

Global War on Terror in Somalia Spreads Asymmetric War to Africa

The worst violence in the Somali capital of Mogadishu in the 16 years that Somalia has not had a government, took place during the last two weeks of April. Bodies rotted in the streets for days, as Ethiopian troops, backing the puppet Transitional Federal Government (TFG), which has no legitimacy, brought in more tanks. At the behest of the Bush Administration, and in the name of the Global War on Terror, Ethiopian troops have been propping up the TFG since its late December invasion. On April 24, a truck-bomb blew up inside an Ethiopian military base outside Mogadishu.

Doctors and hospitals are overwhelmed, as the city has been pounded by tanks, mortars, artillery, and car bombs, which have destroyed buildings, killed up to 1,500 people, and driven 350,000 people out of the city. Aid and food supplies have been held up by the TFG. The United Nations reported that more people have been displaced in Somalia in the last two months, than in any other country.

As in Iraq, Dick Cheney's much-vaunted Global War on Terror has turned Somalia into a training ground for extremists from other countries. The asymmetric war that *EIR* warned would follow after the Ethiopian invasion, now threatens to spread to other nations in the region, as well as the rest of Africa.

Professor Ken Menkhaus of Davidson College in Davidson, N.C., a leading U.S. authority on Somalia, has spent time there, has worked as an advisor to the UN, and assisted many U.S. governmental institutions in developing policy recommendations. He is uniquely situated to provide an expert, insider view on developments in Somalia and the Horn of Africa. With this insight, one can see how the conflict will play out in the longer term, if the provocative unilateral confrontational approach of the Bush Administration and Ethiopia, is not replaced with an approach to Somalia based on economic development. —Douglas DeGroot

Interview: Dr. Kenneth Menkhaus

Dr. Menkhaus was interviewed on April 24 by Lawrence Freeman.

EIR: You're considered an expert in the field of analysis concerning Somalia. How long have you been studying the area, and what kind of experience have you had in that region?

Menkhaus: I first studied there as a student in 1984, and I've been back almost every year. That included time doing my dissertation research in southern Somalia before the war, serving with Famine Relief during the civil war of 1991-92, and then serving as special political advisor in the Unisom [UN Mission in Somalia] peacekeeping mission, 1993-94.



EIR: Have you ever worked for the U.S. government, or have you been independent?

Menkhaus: I've worked on contract for them from time to time, typically through U.S. AID [Agency for International Development] projects involving

research on conflict and development issues, and so on.

EIR: And I know you are called upon many times to provide testimony and expertise to the U.S. Congress and other conferences in Washington.

Menkhaus: That's true.

EIR: Can you give us a report on conditions on the ground now, the situation with the displaced people, the number of deaths, the conditions in Mogadishu? You told me earlier that this is the worst possible scenario, a "perfect storm" for disaster. Can you fill our readers in on what you mean by that?

Menkhaus: The humanitarian crisis that is being produced by the very heavy fighting in Mogadishu, is the worst humanitarian crisis in Somalia since the 1982 famine. We now have, in a city of roughly 1 million people, an estimated 200,000-300,000 displaced. They're being displaced in a context of ongoing fighting, in a context of heavy rains coming in; the rainy season has begun, and there is flooding in the Shabelle River, where many of them have fled. So disease is rife. We've got outbreaks of cholera and other lethal waterborne diseases. And at the same time, Mogadishu and the surrounding area have been largely off-limits to international relief agencies,



due to a combination of insecurity and policies that are being enforced by the Transitional Federal Government, which are very restrictive, and seem to be designed to impede the flow of food relief to the populations that they are fighting.

EIR: There's no simple cause for what is happening, but there are a lot of factors that are coming together now that are producing this crisis.

Menkhaus: On the humanitarian side, yes, this is the perfect storm: the combination of the rainy season, the war, the displacement, and then the government policy.

