

USAWC STRATEGY RESEARCH PROJECT

SHOULD THE UNITED STATES INCREASE  
ITS ENGAGEMENT WITH ERITREA?

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## ABSTRACT

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This paper will discuss Eritrea's history, historical and current relationship with the United States (U.S.), and those elements of U.S. national power that should be used in a future strategy concerning Eritrea. The Horn of Africa is becoming increasingly important to the National Security Strategy of the United States. The region is one that directly affects U.S. objectives in the global war on terrorism (GWOT) and regional stability. The U.S. is very much engaged diplomatically, economically and militarily in Ethiopia, Sudan, Djibouti, and Yemen. However, Eritrea receives less than adequate attention in its importance to regional stability or its impact on U.S. national security interests and objectives. Eritrea has a history of affecting whether or not the U.S. accomplishes its objectives in the region. Eritrea is struggling with significant internal developmental issues but wants to be a participant in the GWOT. The transitional government has become authoritarian. Its heavy handedness has often resulted in the loss of freedom of expression and representation in the country. The economic and humanitarian situations are just as dire. Additionally, there is the growing possibility of a terrorist organization supported by Al Qaeda attempting to turn the country into an Islamic state. Eritrea is important to the U.S. because it is a key ally in the GWOT, is critical in maintaining regional stability, and could provide the U.S. access to the Red Sea. The U.S. has the opportunity to assist Eritrea in developing democratic values through the example of the U.S. military. Without a stable and productive Eritrea there will not be peace in the region, the U.S. will not have an Eritrean ally in the GWOT nor have the access Eritrea provides to the Red Sea Basin. Without U.S. support in general and military support in particular, Eritrea is likely to become an authoritarian state and search for support from countries not friendly toward the U.S.



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## SHOULD THE UNITED STATES INCREASE ITS ENGAGEMENT WITH ERITREA?

Eritrea is a small Horn of Africa country with a population of approximately 3.5 million and a geographical area the size of the state of Pennsylvania<sup>1</sup>. The nation has a history of affecting whether or not the U.S. accomplishes its objectives in the region. Eritrea was critical during World War II (WWII), played a significant role during and after the Cold War. Eritrea is poised to continue to assist the U. S. in the Global War on Terrorism, and can have a major impact on regional stability in the Horn of Africa; both are priorities espoused in the Bush administration's National Security Strategy.<sup>2</sup>

While offering potential benefits as a partner, Eritrea is struggling with significant internal developmental issues. To meet the administration's objectives will require a stable and democratic Eritrea. A struggling Eritrea may fall prey to terrorist organizations, internal chaos, or become the focus of regional conflicts. The present regime is authoritarian and is increasing its heavy handed, repressive methods. The normal judicial, governmental, health and educational institutions found in most developed nations are still in embryonic stages in Eritrea where they exist at all. Also, there is the appearance that at least one Islamic fundamentalist group is growing and working to change the nation into an Islamic state with the assistance of Al Qaeda.

Despite Eritrea's developmental issues, the U.S. can accomplish its goals and assist Eritrea through military engagement. The U. S. military is the one element of power that has been consistent in Eritrea since WWII. The U.S. military is respected by the Eritrean leadership which is looking for recognition in the international community, and by a population that knows little but war. There is a limited period of time in which the U.S. can engage the Eritreans and assist in establishing the foundation for the nation to grow into a democratic nation. Greater U.S. military engagement will assist the nation to become a better neighbor in the region, will foster further development of democratic values, and will promote regional stability. The U.S. military can set the example. If the U. S. will not support Eritrea, then Eritrea will look outside of the West for support as it has in the past.

The U. S. should establish forward bases in Eritrea and utilize programs such as the African Contingency Operations Training and Assistance (ACOTA) and Global Peace Operations Initiative (GPOI) to further engage Eritrea. By using Eritrea as a forward basing area the U.S. can be in a better position to fight the GWOT, and assist in maintaining regional stability. It may also allow the U.S. to reduce the number of troops assigned to other Middle East nations if necessary.

## **BACKGROUND**

Prior to Independence: The U.S. began its involvement and developed its interests in Eritrea when the American firm of Johnson, Drake and Piper implemented military projects in Eritrea that were eventually taken over by the U.S. Army when the U.S. entered the war on the side of the Allies in 1941. The results were an aircraft assembly plant at Gura, and naval bases established in the port city of Massawa. In Asmara, workshops were converted into repair facilities and a signal facility was established. Eritrea's 600 mile Red Sea coastline was important because of its relatively close distance to Saudi Arabia and Yemen, but more importantly its strategic importance in keeping control of the sea lanes that connect Europe and North America with East Africa, the Persian Gulf and Asia. The Suez Canal could be controlled with bases along the Red Sea as well.<sup>3</sup>

After World War II the United Nations (UN) took up the case of Eritrea's desire for self-determination and debated what should become of the former Italian colony. After five years of debating the issue the UN settled with a compromise involving a loose federation with Ethiopia in December 1950. The federation became effective in September 1952.<sup>4</sup> Ethiopia stated up front that it believed that Eritrea was a part of Ethiopia and not a separate nation when the Emperor made the following statement after the federation:

