

## *Full Length Research*

# United States Policy towards Horn of Africa Since 1991

Tegege Edemealem Mekuriyaw

Debre Markos University, College of Social Sciences, Department of Civics and Ethical Studies, Debre Markos.  
Email:edmexlibanon@gmail.com

Accepted 19 May 2016

This paper focused on analyzing the foreign policy of United States of America (USA) towards Horn of Africa since 1991. The paper argued that United States policy towards Horn of African states provides more emphasis for its national interest rather than for international laws and mutual benefit. The paper answered questions such as what are issues of concern for USA in the Horn of Africa since 1991? What is the foreign policy USA towards each Horn of African States? What are the implications for failure of the USA's policy towards Horn of Africa? The paper used qualitative research approach. It employed only secondary sources of data. The USA's policy towards Horn of Africa post 1991 focused on humanitarian aid, security, economic and etc. Particularly, after the 2001 terrorist attack USA provided big emphasis for terrorism. The USA revised its foreign policy towards Horn of Africa related with counter terrorism. The USA established strong relation with Djibouti, Ethiopia and Kenya to fight against terrorism. The presence of Al Shabaab in the Horn of Africa and its contact with Al Qaeda terrorist organization grows to be serious threat for USA. Therefore, combating Al Shabaab with the cooperation of Horn of Africa states became compulsory for USA.

**Keywords:** United States, Foreign policy, Horn of Africa, Security, Terrorism, Al Shabaab

**Cite This Article As:** Mekuriyaw TE (2016). United States Policy towards Horn of Africa Since 1991. *Inter. J. Polit. Sci. Develop.* 4(4): 134-139

## INTRODUCTION

External powers were highly attracted by the Horn of Africa during the period of European colonialism and the cold war period for geo-strategic purpose by the two revival camps i.e., the capitalist and the communist camps. But after the 1991, the need of external powers particularly United States of America (USA) has been changed due to the expansion of terrorism in the region, the increasing of humanitarian crisis, various conflicts, and extremist Muslim groups etc (Moller, 2009). The United States was not considering Horn of Africa as a top geo-political strategic region before the cold war. USA was giving more priority for the negative side of the region such as warfare and instability, genocidal violence, famine, drought, and population displacement. However, after 1991, the United States has given more priority for

the effective counter-terrorism actions, resolving conflicts, and reducing humanitarian crisis in the region (Horn of Africa Steering Committee, 2011).

At the present time, almost United States has a good relation with most of Horn of Africa states<sup>1</sup>. The Horn of African states are agreed with United States to address several problems in the region and their own particular problems. Though there are some areas of disagreement, relatively, United States has a better relation with Ethiopia, Djibouti, Kenya and South Sudan than with Eritrea, Sudan, and Somalia. For instance, the

<sup>1</sup> The main Horn of African states are Ethiopia, Eritrea, Djibouti, and Somalia. However, the extended Horn of Africa includes South Sudan, Kenya, and Sudan.

U.S. has frustrated in Somalia due to the expansion of extremist groups in Somalia territory and the weakness of the federal government to regulate its territory. USA also concern about the humanitarian and human rights crisis in South Sudan and North Sudan (Cooke & Downie, 2010; Horn of Africa Steering Committee, 2011).

The paper focused on examining the foreign policy of United States respect with the Horn of Africa in general and with each particular state in the Horn after 1991. The paper may fill the existing literature gap in the USA foreign policy towards with each Horn of African states after 1991. The paper argued that after 1991, the United States foreign policy to Horn of Africa focused on development and humanitarian assistance, resolving many kinds of conflicts and violence particularly on countering international security threats i.e. terrorism.

### **Issues of Concern by United States in the Horn of Africa: Post-1991**

#### **Security Threats**

There are many sources of security threat in the Horn of Africa which can affect the international peace and security. The United States has considered the Horn of Africa as a major source of terrorism and violence. Therefore, following the 9/11 attacks against the United States, the Horn has come under increased study as a strategic focal point in the war against terrorism and other violence.