EIR: I would say that the situation there has deteriorated back to the level we saw in, say, 1992-94 which was popularly associated with the movie "Blackhawk Down." But certainly, the situation has gotten far, far worse since 2006, prior to the military invasion. What is your view of it?

Menkhaus: Well, you can't even compare the situation in 2006, at least the latter half of 2006, with what's going on there now. In the latter half of 2006, the Islamist movement, which took control of the entire capital and the surrounding areas, was able to impose public order, rule of law, and government services in a way that the population hadn't seen in 16 years. You could walk the street safely day or night, businesses could be open late. This was by far and away the best public security that Mogadishu had seen, and gave the Somali citizens there a lot of hope.

Unfortunately, the Islamist movement turned radical, at least some elements within the Islamist movement turned radical; they helped provoke this war with Ethiopia. And now

we have a situation where the Ethiopian forces appear to be indiscriminately shelling whole neighborhoods. I received a report today which is claiming that one in three homes in northern Mogadishu has been damaged or destroyed.

This is a level of destruction in a very short period of time, that the city has never seen.

EIR: There's a report that somewhere between 200,000 to 300,000 people have left Mogadishu due to the shelling by the Ethiopian forces.

Menkhaus: And it's not just Ethiopia. I think it's important to stress to your readers that all sides are engaged in fairly indiscriminate shelling that is hitting mainly civilians. This is one of the tragedies, and this is raising issues of violations of international humanitarian law, that all parties to this dispute could face in the future.

EIR: Let's go back to 2006. After the failed attempts to support certain of the militia against the Union of Islamic Courts in the Spring and Summer, there was a decision made to provide logistical support, and I believe special forces from the United States and Britain, to the Ethiopian Army, to launch this invasion in late December, under the guise of fighting Islamic terrorism, as part of the global war on terror.

And the idea was that the Ethiopian military would remove itself in early 2007, and the Transitional Federal Government would then take over. But that's not what's turned out, and it does appear that this invasion in December has actually worsened the crisis. What is your view?

Menkhaus: Absolutely. I'd qualify your description of the U.S. role in the actual intervention. The U.S. was actually restraining Ethiopia in the first half of 2006, arguing that there was a good reason to believe that a deal could be brokered between the Transitional Federal Government and the moderate wing of the Islamists. The U.S. was pressing very hard for a diplomatic solution, not a military one.

At some point, in the Fall of 2006, when it was clear that the hardliners from the Islamist movement were driving policy, the U.S. government shifted to a policy of essentially telling Ethiopia, we understand that you have to do what you have to do. That's quite a bit different from subcontracting out the war on terror to a regional state. Ethiopia is not in that sense a client of the United States. It very much pursues its own interest in the region, whether we agree with it or not, and we often don't agree with Ethiopian policy on a range of issues.

In this case, it is true that some U.S. military advisors apparently were on the ground during this offensive. It is not at all clear—the extent of the U.S. involvement is not at all clear at this time. That's going to take some time to discern.

As for the long-term impact: Many of us warned that an Ethiopian offensive would run the risk of a quagmire in Somalia. And we were initially—when Ethiopia scored those initial dramatic victories over the Islamists, and occupied the

capital without a shot being fired then—we were dismissed as alarmists. But in fact, within weeks, a complex insurgency has emerged in Mogadishu, and we've now got a scenario that is actually worse than any of us anticipated. I don't think any of us thought it would get this bad.

EIR: Who, are the Ethiopians actually fighting now? Are they fighting the Union of Islamic Courts? Are they fighting the various clans? And who are the organized groups that are now carrying out this asymmetric warfare against them?

Menkhaus: I used the expression "complex insurgency," to capture the fact that it isn't a single group that is resisting the Ethiopian military presence in Mogadishu. The insurgency includes principally clan militias from the Hawiye clan family, which are strongly opposed both to the Ethiopian presence, and to the Transitional Federal Government, as it's currently constituted—it's a very narrow clan coalition, that does not represent most of the people in Mogadishu. They reject it, and they are determined to prevent it from becoming operational.