...through the return in 1952 of its historic ports on the Red Sea and of the long lost territory of Eritrea, Ethiopia has not only regained access to the sea, but has been one of the few states in the post-war world to have gained lost territory, pursuant to post war treaties and in application of peaceful methods.<sup>5</sup>

The Emperor's 1952 statement concerning the regaining of a lost territory and Ethiopia's ports on the Red Sea portended things to come. Ethiopia's Emperor Haile Selassie abrogated the federal treaty in 1962, making Eritrea the fourteenth province of Ethiopia.<sup>6</sup> American policy was based on the region's relevance to overall U.S. strategic objectives. This meant that the U.S. was going to support Ethiopia because it controlled Eritrean territory and the U.S. needed access to the Red Sea. The Eritrean province allowed U.S. access to the Red Sea, the Suez Canal and the Middle East. This was emphasized by the U. S. State Department Secretary of State John Foster Dulles, who remarked that "from the point of view of justice, the opinion of the Eritreans must receive consideration. Nevertheless, the strategic interest of the United States in the Red Sea basin and considerations of security and world peace make it necessary that the country has to be linked with our ally."<sup>7</sup>

Because the U.S. needed a strong partner to ensure that Ethiopia would support U.S. interests, the U.S. assisted in the development of the Ethiopian military. Between 1953 and

1960 the U.S. assisted Ethiopia in developing Africa's first modern military. The force consisted of three 6000 man divisions equipped primarily with WWII surplus equipment,<sup>8</sup> and eventually Ethiopia obtained the first supersonic jet aircraft on the African continent. The force was in place to defend Eritrea as an Ethiopian province. Ethiopia in return deployed forces to Korea and the Congo in support of U.S. missions; and the Emperor allowed the U.S. to construct military and intelligence installations, and Kagnew telecommunications station in Asmara, the capital of the Eritrean province.<sup>9</sup> For its part the U.S. remained silent when Haile Selassie broke the international agreement that provided Eritrea autonomy and formed the Ethiopian-Eritrean Federation. Moreover, the UN also did not object to the Emperor's annexation of Eritrea.<sup>10</sup> The U.S. viewed the military bases in Eritrea as critical to its security strategy and was convinced that without Ethiopian support it would not have control of the bases and thus the Red Sea Basin.

The Struggle for Independence: U. S. interests in Ethiopia remained consistent during the 1960s and 70s. Eritrea as a province of Ethiopia was critical to U. S. basing in support of its national objectives. The U. S. military remained in Eritrea during the early years of Eritrea's struggle for independence. Members of the Eritrean independence movement are now the government and opposition members that the U.S. must deal with.

The character and history of the present government and its opposition were formed prior to and during the struggle for independence. The organizations that initiated the struggle in the early 1960s had their beginnings much earlier and during the struggle would split and form separate organizations based on ideology. The ELF formed in Cairo in 1960 and backed by Arab nations, became the primary nationalist resistance group opposing Ethiopia. It escalated hostilities through the use of guerilla warfare throughout the 1960s.<sup>11</sup> Due to ideological and ethnic reasons the ELF split into two separate groups which resulted in the formation of the Eritrean People's Liberation Front (EPLF), a Marxist-oriented organization. The EPLF espoused "revolution before unity" and became the dominant revolutionary organization in the battle with Ethiopia. The guerilla forces were so successful that in 1971, Ethiopia declared martial law and deployed half of its armed forces to Eritrea to put down the rebellion.<sup>12</sup>

U.S.-Eritrean Relations: U.S. foreign policy was guided by its military bases in Eritrea, the Kagnew telecommunication station and various other military and intelligence installations.<sup>13</sup> Moreover, U.S. security policy makers did not question Ethiopia's desire for territorial integrity as long as the basing rights continued. In the early to mid 1970s, U.S. officials were concerned that an independent Eritrea would end access to what was considered to be one of the most valuable telecommunication centers in the Middle East.<sup>14</sup> The U. S. had learned the

significance of having naval bases, repair facilities, and the telecommunications center in Eritrea during WWII and it continued to be critical three decades later to maintain the large military presence.

U.S. access to Eritrea played an important supporting role by enabling the U.S. to carry out its Horn of Africa and Middle East objectives during the Cold War, although Eritrean liberation forces posed a problem for the region in their efforts to seek independence from Ethiopia. The independence movement served as a destabilizing factor for Ethiopia and Sudan but had little effect on U.S. forces in Eritrea. However the U.S. would eventually lose its bases and strategic location that provided access to the Red Sea Basin.

In the mid 1970s there was a change of government in Ethiopia: Emperor Haile Selassie's imperial regime fell to the Marxist regime, known as the Derg, of Colonel Mengistu Haile Mariam. The Ethiopian Derg proclaimed Ethiopia to be a socialist country and broke relations with Washington in 1977.<sup>15</sup> The new super power in charge was the Soviet Union, which immediately provided over \$11 billion in arms and high level military advisers; most of which were used by Ethiopia to attempt to quell the rebellion.<sup>16</sup> The U.S. developed what became referred to by then Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs Chester Crocker as the pursuit of a "negative strategic interest." This involved arming pro-Western states surrounding Ethiopia while ignoring the continued fighting in Eritrea.<sup>17</sup> However, now it was Soviets on Eritrean soil occupying former American installations rather than Americans. Eritrea was now on its own to fight Ethiopia and the Soviet Union for its independence. Going it alone was a theme that remained with the liberation movement when it took power at independence.