#### **Terrorism in the Horn of Africa**

Most scholars agree that Horn of Africa is a highly potential and actual region for the expansion terrorist and extremist groups. It is an important staging area, training center, and a favored place to target U.S. interests. U.S. officials are closely monitoring countries which are vulnerable to terrorist penetration and influence, as well as countries that are sympathetic to these groups (Dagne, 2002; Cooke & Downie, 2010). Following the shot down of the United States military helicopter in 1993 at Black Hawk Down incident which were the part of peace keeping in Somalia, and the bombardment of the United States embassies in Kenya and Tanzania in 1998 which was linked to Al Qaeda, United States has been concerning about terrorism in the Horn of Africa (West, 2005). Moreover, after September 9/11 attacks the United States has more focused in the Horn of Africa in order to avoid the sanctuary and expansion of terrorist groups in the Horn of Africa particularly to eliminate Al Qaeda and its wings. Furthermore, the United States intelligence developed information about the training, equipment, and fighters linked to Al Qaeda were coming from the region such as Al-Shabaab (ibid).

### **Somalia Sea Piracy**

Piratical attacks off the Horn of Africa constitute a threat to the lives and welfare of the citizens and many nations. Nearly 12% of the world's petroleum passes through the Gulf of Aden, which is one of the world's most important waterways. The piratical attacks often affect the interests of numerous countries, including the cargo owner, transshipment, and destination states (U.S. National Security Council, 2008). In 2008, the United States government also ratified a policy to address piracy threats in the Horn of Africa. The U.S. National Security Council's (NSC) to repress sea piracy in the Horn of Africa effectively for the smooth conduct of the global economy and sea navigation. The United States concerns to prevent pirate attacks in the Horn of Africa. It is by reducing the vulnerability of the maritime domain to piracy; disrupting the acts of piracy consistent with international law; and ensuring the accountability of pirates for their actions (ibid).

#### **Recurrent Conflicts**

The Horn of Africa experiences conflicts, humanitarian crisis, instability and human tragedy. This situation is connected with the inability of Horn of Africa states to pursue rational policies that increase social cohesion. Moreover, in 2006, the escalation of conflicts in the Horn of Africa has been looked as a marked deterioration of governance in critical states, and a general detachment of USA foreign policy toward the strategically located region (Kidist, 2014).

In recent decades, the Horn of Africa has been one of the world's most conflicted regions, experiencing over 200 armed conflicts since 1990. For this reason, the USA government has looked the Horn of Africa in the eyes of regime insecurity, terrorism, religious fanaticism, and tribalism. As result, United States has been exerting efforts to dry the sources of conflicts from the grass root (Williams, 2011). United States works with the Ethiopian government to establish a well-organized and professional military which can protect the national and regional security (Kidist, 2014). In Somalia, due to the failure of the Transitional Federal Government (TFG) to control the territory, the Union of Islamic Court developed in 2006. In 2006, the United States supported the UN Security Council Resolution 1725 in order to deploy African troops to sustain the authorities in Baidoa (Lyons, 2006).

United States has engaged in the resolution of some conflicts in the Horn of Africa. It has engaged in the Comprehensive Peace Agreement in Sudan; the adoption of the dual-track approach in Somalia by engaging directly with the authorities in Somaliland and Puntland as well as Mogadishu; and in Ethio-Eritrea peace resolutions (Williams, 2011).

## Humanitarian Crisis

Humanitarian crisis in Horn of Africa remains the worst in the world. Humanitarian crises in the Horn of Africa have been caused by political turmoil, periodic conflicts, drought and famine. Much of the violence conflicts have been fueled by poor governance, corruption, and economic mismanagement. The presence of disputing borders and small arms throughout the region, increase the regional and local insecurity. Several domestic and transnational terrorist groups currently operate in the Horn. This led for an intensified humanitarian crisis in the Horn of Africa (Browne et al., 2012).