In addition to the Hawiye clan militias, you've got some warlord militias, that simply oppose the establishment of any government, and then you've got the regrouping Islamists. I am told that the Hawiye clan is actually trying to keep the hardline Islamists out of the city. They do not want to be perceived as an Islamist insurgency. They want it understood that they are a clan-based resistance movement. Nonetheless, it is clear that some of the Islamists are active, as part of the resistance. You can see it from, for instance, the suicide attack on an Ethiopian military base—that's really a signature of a jihadist tactic, not something that a clan militia, I think, would have done.

EIR: The Transitional Federal Government that is supported by the U.S. government, and other governments outside Somalia: What kind of support does it have inside the country?

Menkhaus: It's got very weak support inside the country. It has very questionable legitimacy. It's considered a very narrow clan coalition. It's considered to be a client, or puppet, of Ethiopia. And so it has faced an uphill battle in convincing Somalis that it should be treated as a legitimate government.

Externally, you're right. External actors have recognized the TFG as the sole legitimate repository of Somali sovereignty. It's the government that we have to work with. Everyone is pressing the Transitional Federal Government to engage in political dialogue, to make itself more inclusive, so that it's acceptable to a broader range of Somalis. The problem is most Somalis have already given up on it. They don't want to legitimize it, they want to end it.

And so, the international policy is at odds with the inclination of most Somalis at this point.

EIR: Returning to the question of asymmetric warfare—I think this was known, or could have been seen in advance. If

you look at the situation in Iraq, after the military part of the campaign was completed, you had Jerry Bremer come in May, and he issued two orders, Executive Orders 1 and 2, which did two things: He called for all Ba'athists to be removed from the government, and he disbanded the army. Some people on the ground said that, "You guaranteed that you're going to have 350,000 enemies immediately." And that seems to me, if not conscious, was an act that led to the asymmetric warfare. It seems to me that the way the invasion was handled—and I think there was evidence of U.S. logistical support, satellite intelligence, and some special forces. And then, that was followed with two gunship attacks. One could foresee, couldn't one, that this would lead to an asymmetric warfare uprising?

Menkhaus: The way that events played out in late December were so unexpected, that I think that any planning, any contingencies, were tossed out the window. No one foresaw that Ethiopia would be able to walk into Mogadishu without a fight. I think most of us thought that Ethiopia wouldn't even try to go into Mogadishu. But because the Council of Islamic Courts dissolved itself, and fled south, that provided this very unexpected scenario.

Once in Mogadishu, you could virtually count on an armed insurgency against Ethiopia, of some kind. And you don't even need to look as far afield as Iraq and Baghdad to anticipate the kind of fighting that would take place. Those of us who served in Unisom still had fresh memories of fighting an unwinnable war against the clan militia of General Aideed in the Summer and Fall of 1993.

EIR: There's a history that goes back, some people say centuries, between the Ethiopians and the Somalis. Using your knowledge of that history, what do you think is the cause of this current crisis, which has now devolved to a new level of catastrophe?

Menkhaus: The two societies and countries do have a long history of animosity. Somali governments have never recognized the border with Ethiopia. They make irredentist claims on Somali-inhabited territory in Ethiopia. They launched a devastating war, that they eventually lost—it was a very costly war, the Ogaden War, in 1977-78—in an attempt to grab that land.

Ethiopia is hypersensitive about any government in Somalia that is going to resurrect those irredentist claims on its territory. The hard-line Islamists, who did in fact invoke those irredentist claims, also invoked jihad against Ethiopia, called for a popular uprising against the Meles Zenawi government, forged close relations with Ethiopia's arch-rival in the neighborhood, Eritrea—basically did everything they could to guarantee, if not a war, then the threat of war with the government of Ethiopia.