## **INDEPENDENCE AND BORDER DEMARCATION**

The U.S. lost its bases and had little to do with Eritrea until Eritrea gained its independence. The importance of Eritrea in the region was not overlooked but it was minimized. Eritrea did not know how to act as a new nation and its military was the strongest institution at the time. Eritrea would continue to resort to armed conflict to solve its problems gaining it a reputation as the trouble maker in the region.

In 1993 a referendum was held and over 98 percent of the Eritrean population voted for independence. Between 1993 and 1998 the U.S re-established military to military relations with Eritrea. There were special operations and other military personnel that conducted initial assessments of the Eritrean military as it sought to demobilize and professionalize. Eritrea became the recipient of International Military Education Training (IMET) funds to assist in improving its military. Additionally the U.S. military initiated a de-mining program to assist with

de-mining the large portion of the country that contained mines and unexploded ordinance from thirty years of fighting. In 1993 Eritrean President Afwerki asked for a formal Defense relationship with the U.S. Eritrea wanted to be an ally of the U.S.<sup>18</sup> The U.S. turned down Afwerki opting to provide the aforementioned smaller military aid package.

The U.S. had an opportunity to positively influence the government of Eritrea and its development through the U.S. military but chose not to at that time. Eritrea was not considered as politically significant as the other countries in the region. The war on terrorism had not been declared and the end of the Eritrean war for independence provided an indication that regional stability was possible. The U.S. had too many other priorities at the time. U.S. military assistance and representation in the country might have been able to persuade Eritrea not to resolve its disagreements by conflict as would become the norm. Eventually, Eritrea looked to other nations for support. Eritrea may have been independent but settling issues by conflict was what it understood and by doing so was becoming a destabilizing factor in the region.

Eritrea showed signs of becoming a problem within the region by going to war with Yemen over the Hanish Islands. To both countries' credit they accepted an international court decision that split the islands but found primarily in Yemen's favor. Small disputes continue over fishing rights surrounding the islands. Additionally, Eritrea had differences with Sudan which it claimed was supporting rebel forces against the new government. However, both incidents paled in comparison to the renewed conflict with Ethiopia.

In 1998 war broke out between Eritrea and Ethiopia. Although the war was ostensibly over the Badme area, it was primarily the result of un-resolved issues from the 30 year war for independence. The primary issue: the border demarcation was not confirmed at the time of independence.<sup>19</sup> This new war was costly to both countries. For the next two years Eritrea and Ethiopia fought and lost thousands of lives, destroyed the agricultural based economy of Eritrea, and displaced thousands of refugees from the front areas. Both countries continue to require large amounts of humanitarian assistance. More importantly the region was in conflict again and that conflict could conceivably expand to neighboring nations. The conflict was having a negative effect on U.S. regional objectives.

The U.S. withdrew its military support from both countries during the conflict but played a large diplomatic role during the two year conflict. President Clinton named former National Security Adviser Anthony Lake as Special Envoy for the crisis and sent a team consisting of Foreign Service, National Security Council, and Defense personnel to negotiate with Eritrea and Ethiopia. Eventually, an agreement to end hostilities was signed in Algiers in June 2000.<sup>20</sup> The UN sent a peacekeeping force, United Nations Mission Eritrea, Ethiopia (UNMEE), to enforce

the agreement between Eritrea and Ethiopia while the border demarcation took place. The independent demarcation commission concluded the disputed area of Badme did in fact belong to Eritrea.<sup>21</sup> Although both sides agreed to be bound by the commission's results Ethiopia contested the finding.<sup>22</sup> In November 2004, Ethiopia finally accepted "in principle" the independent border commission's ruling concerning the border between Ethiopia and Eritrea. The commission ruled that the town of Badme, the catalyst for the 1998-2000 war that resulted in the death of an estimated 70,000 people, belonged to Eritrea. The conflict reached termination because fighting stopped, however the situation is far from resolution. The border must still be physically demarcated and both nations may use the slow process to resume hostilities.

However, since Eritrean independence and the terrorist attacks of 9/11 the U.S. national security strategy for the region has grown in importance and both countries are playing a part. Eritrea and Ethiopia are allies in the GWOT and both are in a region that has nations that have supported terrorism and instability in the region. Sudan and Somalia are part of the Horn of Africa and are bordering nations to Eritrea and Ethiopia. The two nations are allies but their internal problems and distrust for each other has the ability to hinder the U.S. National Security Strategy and objectives for the region.

#### **U.S. SECURITY STRATEGIES AND FOREIGN OBJECTIVES**

Each National Security Strategy since 1997 has called for more engagement in Africa. Little was done prior to the terrorist attacks of 9/11. After 9/11 and the start of the war on terrorism, strategies became more focused and the Horn of Africa became critical to accomplishing U.S. strategies. The primary objectives in the Horn of Africa region are fighting global terrorism, diffusing regional conflicts, and preserving human dignity as stated in the Bush Administration's U.S. National Security Strategy.<sup>23</sup> The

U. S. National Defense Strategy reinforces the National Strategy with its three primary objectives being: secure strategic access and retain global freedom of action; establish security conditions conducive to a favorable international order; and strengthen alliances and partnerships to contend with common challenges.<sup>24</sup> Eritrea has promised its support in the GWOT. Its geographical location is as important today as it was during WWII and the Cold War. Its location allows strategic access to the Red Sea Basin, and the Middle East.