Following the increasing of humanitarian crisis in the region due to different reasons, USA has engaged in the Horn of Africa. It has been giving development and humanitarian assistance to Horn of African states like, health, nutrition, agriculture and food security, economic recovery and market systems, logistics and relief commodities, humanitarian coordination and information management, and water, sanitation, and hygiene supports to Horn of Africa states. The United States is the largest bilateral donor of emergency assistance to the Horn of Africa (ibid). United States has also been providing protection and assistance for refugees in Kenya, Ethiopia, and Djibouti, including funding for the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees' (UNHCR) recent emergency (Office of the Spokesperson, 2011).

### United States Policy with each of Horn of African States: Post 1991

Basically United States has different level of relation with each of horn of Africa states and its foreign policy towards Horn of Africa more focus on countering security threats, providing development and humanitarian assistances, settling conflicts and creating stable environment in the region. United States has also been encouraging good governance, rule of law, and respect for human rights, poverty alleviation measures etc.

### USA-Sudan

The Sudan's government had given a shelter for terrorist groups like Al-Qaeda, Islamic Group, Hezbollah, and Palestinian Islamic Jihad in 1990s. This attitude of the Sudan's government was disliked by United States and United States placed Sudan on the list of states that sponsor terrorism in 1993 (Woodward, 2006). In 2000, the USA and Sudan agreed to work cooperatively and USA to send an organized counter terrorism group to Sudan. Especially, after the September 9/11 attacks Sudan showed its collaboration to USA for tracking and

capturing terrorists (West, 2005). The Sudan government had allowed for the United States forces to attack the Islamic group in Eastern Sudan although there was no a genuine relation between United States and Sudan (Cooke & Downie, 2010).

The United States had also a critical role in bringing the South Sudan and the Sudan's government to the agreement in 2005. Moreover, the US becomes a guarantor to the Comprehensive Peace Agreement and also facilitates for the effective implementation of the agreement. In accordance with the terms of the 2005 Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) that ended Sudan's civil war, the internationally monitored referendum was conducted in 2011. It allowed the people of Southern Sudan to vote for secession (Berouk, 2011). USA has engaged to full implementation of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement. The USA President Barack Obama appointed Major General J. Scott Gration as US Special Envoy to Sudan in March 2009 in order to executing US policy in Sudan and reinvigorating the process of CPA implementation (ibid).

The United States is the largest donor of humanitarian assistance to Sudan. It gave food aid, health care provisions, water, sanitation, hygiene, and many. The United States provided nearly a huge amount of financial and other resources to nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) working in Darfur and on the Chad/Sudan border (Rennack, 2005).

### USA-Somalia

Since the collapse of Dictator Siad Barre government in 1991, Somalia has been without a central government. The non-existence of central government in Somalia led a country to many armed factions operate in different parts of the country and the emergence of terrorist groups in the country. This was why the United States has explained that Somalia is a favorable state and the Al-Qaeda might use it as a base (Kidist, 2014). The increasing of extremist Islam groups in Somalia which have a connection with Al-Qaeda forced USA to more emphasis on eliminating security threats from the region. USA targeted four priority areas in Somalia. The first is encouraging negotiation how the government could be continued and promoting to conduct election thereby isolating the terrorist and extremist groups. This is the intention to eliminate terrorist movements in the state by consolidating the transitional government along the United States line. The second is providing development and humanitarian assistance for the Somali people and developing the capacity of the Federal Government, the third is facilitating the regular deployment of the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM) to stabilize the country (Kidist, 2014).

The United States is the largest bilateral donor of

humanitarian assistance to Somalia and United States also coordinate closely with other international partners diplomatically (Swan, 2007). United States also strengthens its efforts against the Somali piracy in various mechanisms. It has been supporting the federal government to increase its defensive and offensive capacity towards sea pirates. Moreover, United States has been taking measures against the Somali piracy unilaterally and with other international actors (Blanchard et al., 2009).