For its part, Ethiopia has also helped propel the situation into war, in part because of its close support of TFG, which is considered a puppet, in part because of the presence of Ethiopian forces to protect the TFG in Somalia in the months



World Food Program

Somalis who have been forced to flee the violence resulting from the Bush Administration-sanctioned Ethiopian military intervention, end up in camps such as this one, where they live in shelters they make from sticks and rags, and become dependent on food aid.

leading up to the war. And even without all that, there were long-running tensions over the treatment of Somali Ethiopians in eastern Ethiopia. They are considered second-class citizens; they feel that they are occupied by the government of Ethiopia. Sometimes they exaggerate their grievances; other times their grievances are very real. And that spills over into relations between the two.

But I should say that Ethiopia at times has had very good relations with some Somali groups, including some of the Mogadishu factions. Back in 1994-95, the Ethiopian government was instrumental in trying to hold peace conferences, and to help Somalis out of their mess. So these two societies are not hard-wired to hate each other. Circumstances change. I could see them working things out. But at present, the circumstances are moving in the opposite direction.

EIR: That's what I wanted to ask you about. What kind of change do we have to bring about in the circumstances, or in the environment, or in the political geometry, to find a way for the two countries to find common interest? In January, there were conferences in Washington where the U.S. said, "We will have a conference on reconciliation." The U.S. was going to give what I consider a small amount, \$40 million, half of it for humanitarian aid, and Ethiopia was going to retreat back to its borders, and African troops were going to come in. They called for, I think, 8,000 by mid-February or mid-March.

Well, Ethiopia has not retreated, there is no reconciliation conference, and there are 1,200 Ugandan soldiers, and I doubt any other country is going to send any more, so how do we

work our way out of this?

Menkhaus: Well, there is going to have to be a ceasefire declared, and then enforced. I think that's the first thing. Both sides are suffering enough casualties and paying a heavy enough price, that it is foreseeable that they'll be exhausted; they'll reach a hurting stalemate sometime in the near future.

Thereafter, there has to be a negotiated withdrawal of Ethiopian forces. They are the lightning rod. Their presence in Mogadishu guarantees trouble, and they know that. And I don't think they want to stay. This does run the risk of a quagmire for them. The problem is, no one else wants to inject troops in there. We've had the Secretary General of the UN, just yesterday, in his report to the Security Council, suggest that discussions be held about the possibility of another UN force, if African Union forces can't be mustered, that a broader international force come in to try to keep the peace in the interim.

I don't know if that is desirable, or even possible. But there is going to need to be some kind of very smooth hand-over to a local authority to try to keep the peace. If I were the Transitional Federal Government, I would turn to the old Benadir authority that

was created by the Mogadishu community a few years ago.¹ It has some credibility—basically, self-rule: Hand over administration of the city to the residents of the city, as a way of reassuring them that they are not being occupied or colonized, and as a way of quickly improving security. They did show that they could do it last year, with or without the Islamists. I think it's entirely possible. I think that many of the moderate Islamists could play a role again, either formally or informally, in that kind of administration.

Then you need longer-term talks, within the Somali community, and they need to really talk, not just discuss power-sharing, which is always where their national reconciliation conferences end up. Instead, they need to discuss underlying conflict issues, of which they have many. And their leaders have routinely avoided discussing them.

And then, finally, you need a peace between the two principal protagonists in this fight, which is the government of Ethiopia and the Mogadishu group, the loose coalition of clans and Islamists and interests in Mogadishu that have been at odds with one another for the better part of ten years now. Until they sit and hammer out a *modus vivendi*—and it would involve both sides making some painful concessions—we're going to continue to have this standoff.

1. Benadir refers to the Indian Ocean coast of Somalia, including Mogadishu. The Benadir Administration was set up to govern Mogadishu and its environs in August 1998 as a result of talks in Cairo, and was unofficially recognized by four governments: Egypt, Libya, Sudan, and Yemen. Regional organizations and representatives from international bodies had demonstrated cautious interest in the progress of the Benadir Administration, until fresh fighting erupted in the capital in March-April 1999—Ed.

Ethiopia will not allow the rise of a strong, centralized, Islamist, anti-Ethiopian government in Somalia. It won't allow it. And so there is going to have to be concessions made in Somalia about the kind of state, and the kind of foreign policy that it has, that will be minimally acceptable to Ethiopia.