However, the ruling Eritrean transitional government is showing more and more a trend of becoming an authoritarian government that has little tolerance for opposing views which limits freedom of expression, cultural and religious representation in the country.<sup>25</sup> The government

is increasingly arresting political dissidents, some of which are former senior members of the government and former high ranking freedom fighters. Regional military commanders that respond directly to the president appear to be gaining more and more power. Re-shuffling of government officials and marginalizing positions that may not be in complete agreement with the president's views does not bode well for the future. The deteriorating situation could see more of the population turn to the Eritrean Islamic Jihad Movement (EIJM) and possibly new opposition groups. Continued U.S. military presence in Eritrea would have a calming and positive effect on the government, thus reducing the heavy handedness of the government. The Eritrean military would have a positive example to follow; the government would have counter terrorism assistance; and someone watching its actions on behalf of the U.S.

Ethiopia has been designated an "anchor" country in the Horn of Africa by the Bush administration.<sup>26</sup> Ethiopia cannot provide the access to the Red Sea Basin that Eritrea can, however it is assisting with the GWOT and provides access to Somalia. Additionally, Ethiopia is a major trading partner in Africa for the U.S. The U.S. is counting on Ethiopia in the GWOT and in continued democratic and economic development to secure regional stability in the region. Both nations support U.S. objectives but are a cause for concern. Regional stability cannot be maintained if the conflict between the two nations is not decisively settled. Eritrea is a key ingredient in the region and has proven since independence that it will go to war with or without allies if it believes it is in its interests.

#### **THE U.S. ERITREAN MILITARY RELATIONSHIP**

The U.S. has re-established its military-to-military relationships with Eritrea on a limited scale. There are two offices in the Embassy, the Defense Attache Office and the Security Assistance Office. De-Mining efforts continue in Eritrea and limited IMET is ongoing. In FY 2003, 34 Eritrean students were trained under the E-IMET program; and the number of projected students for FY 2004 was 84. The total IMET funding for Eritrea was \$106,884.00 in 2003 and \$773,076.00 was projected for FY2004. Eritrea continues to be invited to participate in African Center for Strategic Studies programs. The State Department is considering expanding the IMET program to include all professional military education courses because of Eritrea's support to the war on terrorism.<sup>27</sup> The U.S. is back to the status it held after 1993 when it turned down a formal relationship with Afwerki. Eritrea is again giving the U.S. an opportunity to work with it through the military. The U.S. could have a positive impact on the future of the region if it increases its military involvement in Eritrea.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

If Eritrea is not engaged in a more robust manner, it will probably remain a humanitarian and regional conflict problem in the region for the foreseeable future. The support provided by the U.S. so far has been limited to training a small number of Eritrean military members outside of Eritrea. There is no direct military to military unit involvement in Eritrea. The U.S. is not sending military to train the Eritrean military. There is a void that needs to be filled. Eritrea is still trying to build its national institutions and with greater engagement the U.S. could shape the future military and influence the government. While increased U.S. diplomatic and economic engagement is important, positive military engagement is particularly important. The Eritrean culture has been brought up on military service or events. Each affected the rest of society. Eritrea can relate to the military and adapt its values to the rest of the nation's institutions.

The U.S. should increase its military presence and engagement in Eritrea. Although a very small country, it plays an often overlooked critical position in the Horn of Africa. Its geographical position on the Red Sea and ability to influence its neighboring countries should not be discounted. Eritrea's geographical position has been useful to the U.S. since WWII. A Department of State 2004 report to Congress said,

A good bilateral relationship with Eritrea, which has the longest seacoast on the Red Sea, could be useful to U.S. interests in the region. Eritrea is an important factor for the overall regional stability in the Horn of Africa, particularly with respect to U.S. efforts to promote an enduring peace between Ethiopia and Eritrea, and to stem the presence and influence of terrorism in the Horn. A modern well-trained Eritrean military could be an asset to U.S. national security interests in the region.<sup>26</sup>

The strategic objective for Eritrea would be supported by increasing U.S. military efforts in support of the other elements of national power. Eritrea has a stake in the war on terrorism since foreigners and locals have come under attack from an Islamic Fundamentalist terrorist group. Furthermore, the fragility of the country provides potential for terrorists to operate with a lessened chance of discovery or apprehension by authorities. Eritrea is critical to maintaining regional stability. There cannot be regional stability if Eritrea and Ethiopia do not form a lasting peace. Ethiopia is a stated anchor country in the present administration's policy for Africa. But it cannot positively support the U.S. as an anchor if it is concerned about Eritrea. Eritrea has already shown that it is willing to go to war for what it perceives is its interests whether it is with Ethiopia or another neighbor. The humanitarian costs continue to rise in the region because of the conflicts. Finally, utilizing bases in Eritrea will allow the U.S. the flexibility to react to terrorist or other events in the Horn of Africa and Middle-East regions.

