns for Security Sector Reform (SSR)

Human Rights conditions

The human rights situation in the country is a matter of concern for SSR programmes in a post-military and post-war era to enable democratic development. With the dark days of the Derg and the war with Eritrea put behind, human rights conditions have improved tremendously. A new democratic constitution was approved by the TGE in 1994 and ratified by the National Assembly elected in 1995. The constitution guarantees protection of human rights and freedoms as well as the rule of law. However, the months leading up to the elections in 2000 witnessed a systematic policy of intolerance of political dissent, press censorship and containment of civil liberties and human rights by the ruling EPRDF. Arbitrary arrest, detention and exile became very rampant. Some of the most infamous instances, among many others, include the killing of 11 supporters of the Southern People's Democratic Coalition by government forces, and the use of lethal weapons to disperse the anti-government demonstrations by students of the Addis Ababa University in April

2000.³ According to the Amnesty International Report of 2002, at least 31 people were killed as the police used lethal weapons to disperse the protesting crowd and break the demonstration.⁴ Other egregious abuses by government security agencies include arbitrary arrests and torture, extra-judicial killings and disappearances, and

Equipment

Army

Main Battle Tanks: 160 T-54/55 & T-62.
Reconnaissance/Armoured Infantry Fighting Vehicle/Armoured Personnel Carrier: 200 BRDM, BMP, and BTR-60/-152.
Towed Artillery: 76mm: ZIS-3; 85mm:D-44; 122mm: D-30/M-30; 130mm: M-46.
Self-propelled Artillery: 122mm: 2S1; 152mm: 2S19.
Multiple Rocket Launcher: BM-21.
Mortar: 81mm: M-1/M-29; 82mm: M-1937; 120mm: M-1944.
Anti-Tank Guided Weapon: AT-3 Sagger.
Recoilless Launcher: 82mm: B-10; 107mm: B-11.
Air Defence Guns: 23mm: ZU-23, ZSU-23/-24; 37mm: M-1939; 57mm: S-60.
Surface-To-Air-Missile: 65 SA-2, SA-3, and SA-7.

Air Force

Combat Aircraft: 53.
Armed Helicopters: 16-18.
Fighter Ground Attack: 24 MiG-21, 17 MiG-23 BN, 4 Su-25 (2-25T, 2-25 UB) and 8 Su-27.
Transport: 4 C-130B, 7An-12, 2 DH-6, 1 Yak-40 (VIP), and 2 Y-12.
Transport Helicopters: 22 Mi-8/17.
Training: 10 L-39, 10 SF-260.
Attack Helicopters: 16 Mi-24 (Possibility of 2 Ka-50).

Defence Budget & Foreign Military Assistance

The defence budget for the years 1998, 1998 and 2000 are estimated at 140m, 432m and 457m US\$ respectively. The armed forces received from the US 0.3m, 0.5m, 1.5m and 1.4m US\$ for the years 1998, 1999, 2000 and 2001 respectively. France also gave military assistance worth about 0.5m US\$ each in 1999 and 2000.

The army has also received training assistance from the US, particularly in mine clearing. It received some \$300,000 from the US for military training in 1995.³

Total Military expenditure for the year 2000 is estimated at \$800 million, which is about 12.6% of the GDP. However, the army has embarked on downsizing since the end of the war with Eritrea in 2000.

Civil-military Relations

Most of the issues of civil-military relations have been discussed in previous sections. However, it is important to note that the Ethiopian military forces were transformed from former insurgent militias who fought against the Derg and their former commanders are the current civilian leaders of the EPRDF coalition. The civil authority is therefore in firm control of the military. The only fear is that this relationship could snap in a post-EPRDF political dispensation, when the subordination of the military might become a serious concern.

Conclusion

Post-military Ethiopia has come a long way on the path to national reconstruction and transformation. With the growing favourable international environment of donor assistance and good will, the EPRDF government has a rare opportunity to accelerate the pace of democratic transition. The international community has the chance to apply pressures on the government to improve its human rights credentials and make the political system more transparent and participatory.

The drought-induced famine has exacerbated the suffering of a population afflicted with the bitter experience of war and its associated miseries. While there are pockets of insurgency and rebellion against the government, the general aspiration of the population is to attain a peaceful, stable and secure environment in order to divert their energies to creating a sustainable economic order at home. Tired of war and government high-handedness, the people want to surmount the problem of food insecurity, poverty and unemployment.

Endnotes

¹ Young, J. (June 1998), Regionalism and Democracy in Ethiopia. Third World Quarterly, p.191-204

² European Platform for Conflict Prevention and Transformation (1999), Searching for Peace in Africa., Utrecht. p.133

³ See the US department of State Country Reports on Human Rights Practices-2001 on Ethiopia for the catalogue of human rights violations and abuses.

⁴ Amnesty International Report 2002-Ethiopia

⁵ Jane's Sentinel Security Assessment 2002 on North Africa