### **USA-Kenya**

Kenya is one of the Horn of Africa states which are repeatedly attacked by the terrorist groups. Because of this and other issues Kenya has a close relationship with United States particularly on counter-terrorism acts (West, 2005). As far as Kenya is a neighboring state to Somalia, and Somalia is a safe haven for terrorists like Al-Shabaab which has a connection with Al-Qaeda, USA established strong relation with Kenya. The USA has devoted significant resources to improving Kenyan counter-terrorism and anti-piracy capacity. The USA has allocated up to a third of the \$100 million for the East African Counter-terrorism Initiative to Kenyans to help improve border patrols and maintain immigration control improvements at main airports and sea-ports (ibid). Moreover for conducting a free, fair, and transparent election in Kenya, the USA have been providing election-related training to civil society organizations, political parties, and youth and women candidates, as well as supporting the work of the Electoral Commission (Swan, 2007). Pastoral communities of Kenya, in the arid north have been facing drought and famine repeatedly and also refugee problems i.e. Somali refugees. Due to these problems United States has given short and long term supports to Kenya (Browne et al., 2012). In 2007, following the disputing election in Kenya there was violence. In this, United States had an important role to solve the problem peacefully. In 2010, United States influence was critical for the approval of a new constitution (ibid).

### **USA-Ethiopia**

Ethiopia is a good ally for United States in eliminating terrorism in the Horn of Africa. In doing so, Ethiopia and United States have discussed in different issues about terrorism and Ethiopia has benefited from the Horn Africa Counter-terrorism Initiative (Kidist, 2014). Even though United States has been refusing the human right violations and the handling of the 2005 and 2010 elections in Ethiopia, still United States and Ethiopia have strong relation particularly in the area of security (Browne

et al., 2012). United States has also gained a military base in Ethiopia at Arba Minch. United States has also been engaging in humanitarian issue in Ethiopia. During the Ethio-Eritrea war (1998-2000), United States gave support for the peoples who were affected by the war. Moreover, the Ogaden region has repeatedly been affected by human made and natural disasters like poor rains, drought, and security restrictions provide a continued risk of famine. Following this, United States has granted around \$53 million in emergency assistance to the Ogaden since August 2007 (Swan, 2007).

United States has been continuing a humanitarian and development assistance for Ethiopia. So as to mitigate the impact of drought and other natural disasters, United States provided more than \$160 million in humanitarian assistance and \$300 million for health care in 2007 for Ethiopia (ibid). United States has also given a humanitarian assistance for refugees in Ethiopia (UNICEF, 2011). The United States is helping Ethiopia to build safety net programs and develop its agricultural sectors. Ethiopia's Productive Safety Net Programs provide food and cash to an estimated 7.5 million for work building community assets such as roads, schools, and clinics (Browne et al., 2012). One of the objectives of United States is bringing peace in the Horn of Africa. In this case, United States engaged in brokering the Algiers Agreement to end the 1998–2000 border war between Ethiopia and Eritrea is at a crossroads (Lyon, 2006).

### **USA-Djibouti**

The strategic significance of Djibouti increased as a result of the Ethio-Eritrea war. Though before the war United States had a hope to cultivate more cooperation with Ethiopia and Eritrea than Djibouti, the war disturbed the situation. So, United States took Djibouti as an important ally due to the increasing of terrorist threats in the Horn of Africa (Woodward, 2006).

Djibouti's economy is based on the foreign use of the port. Thus, the area can be exposed easily for attacks and the country may become a more interesting target for transnational terrorism (West, 2005). The USA military used Djibouti as a transit point during Gulf War, but American interest in Djibouti waned after the conflict was over (ibid).