Global War on Terrorism: Eritrea is an ideal location from which to fight the GWOT. It provides access to the Middle East and the Horn of Africa nations suspected of supporting terrorist organizations. Eritrea publicly offered its support in the GWOT prior to Operation Iraqi Freedom when Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld visited the country in December 2002. Eritrea offered facilities, troops, intelligence and other assistance in the form of over-flights and mooring permissions to the U.S.<sup>29</sup> The U.S so far has only accepted Eritrea's offer concerning over-flights and limited ship visits to the port of Massawa.

The U.S. had a large military presence in Eritrea during the 1940s, 50s, 60s and 70s. The population welcomed the presence of U.S. military members in Eritrean cities during these decades. The population would welcome the return of the U.S. military. Moreover the U.S. finds itself in a situation not unlike it did in WWII. The war on terrorism is global and not being fought in any one location. Furthermore, the strategic importance of the Red Sea and access to the sea lanes is no less important today than it was during WWII and the Cold War. The U.S. needs additional forward basing to counter terrorism and meet other U. S. objectives. Eritrea offers the space.

The U.S. needs additional allies with competent military forces to assist in the GWOT. Eritrea has a hardened military but needs additional training. Eritrea would gladly provide troops but would need additional equipment and training especially if they were to be asked to deploy outside of Eritrea. Iraq is an area the Eritrean government might be persuaded to send at least a token force to as long as it is provided training and equipment. The U.S. can provide it. Eritrea will obtain the training and equipment it needs from somewhere. If it is not the U.S. then it may be China, North Korea, or a former Soviet Bloc nation. Eritrea relied on Russia, former Soviet Bloc countries, and others to provide its aircraft and ground equipment during the last conflict. It is in the U.S. interest to provide this military assistance.

The strategic advantage lies in Eritrea where greater access to the region and security for U.S. forces exists. Ethiopia, while an ally in the war on terrorism and a large trading partner of the U.S., does not have the access to the Red Sea Basin that Eritrea does nor are there U.S. forces forward deployed in Ethiopia. However Ethiopia is assisting with the pursuit of terrorists operating from within Somalia, an area that the U.S. does not have direct access to. The secure operational environment available to U.S. forces is greatly expanded when working with both countries. There are signs that the U. S. military is attempting to reestablish a greater relationship with Eritrea. U.S. Central Command's (CENTCOM) Combatant Commander and the Combined Joint Task force Horn of Africa (CJTFHOA) commander have visited Eritrea in an effort to re-engage the country militarily after the 1998-2000 war with Ethiopia.<sup>30</sup> Additionally,

since those meetings Eritrea has sent a representative to CENTCOM headquarters in Florida, and continues to offer its assistance. Eritrea can relieve the physical limitations on CJTFHOA in Djibouti. Presently the task force is limited in space and must share Djibouti with the French. The French military maintains permanent bases in Djibouti and operates off the economy. The U.S. provides very little in the form of economic support to the local community and lives on its own compound. Security for U.S. forces would be greater in Eritrea, where there is more than one location to base troops and conduct operations.

The port cities of Asseb and Massawa could alleviate an already strained CJTF HOA in Djibouti. Asseb also has a military airfield. The new airport in Massawa can now accept modern jets and would be available for military use.<sup>31</sup> The Eritrean navy is headquartered in Massawa. Eritrea also has former Soviet bases located on islands off the coast. These bases could be used by U.S. forces. The Eritreans would benefit from the new construction and upgrades to the port areas. U.S. troops could also assist Eritreans with counter terrorism training at their new training facility in Sawa which is in the northern part of the country and has a military airfield with an extended runway. If approached in a serious manner it is likely the Eritreans would be willing to allow troops on its soil, allowing U.S. forces to be forward deployed and to meet threats closer to the source. However the Eritrean government would have to be provided a long term plan that insures that the U. S. is serious.

By establishing forward basing in Eritrea the U.S. could reduce its presence in countries such as Saudi Arabia and Kuwait and limit port calls in Yemen where the USS Cole was attacked. The Red Sea Basin could be controlled from bases on the 600 mile coast of Eritrea. A Status of Forces Agreement would have to be worked out but would be worth the effort.

A greater U.S. military presence would assist the Eritreans in deterring terrorism within Eritrea. Terrorists in Eritrea or an Islamic fundamentalist government in Asmara would lead to a base of operations for terrorist organizations. The CJTFHOA located in Djibouti would be sandwiched between two major terrorist bases of operation which have the support of terrorist operations ongoing from Sudan. Basing troops in Eritrea will add to U.S. presence in Djibouti, Eritrea and Ethiopia. The continued physical presence in all three countries and bases in Eritrea and Djibouti could frustrate and cut off terrorist operations originating in Sudan and Somalia as well as other African nations.