Ethiopia, for its part, is going to have to accept the fact that some clans and some Islamists whom they're uncomfortable with, are going to have a seat at the table in a future Somali government. Its unavoidable.

If the two can hammer that out, if they can make these painful concessions, we can get beyond this mess, and allow the people of the Horn of Africa to get back to a normal life.

EIR: Some of our readers may not know how much this clan culture is inseparable from any consideration of politics in Somalia. But what you were saying earlier, in this Mogadishu situation—you see a combination of clans opposed to the Transitional Government, and you also see that among some of the Islamists. So are they operating in some kind of loose coordination, are they independent groups? Essentially you would have to deal with both the clans and the Islamists, because you could not keep them out of some kind of coalition agreement. I don't think they would accept that.

Menkhaus: And the government of national unity that has to emerge in Somalia, whether it is a more inclusive Transitional Federal Government, or a more inclusive successor government, to the TFG, has to be a true government of national unity. What continues to happen, is Somalis declare these governments, and they are in fact—they look superficially like they cover all the clans in the country. In fact, what they do is, they marginalize opponents of the people in power. And so Somali political leaders continue to operate under the illusion that they can impose a victor's peace on their enemies, and what they end up with each time is a stalemate—in some cases a very bloody stalemate, like what we've had here—and not a functional government.

EIR: One of the underlying problems that I see, is that you're dealing with some very poor, desolate areas, as also we are in Darfur, Sudan. And a real commitment of economic development, which would include infrastructure and water management, electrical power, and roads that would provide economic security for everybody involved, it seems to me, is necessary for progress in the Ethiopia-Somali conflict, especially in Somalia. But I also see the same thing is needed in parts of Sudan. This kind of commitment for an economic approach seems to me absent from any discussions that I've heard of. I think it is absolutely essential.

Menkhaus: It certainly is essential for the well-being of the Somali people. It's one of the poorest countries in the world, and so promoting effective and sustainable economic development is a top humanitarian priority. I would say that state-building can occur effectively with only minimal economic

development. And the reason I say that is because it has already happened. Somaliland, the unrecognized secessionist state in the Northwest of Somalia, has been able to cobble together a modest state, based on very modest revenues—the budget typically is between \$25-30 million a year for the whole government—and yet, it runs quite well. And there is peace and security, and now economic recovery, in Somaliland.

We saw the Islamists in Mogadishu for six months, create a pretty impressive administration, based again on fairly modest revenues. A lot depends on the kind of state that the Somalis think they are reviving. If they want to revive the maximalist state that is going to provide civil-service jobs for thousands and thousands of people, and then there are no resources for it—then there's going to be conflict, because the pie isn't big enough for all the people with a plate.

If you take a different approach to the state in Somalia, and say, "Let's create a state that matches our current economic reality," so it's going to have to be a minimalist state that focusses on just a handful of core government functions that the Somali people most need and want, then you take the cake out of the equation altogether. There's nothing to fight over. There's not going to be lots of jobs, there's not going to be lots of money, and yet there could be some services that would be of real value, and that would eventually promote the kind of economic recovery that could allow the Somalis to have the resources to build whatever state they feel is appropriate.

EIR: Some would have a different view. Our approach toward Sub-Saharan Africa, and globally, is to get the United States, with other major powers, such as China, Russia, and India, to launch great infrastructural projects. And when you're dealing in Sub-Saharan Africa, they would be almost grants, but certainly, 25-year, low-interest loans for water management, electrical power, roads, so that you actually would bring the level of economic existence in the Horn of Africa (but also Nigeria, Congo, and other countries), up to the level that we should consider normal for human beings to operate and live in. So we would be looking at much greater state-sponsorship and aid from the West, in terms of real infrastructure capital development.