Combined Joint Task Force of Horn of Africa is based in Djibouti. The USA military has based at Camp Lemonier in Djibouti. The United States relations with Djibouti have further tied in recent years. Since 2002, Djibouti has hosted the only permanent USA military base in sub-Saharan Africa (CJFF-HOA). The command's first concern is to prevent the engagement of Al-Qaeda in Somalia and Yemen (Cooke & Downie, 2010). In Djibouti, there are a lot of refugees that needs an emergent humanitarian assistance. As a result, United States has been giving assistance for the refugees in Djibouti

unilaterally and with United Nations as well as with many other international humanitarian institutions (UNICEF, 2011).

### USA-Eritrea

For most 1990s, Eritrea had a good relation with USA (Browne et al., 2012). However, since the outbreak of Ethio-Eritrea war United States has had a loose relation with the Eritrea. Like in Sudan, in the issues of counter-terrorism measures in the region, in promoting human rights and democratization, USA faces difficult choices and complex foreign policy with Eritrea because Eritrean government has a bad record in human rights, and suspected as sponsoring terrorists in the Horn of Africa (West, 2005). Eritrea has been supporting extremist groups in Somalia which includes Al-Shabaab designed as wing of Al Qaeda in the Horn of Africa by United States and United Nations. In addition, it has given supports and trainings for different liberation movements, for instance, Ogaden National Liberation Front (ONLF) in Ethiopia. Because of these activities, the United States has repeatedly pressurized the Eritrean Government on these issues. However, Eritrea remains unresponsive (Cooke & Downie, 2010). In this case, now USA has unfriendly relation with Eritrea.

### Implications of Failure for United States' policy in horn of Africa

Although the United States focuses on security such as counter-terrorism and against extremism, it has clearly failed to produce a stable and peaceful Horn Africa region (Williams, 2011). Though United States propagates democracy, human rights and conflict resolution, now it is giving more concern for counterterrorism by establishing a relation with autocratic governments (Thomas-Jensen, 2008). Therefore, it has undermined other issues, for instance, it become negligent to settle the border dispute between Ethiopia and Eritrea for long lasting due to its first focus on counterterrorism (ibid).

Repeatedly, United States have spoken out against the crimes in Darfur but following the increased cooperation of Sudan government with United States in the area of counter-terrorism, United States forget all about human right violations in Sudan (ibid). For United States cooperation of the Sudan's government on counter-terrorism and intelligence was more important than Darfur issues, even with genocide. It decreased the reliability of United States (Woodward, 2006).

The continuous U.S. air strikes against Islamist holdouts like in Somalia increased the destruction of human and material resources. This led for the intensification of anti-American sentiments in Somalia

and it gives an opportunity for al Qaeda to recruit individuals and groups of terrorists from Somalia (Thomas-Jensen, 2008). For example, the Ethiopian intervention in Somalia in 2006 with the help of United States caused for the emergence of various Islamist and clan-based insurgency (Cooke & Downie, 2010).

### CONCLUSION

In conclusion, Horn of Africa is the geo-politically important region which has been attracting different powers in different times. After, the end of cold war (1991), United States came to Horn of Africa with different interests and policy such as countering terrorism, humanitarian and human right issues, solving conflicts and wars, eliminating civil wars etc. Though United States has a general principles or policy which it follows towards the Horn of Africa, it has different degree of relation with each state of the Horn. For instance, it has a better relation with Ethiopia, Kenya, and Djibouti than Eritrea, Sudan and Somalia.

United States have been collaborating with the states like Ethiopia, Somalia, Kenya, and Djibouti as well as sometimes with Sudan for counter measures of terrorism in the Horn of Africa. And also, United States has been providing humanitarian, developmental and other assistances to Horn of Africa states. United States also engaged in the peace resolution of conflicts in the region, for example in solving the problems between Ethiopia and Eritrea, and the South and Sudan. Even though United States involved in different issues in the Horn of Africa, there are many failures of United States in the Horn of Africa.