Eritrea has its own concerns about terrorist activities within its borders. The EIJM, based in Sudan, is believed to be responsible for attacks against Eritreans and foreign aid workers in Eritrea carried out since 1993. The EIJM "vowed to liberate the country (Eritrea) and raise the banner of Islam over it."<sup>32</sup>

EIJM combatants entered Eritrea in 1989 but did not start military operations until January 1992 and then on a very small scale. In 1993 the EIJM initiated concerted combat operations within Eritrea. In 1994 Eritrea killed several EIJM members during EIJM cross border operations. Three of the members were from Morocco, Afghanistan, and Yemen leading credence to bin Laden and Sudan supporting the EIJ. The incident led to a split in diplomatic relations between Eritrea and Sudan. The two countries continue to deal with cross border incidents which undermine the stability of the region. In 2003 an attack against U.S. aid based members of Mercy Corps International was blamed on the EIJM. In April 2004 the UN reported attacks in western Eritrea that were believed to have been carried out by the EIJM.<sup>33</sup> There is very little international attention paid to the group as it continues to operate in Eritrea and the Horn of Africa region. However there is a possibility that in the mid-to-long term, Eritrea could become a training ground for fundamentalist groups that assist in destabilizing the region or support international terrorist operations worldwide. It is not in the U.S. interest to have an associate of Al Qaeda in a country that plays such an important part in the stability of the region nor to allow the organization the strategic geographical advantage of Eritrea.

The indicators that the EIJM is linked to bin Laden and Al Qaeda continue to grow. During the period between 1992 and 2002 the more extreme wing of the EIJM took control of the organization and continued to develop a relationship with Osama bin Laden's organization, the Islamic Coalition, headquartered in Sudan. According to the Internal Revenue Service, suspected Al Qaeda front company the Horn of Africa Relief Agency (HARA) provided \$36,322 to support various Al Qaeda affiliates. HARA distributed donor forms in the U.S. soliciting donations for the EIJM. The form asked donors to pledge support for an orphan or the training of a Mujahid (holy warrior) or his family. The pledge amounts were \$3000.00 yearly donation for training Mujahid, \$700.00 towards family support or \$420.00 to support an orphan.<sup>34</sup> Without the support of Al Qaeda the EIJM would have a more difficult time operating.

A defector who claimed to have been a liaison between the NIF and bin Laden's Islamist Coalition indicated that the EIJM held a seat on bin Laden's international network's coordinating council. The Coalition was the forerunner to Al Qaeda and had forty-three members who served on sub-councils responsible for security, military affairs, economics, media and information, and policy. Groups represented on the council were the Oromo Islamic Front in Ethiopia, the Islamic force of Sheikh Abdullah in Uganda, Algeria's Islamic Salvation Front, and the Moro Liberation front from Mindanao, Philippines.<sup>35</sup>

During 1998, the EIJM deputy commander, Abul Bara Hassan Salman, described the organization's objectives as liberating the region from Christian-Jewish control through armed

struggle and regional diplomacy, and replacing the current Eritrean government with an Islamic government.<sup>36</sup> The EIJM continued its attacks and drew more and more support from disaffected Muslims in Eritrea who believed they were being treated like second class citizens by the predominantly secular government. By 2001 the EIJM was operating freely in Eritrea's northern red sea region; and foreigners or Eritrean officials traveled in the area only if accompanied by an armed escort.<sup>37</sup>

Regional Stability: Without peace between Eritrea and Ethiopia there will not be regional stability. Without regional stability Ethiopia will find it difficult to fulfill its role as an anchor state as defined by U.S. strategy for Africa. Ethiopia has thus far had to spend a great deal of its budget on the war with Eritrea. Eritrea has ruined its economy due to the conflict. Both nations have spent heavily on armament and are prepared to return to war if necessary. The Ethiopian government will not be able to transition from an authoritarian to democratic government, nor will its economy grow if it must always be preparing to return to war with Eritrea. The preoccupation with Eritrea will limit its assistance in the GWOT and U.S. goals for the region.

Eritrea signed an agreement in Algiers, Algeria in June 2000, to end the fighting with Ethiopia. Not unlike North and South Korea, the two countries have reached conflict termination, not conflict resolution. A UN force remains in a Temporary Security Zone between the two countries. The majority of the Temporary Zone is on Eritrean soil a moral point the Eritreans quickly remind anyone willing to listen. It is probable that the two would re-initiate hostilities at some point if the UN force were to be withdrawn. Without a lasting peace between the two countries the region will remain in turmoil and neither country will reach its full political and economic potential. On a grander scale, war between the two countries disrupts the region as a whole because both countries use rebel groups or insurgents from other nations to destabilize each other. Eritrea and Ethiopia activities further the possibility that the conflict will spill over into neighboring countries. This does not bode well for the long term prospects of the region; and complicates both countries' ability to assist the U.S. with the war on terrorism. If the region is going to be stable a lasting peace between Eritrea and Ethiopia must be found. It is improbable the two nations would resume hostilities if U.S. forces were represented in both countries. The possibility of losing U.S. support, once gained, would be detrimental to either country. However, Eritrea presently does not have the threat of losing U.S. support.

U.S. military representation and assistance should be increased in order to support to the global war on terrorism within the region; assist with regional stability and to carry out additional IMET programs in Eritrea. Having a military presence in Eritrea and Ethiopia would greatly reduce the possibility that the two countries will return to hostilities or engaging in conflicts with

other countries in the region. Both nations are supporting U.S. goal for the region and will benefit from a larger presence. Ethiopia is not likely to attack Eritrea because of a concern of losing U.S. support if U.S. forces are endangered. Eritrea is not as likely to go to war for fear of losing long term U.S. support once it has started. Eritrea has a history of going to war. It does not have tolerance with or experience in diplomacy. Special Operation Forces and CJTFHOA forces could serve as the first deployments to the country. The Task Force would be in a position to continue its fight on terrorism and assist in regional issues if called upon. Special Operations Forces would be in a position to assist with the war on terrorism, carry out IMET programs, and develop a professional relationship with the Eritrean military. The presence in Eritrea would also benefit the country economically due to the increased use of its ports and facilities. In Eritrea, unlike Djibouti, U.S. forces are likely to engage more with the local community and provide assistance as well as obtain goods from local vendors. The ports and facilities may also be needed if the UN or the US decides to take some sort of action in Sudan due to the on-going genocide as stated by former Secretary of State Collin Powell and being investigated by the UN.