Menkhaus: There are some major infrastructural challenges in Somalia that the current private sector in Somalia just can't meet. There's too many free-rider dilemmas, and other reasons why they're not interested in, for instance, building roads and repairing bridges, repairing canals along the Shabelle River. Things like that really require—and would be appropriate for large-scale foreign-aid grants.

But for the rest, Somalis, if they really want something to happen, have a remarkable capacity to make it happen, as long as it doesn't cost too much money. And even things like water and electric grids in the capital, Mogadishu, are currently the domain of business people who are providing those services.

EIR: Have you seen from the Executive branch, which I guess would be through the State Department, or from the Congress, any proposals in terms of how they think the U.S. could aid in resolving this crisis? I haven't seen much.

Menkhaus: The last public statement of any significance, was made in the immediate aftermath of Assistant Secretary of State Jendayi Frazer's visit to Baidoa, Somalia, I think it was April 7. After that meeting with TFG officials, she made a series of statements that stressed the need for more inclusive governance, the need for a ceasefire, and the need for international support for the TFG, to build its capacity. We haven't really seen anything more from the U.S. government, although today's meeting of the Security Council might produce some statements by both the U.S. and others that could be revealing.

There's a lot of pressure on the International community to put pressure on the TFG and the Ethiopians to stop the actions that are helping to produce this humanitarian crisis.

EIR: That's true. I think they would have to see if there is actually an intention to resolve this crisis. What concerns me, is that if you look at how the violence has spread in four months, and you look at what potentially could develop in Sudan, and other problems we have, I could see that the Horn of Africa could escalate in terms of increase of asymmetric warfare right across the water from what we are already seeing as a very important situation in Southwest Asia. I think that this is something that is very dangerous to Africa, and to the whole region, if this thing were to spread.

Menkhaus: It certainly has a capacity to spread into Ethiopia, for starters, and possibly even into northern Kenya, and to Nairobi.

EIR: What do you think about Eritrea coming in support of Somalia?

Menkhaus: Eritrea is using the insurgency in Mogadishu as a proxy war against its nemesis—Ethiopia. It's a no-brainer for Eritrea. This creates a very expensive, draining conflict for Ethiopia to have to deal with on its eastern front, but Eritrea is playing with fire. It has no friends in the region; it has virtually no friends in the world right now, it's very isolated, and it would do well to focus on improving its situation at home, rather than meddling in—playing out a proxy war along with Ethiopia, inside Somalia. I mean, the poor Somalis are paying the price for this proxy war between Ethiopia and Somalia, there.

EIR: Just before we began this interview, you were telling me about a new terrorist development in the region.

Menkhaus: We had breaking news today of an attack on an oil site north of the town of Jijiga, in Somali-inhabited Ethiopia. Seventy-four people died in that attack, mainly Ethiopians, but also nine Chinese oil workers were killed, and several Chinese were also taken hostage. This attack was

conducted by the Ogaden National Liberation Front (ONLF). It is a long-running, armed insurgency of Somali Ethiopians against the government of Ethiopia.

Its objectives have been at times unclear. Sometimes it's discussed secessionist aims, other times, simply self-determination within Ethiopia. It represents the grievances of the Somali Ethiopians who feel marginalized in Ethiopia. A fairly unusual attack, this was, far and away, the most lethal attack it has ever launched. It has not engaged in more than a handful of these kinds of attacks, per year, and usually much smaller in scale. So this is a major new development. It is almost certainly linked to the ONLF condemnation of Ethiopia's offensive into Somalia. We were fearing that the ONLF would eventually take action, and in fact it has.

EIR: So could this kind of major development itself be a catalyst for the kind of spread of warfare now inside Ethiopia?

Menkhaus: It could, and it will be—we'll all stand by to see what kind of reaction this elicits from the Ethiopian government, which of course now has some of its forces stretched along the border with Eritrea, which continues to be a flash-point for potential violence. It's got some of its forces in Somalia; now it's going to have to react to the ONLF's attack in eastern Ethiopia. And at some point, the Ethiopian military is going to get overstretched.

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