### REFERENCES

- Berouk, M. & Roba, S. (eds.) (2011) *Regional security in the post-cold war Horn of Africa*. Pretoria: Institute for security studies.
- Blanchar, M, Christopher, L. P., Ronald, R., Mason, C., King, O. R. (2009) *Piracy off the Horn of Africa*. Washington D.C.: Congressional research service.
- Browne, A. M., Dagne, T., Hanrahan, C. E., Ploch, L., Rennack, D. E., and Chesser, S. G. (2012). *Horn of Africa region: The humanitarian crisis and international response*. Washington D.C :Congressional Research Service.
- Cooke, G. J. & Downie, R. (2010). African conflicts and U.S. diplomacy: Roles and choices. A Report of the CSIS Africa Program and the American Academy of Diplomacy.
- Dagne, T. (2002). "Africa and the war on terrorism: CRS report for Congress." Washington D.C: Congressional Research Service.

- Horn of Africa Steering Committee (2011). Path ways to peace in the Horn of Africa: What role for the United States? Washington D.C: Woodrow Wilson International Center.
- Kidist, M. (2014). The Role of regional powers in the field of peace and security: The case of Ethiopia. Friedrich Ebert Stiftung.
- Lyons, T. (2006). *Avoiding conflict in the Horn of Africa: U.S. policy toward Ethiopia and Eritrea*. New York: Council on Foreign Relations.
- Moller, B. (2009a). *Piracy, maritime terrorism and naval strategy*. Copenhagen: Danish Institute of International studies press.
- \_\_\_\_\_.(2009b). The Horn of Africa and the US "War on Terror" with a special focus on Somalia. Development, Innovation and International Political Economy Research, Aalborg University.
- Office of the Spokesperson. (2011). *U.S. response to humanitarian crisis in the Horn of Africa*. [www.aila.org/content/default.aspx?docid=36600](http://www.aila.org/content/default.aspx?docid=36600). Accessed on 11 March 2012.
- Rennack, E. D. (2005). Sudan: economic sanctions: CRS report for congress. Washington: Congressional Research Service.
- Swan, J. (2007). U.S. policy in the Horn of Africa: 4th International Conference on Ethiopian Development Studies. Michigan, Western Michigan University.
- Thomas-Jensen, C. (2008). *Beyond AFRICOM: Toward a comprehensive U.S. Africa policy*. [www.clingendeal.nl/publications/.../2011200-wollf-choillot\\_paper](http://www.clingendeal.nl/publications/.../2011200-wollf-choillot_paper). Accessed on 11 March 2012
- UNICEF (2011) *Horn of Africa crisis: UNICEF Somalia, Kenya, Ethiopia and Djibouti. Addendum to HAU issued in July 2011.*"<[www.unicef.org/.../UNICEF\\_Humanitarian\\_Action\\_Update\\_Horn...](http://www.unicef.org/.../UNICEF_Humanitarian_Action_Update_Horn...)>. Accessed on 11 March 2012.
- US National Security Council (2008). *Countering piracy off the Horn of Africa : Partnership and action plan.*<[www.dtic.mil/cgi-bin/GetTRDoc?Location=U2&doc...pdf...](http://www.dtic.mil/cgi-bin/GetTRDoc?Location=U2&doc...pdf...)>. Accessed on 11 March 2012.
- DeWaal , A. (ed.) (2004). *Islamism and its enemies in the Horn of Africa*. Shama books: Addis Ababa
- Wasara, S.S. (2002). Conflict and state security in the Horn of Africa: Militarization of civilian groups. *African journal of political science*, 7 (2), 39-60.
- West, D. L. (2005). Combating terrorism in the Horn of Africa and Yemen: Program on intra-state conflict. Massachusetts, Harvard University.
- Williams, P. D. (2011). Horn of Africa: Webs of conflict & path ways to peace. Washington D.C: George Washington University.
- Woodward, P. (2006). *United States foreign policy and the Horn of Africa*. Burlington: Ashgate.