By establishing a committed long term presence in Eritrea as part of its regional strategy the U.S. would be in a position to effect the development of a professional military that responds to a civilian government. And, with a longer term program and presence, over time, the government is more likely to stop its authoritarian ways and evolve into a true democracy. The present regime fought for thirty years for independence with little or no aid and due to its experiences during the struggle and since independence it views all offers of aid with great suspicion. However long term military aid is something it understands and is a relationship it has indicated on more than one occasion that it wants with the U.S. Eritrean liberation forces studied U.S. history and military methods during the course of the war. In 2000 Eritrean Minister of Defense told the U.S. Defense Attache that he would prefer to buy U.S. military equipment than the former Soviet Bloc equipment but the 1998 war started quickly and he was convinced by others on the staff to purchase from former Soviet nations. The U.S. would not provide equipment after the outbreak of the conflict. The desire to be associated with the U.S. military is strong.

The U.S. has the tools to engage Eritrea and develop the long term relationship and positive influence that is needed. The African Contingency Operations Training and Assistance (ACOTA) is one of the tools that can be used. ACOTA is the successor to the African Crisis Response Initiative (ACRI). ACRI was a bi-lateral U.S. African initiative that provided peacekeeping training. The program concentrates on basic soldiering and peacekeeping skills,

common communications equipment, training ammunition, individual soldier equipment and peacekeeping support equipment.<sup>38</sup> However the program has a much greater influence than just basic skills. The ACRI was a Department of State program run by the U.S. military that promoted democracy and respect for human rights as well as empowerment for good and independence of action.<sup>39</sup> ACOTA is an improved and more enhanced program which that is a method of engaging Eritrea with military support of a non lethal manner and promoting the values that the U.S. promotes. The program will tailor an individual packaged program for Eritrea.<sup>40</sup> Having Eritrea as part of a peacekeeping force would give its military a positive mission to train for. Furthermore Ethiopia, also a transitional government, may ask to be considered for ACOTA now that the conflict is over. ACOTA has been used to engage countries with less than fully democratic governments. Uganda and the Ivory Coast are two examples. The Global Peace Operations Initiative (GPOI) is another possible tool proposed by the Bush administration that could be used to engage Eritrea. The proposal calls for the creation of a standby peacekeeping force composed primarily of foreign soldiers. Eritrea would be willing to provide troops to a standby peacekeeping force. Ethiopia would probably provide troops as well. By providing support to both nations in the form of programs similar to ACOTA and the GPOI it will increase the possibility of the two nations working together as part of the larger peace keeping effort in Africa. Their cooperation will be one more step in ensuring peace in the region and develop the groundwork for further cooperation in the future.

The U.S. will have to take a long term patient approach that includes the European Union, African Union and other international organizations. It will take time to demobilize and develop a professional military, and establish democratic, educational and health institutions in a country that is building from the ground up. The population will realize some short term economic and security benefits from the increased U.S. presence and this in it self will assist in buying time for the additional institutions to grow and economic conditions to improve. To ignore Eritrea, a country with difficult problems that could continue to grow and insure regional instability would be a mistake.

## **CONCLUSION**

Eritrea has historically been an ally for the U.S. however the U.S. has shown little interest in supporting Eritrea. Historically, considering Eritrea insignificant has not worked. Eritrea believes it can survive alone based on its 30 year war experience. Without a policy of engaging Eritrea on a larger scale the U.S. could lose an ally in the war on terrorism and runs the risk that Eritrea will continue to be a destabilizing factor in the region and a possible training ground for

terrorists. Although not a popular view, the U.S. should expand its military support for Eritrea. Eritrea should be held accountable for its human rights violations and failure to make progress in the democratic process its constitution calls for, but isolation is not the answer. Punishing Eritrea, a country that has had the stick rather than the carrot approach used against it for the most of its history will not work. The Eritrean population and its government are numb to negative reinforcements. Eritreans view everything as a continuation of their liberation struggle and will do what they have to, to survive. In the long run that will mean turning to countries that the U.S. would not approve of and continued authoritarian leadership and human rights abuses or possibly a civil war. Eritrea is just starting to develop as a nation and has shown mixed signs over the last ten years, but since the end of the 1998-2000 conflict with Ethiopia has been leaning towards authoritarianism. The U.S. can counter these initial leanings through greater military engagement, and programs like ACRI and GPOI. Eritrea is one country that can change from within, with the support of the U.S. Change will not occur if the U.S. stands on the sidelines and watches as the situation continues to deteriorate.

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## ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> State Department, Bureau of African Affairs, *Background Note: Eritrea*, March, 2004; available from <<http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/2854.htm>>; Internet; 27 August 2004.

