



*Ethiopia's Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed. Photo Credit: Tasnim News Agency*

Stabilizing The Horn Of Africa And Creating A Reliable Environment For An Anti-Terrorist Front – OpEd

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### **Fighting Al-Shabaab and Ethiopia's role**

A key interest of the USA and other democracies in East Africa is focused on anti-terrorist counter insurgency. In this regard, in the past, Ethiopia has played a significant role in combating terrorism in the Horn of Africa.

The country has been a key ally in regional security efforts, particularly in the fight against Al-Shabaab in Somalia. Ethiopian troops have participated in numerous military operations under the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM), contributing to the stabilization of the region. Ethiopia's strategic location and military capabilities have made it an essential partner in counter-terrorism initiatives, helping to disrupt terrorist networks and prevent the spread of extremist ideologies.

All of this has crumbled particularly since the government of Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed signed a memorandum of understanding with Somaliland.

### **What is behind Abiy's move to recognize Somaliland**

Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed's recent move to recognize Somaliland was driven by two primary reasons: building a naval base and gaining access to the sea to bolster his declining legitimacy among Ethiopians. However, this proposal did not gain traction among Ethiopians, and the region as well as the international community.

Instead, the strategy has backfired on Abiy's government and, more importantly, on Abiy himself. His regime is "fatally wounded".

### **Abiy is not a reliable partner**

There are number of reasons why the Abiy Ahmed's government cannot be a reliable partner to fight terrorism:

- Since Abiy has lost legitimacy and is engaged in a bloody civil war in his own country, he will be unable to send meaningful military power to Somalia to fight Al-Shabaab or any other terrorist group. The recent wide spread Ethiopian forced military conscription shows Abiy's weakened ability to mobilize support to join his army.
- Abiy hedges with the UAE, BRICS, including China and Russia, and Türkiye, who have their own regional interest that could be viewed as being against that of the US in many ways.
- Even after he signed agreement with the government of Somalia, Abiy has signed a new military agreement with Somali Land. Obviously, this will not go well with the Government of Somali.

All of this indicates that Abiy cannot be a dependable partner for peace and to fight terrorism in the region. His action could even provoke yet another crisis with Somalia.

As such, the time has come to begin to look beyond Abiy for a solution.

### **What needs to be done?**

The best interests of Ethiopian, the region, and the international community can be achieved and safeguarded only if peace and stability is maintained in Ethiopia. I believe, the way to achieve this is through peaceful resolution of the crisis in Ethiopia.

In this regard, the US government and the international community can play a constructive role by using their influences to convene an all-inclusive national conference of key stakeholders to deliberate on the root causes of the crisis in the country and produce a roadmap to the way forward.

Abiy's legitimacy as well as his capacity to rule has already been seriously compromised. Abiy is now fighting an armed resistance in parts of the country with more than 60% of the total population. His government has lost its ability to rule Tigray and 70-80% of the Amhara region as well as a significant part of Oromia. His government faces a strong military resistance in the entire Amhara region, large parts of Wellega, Guji, Borena and much of Shoa. Fighting with armed resistance forces as close as 50 Km near the capital Addis Ababa is very frequent. Basically, his military capacity has been seriously compromised and weakened.

Jewar Mohamed, a popular politician from the Oromia region who was once an ally of Abiy, has become a significant figure in the opposition, especially among the Oromo youth. He has now come openly indicating his goal to push Abiy out of power. This shift could indeed lead to further deterioration to Abiy's support base in Oromia where he believes his ethnic and traditional support base is.

Given these realities, addressing the root causes of the Ethiopian political crisis is crucial and urgent.

### **The way out is through negotiation and all-inclusive national transition**

Given the instability within Ethiopia under Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed's leadership, it is evident that a new and innovative approach is necessary to address the region's challenges. Abiy's inability to provide a meaningful military presence in Somalia and his erratic behaviors and unstable engagements with various international and regional actors with opposing objectives and interests have undermined his reliability as a partner in the fight against terrorism. Consequently, it is imperative to explore alternative solutions and leadership that can effectively contribute to regional stability and security.

The time has come to look beyond Abiy for a sustainable and comprehensive resolution of the ongoing crises in the Horn of Africa. Abiy has proved to be part of the problem of the crisis both in Ethiopia and neighboring Somalia. The political, economic, and military situation in Ethiopia shows that Abiy's regime can no longer survive the deepening crisis. The only unknown is when he will go.

The regional and international community could help this process and avert the impending crisis not by propping Abiy, but by using their offices to engage stakeholders to convene an all-inclusive national convention that would pave the way to a meaningful transition and a clear road map for peace, stability inclusive and democratic governance that would be a reliable partner for peace in the region and beyond.