<sup>2</sup> George W. Bush, *The National Security Strategy of the United States of America* (Washington, D.C.: The White House, September 2002).

<sup>3</sup> Dan Connell, "Eritrea: On a Slow Fuse," position paper presented at Harvard University October 2004. 1.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 2

<sup>5</sup> Stuart S. Nagel, ed., *Handbook of Global International Policy* (New York: Marcell Dekker, 2000), 45.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Connell, 2.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Nagel, 46.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.,

<sup>12</sup> Library of Congress, *Country Studies: Ethiopia*, 1991; available from <[http://lcweb2.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/r?frd/cstdy:@field\(DOCID+et0183\)](http://lcweb2.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/r?frd/cstdy:@field(DOCID+et0183))>; Internet; 24 September 2004.

<sup>13</sup> P. Schraeder, "The Horn of Africa: U.S. Foreign Relations in an Altered Cold War Environment," in *Handbook of Global International Policy*, ed. Stuart S. Nagel (New York: Marcell Dekker, 2000), 47.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 46-47.

<sup>15</sup> Connell, "Eritrea," *Foreign Policy in Focus: A Think Tank without Walls*, September 1997; available from <[http://www.fpi.org/briefs/vol2/vn45eri\\_body.html](http://www.fpi.org/briefs/vol2/vn45eri_body.html)>; Internet; 9 September 2004.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> Robert Hodek, former Ambassador to Eritrea and Ethiopia, interviewed by author on 14 October 2005, McLean, VA.

<sup>19</sup> John Prendergast, *U.S. Leadership in Resolving African Conflict: The Case of Ethiopia-Eritrea* (Washington, D.C.: 7 September 2001), 4.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> OxResearch, *Ethiopia/Eritrea: Border Ruling*, 30 April 2002; available from <<http://proquest.umi.com/pqdweb?index=11&did=000000567834261&SrchMode=1&sid=2...>>; Internet: access 24 September 2004.

<sup>22</sup> "Jane's Sentinel Security Assessment: Eritrea: External Affairs," 24 February 2004; available from Jane's; Internet; 24 September 2004.

<sup>23</sup> George W. Bush, *The National Security Strategy of the United States of America* (Washington, D.C.: The White House, September 2002), 3, 5, 9.

<sup>24</sup> Joint Chiefs of Staff, *National Military Strategy of the United States of America 2004*, (Alexandria, VA: The Pentagon, 2004), 1.

<sup>25</sup> Ruth Iyob, *Shifting Terrain: Dissidence versus Terrorism in Eritrea*, January 2004; available from <<http://www.usip.org/pubs/specialreports/sr113.html>>; Internet; 6 September 2004.

<sup>26</sup> Bush.11

<sup>27</sup> State Department, *Foreign Military Training: Joint Report to Congress, Fiscal Year 2003 and 2004*, June 2004; available from <<http://www.state.gov/tpr/rls/rpt/fmtrpt/2004/34215.htm>>; Internet; accessed 24 September 2004.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> Jim Garamone, "Eritrea Could Teach U.S. Much to Combat Terror," Armed Forces Press Service, 10 December 2002; [http://www.defenselink.mil/news/Dec2002/n12102002\\_20021204.htm](http://www.defenselink.mil/news/Dec2002/n12102002_20021204.htm); Internet; accessed 1 January 2005.

<sup>30</sup> Teresa Sullivan, "U.S. General Visits Eritrea, Discusses Future Relations," 7 July 2004; available from <[http://dehai.org/archives/dehai\\_archive/jul04/0020.html](http://dehai.org/archives/dehai_archive/jul04/0020.html)>; Internet; accessed 15 September 2004.

<sup>31</sup> State Department, Bureau of African Affairs, *Background Notes: Eritrea*, March 2004; available from <<http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/2854.htm>>; Internet; accessed 27 August 2004.

<sup>32</sup> Connell, *Eritrea on a Slow Fuse*, 9.

<sup>33</sup> Iyob.

<sup>34</sup> Matthew Epstein and Evan Kohiman, "Progress since 9/11: The Effectiveness of U.S. Anti-Terrorist Finance Efforts Arabian Gulf Financial Sponsorship of Al-Aqaida via U.S. Banks, Corporations and Charities," as described in the testimony before the House Committee on Financial Services, 1 March 2003, 12.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

<sup>36</sup> "The Governing Regime Is a Terrorist Regime Which Acts with Enmity against the Eritrean People," as reported in Dan Connell's *Eritrea: On a Slow Fuse*, available from <<http://www.islam.org.au/articles/22/index.htm>>; Internet; accessed 15 October 2004.

<sup>37</sup> Connell, 11.

<sup>38</sup> Karen U. Kwiatkowski, *African Crisis Response Initiative (ACRI) Past, Present and Future* (Carlisle Barracks, PA: U.S. Army War College, Peacekeeping Institute, 2000).5

<sup>39</sup> Ibid, 20.

<sup>40</sup> Russell J. Handy, "Africa Contingency Operations Training Assistance: Developing Training Partnership for the Future of Africa," 4 September 2003, available from <<http://www.airpower.maxwell.af.mil/airchronicles/apj/apj03/fal03/handy.html>>; Internet: accessed 24 February 2005.



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