



ATLANTIC COUNCIL

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Prepared Statement of

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before the

**United States House of Representatives**

**Committee on Foreign Affairs**

**Subcommittee on Africa, Global Health, Global Human Rights, and International Organizations**

on

**“Ethiopia After Meles:  
The Future of Democracy and Human Rights”**

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**Rayburn House Office Building, Room 2172  
Washington, D.C.**

Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member Bass, Distinguished Members of the Subcommittee:

I would like to thank you for the opportunity to testify today on the subject of political developments in the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia, especially as they relate to democracy and human rights, since the death last year of the late Prime Minister Meles Zenawi.

**Ethiopia’s Importance**

However, before addressing the country’s political evolution—and there has indeed been a shift, even if, at times, the changes have been so subtle as to be imperceptible to those who do not track developments closely, to say nothing of those who view them through ideological blinders—I do think it is incumbent upon us to recall the enormous importance of Ethiopia,

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both in its own right and relative to the national interests of the United States of America in Africa in general and in the geopolitically sensitive Horn of Africa in particular. That context is especially important if any resulting proposals are to be relevant, realistic, and, perhaps most importantly, strategic in the fullest sense of that term, rather than token, ineffectual, and, at worst, downright counterproductive to the achievement of overall objectives which I would like to believe are shared by everyone appearing before the Subcommittee today.

With an estimated 93 million people, Ethiopia is the second most populous country on the African continent. Its 5,328 kilometers of land borders put it adjacent to some of the most politically and economically challenged states on the continent, including Djibouti, Eritrea, Kenya, Somalia, South Sudan, and Sudan.

Ethiopia is the source of Blue Nile, which traces its remotest source to the Felege Ghion spring held sacred by the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church, as well as of the Nile River’s other major tributary, the Atbara River, which likewise originates in the heart of the Ethiopian highlands near Lake Tana; together, the two streams account for nearly 90 percent of the water and over 95 percent of the sediment carried by the Nile proper. The ambitious hydropower construction program undertaken by the Ethiopian government to harness the potential of this flow bears the promise of clean, renewable energy not only for Ethiopia, but for many of its neighbors in a region where access to electricity remains an aspiration for hundreds of millions of people.

In terms of regional security, the Ethiopian National Defense Force (ENDF) has played key roles both in Somalia, where Ethiopian troops recently were able to turn over several towns in the Bay region to the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM) peacekeepers, and in the disputed Abyei region between Sudan and South Sudan, where the 3,860 ENDF as well as Ethiopian police and civilian personnel make up more than 95 percent of the United Nations Interim Security Force for Abyei (UNISFA). Against predictions by skeptics that it would get mired down in an intractable conflict, UNISFA has for two years now managed to prevent the escalation of violence and keep open a fragile humanitarian space in the territory, albeit not without sacrifice—as we were reminded just last Friday, when one Ethiopian peacekeeper was killed and two others wounded in what was apparently a rebel mortar attack on a football stadium that hit their base instead. It should be noted that, overall, Ethiopia is the fourth-largest global and largest African contributor to United Nations peacekeeping operations.

With the exception of the period when Mengistu Haile Mariam and his Marxist military junta, the Derg, aligned the country with the Soviet Bloc and welcomed tens of thousands of troops dispatched by Fidel Castro, Ethiopia has historically been a strong ally of the United States. Our countries fought on the same side during World War II and, during the Korean War, the Emperor Haile Selassie sent the famous “Kagnew Battalion” of the 1<sup>st</sup> Division of the Imperial Bodyguard to fight alongside America’s 7<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division, most famously at Pork Chop Hill. In more recent times, the Ethiopian government worked with the United States in the 1990s to contain the threat posed by the National Islamic Front regime in Khartoum as well as embraced

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the global effort against terrorism after the September 11, 2001, attacks by al-Qaeda on our homeland. And, in the last few years, Ethiopia has hosted a discrete US military presence in the southern part of the country where service personnel maintain several unmanned aerial vehicles assigned to counterterrorism missions in East Africa.

Nor is security the only area of strong bilateral cooperation between the United States and Ethiopia. In August, the Ethiopian government will host the 2013 US-Sub-Saharan African Trade and Economic Cooperation Forum, also known as the AGOA Forum, a ministerial-level event built around America’s signature trade initiative with the continent that will include high-level dialogue on the future course of US-African economic and commercial relations as well as various civil society and private-sector events, including a meeting of the African Women’s Entrepreneurship Program (AWEP) and a US-African trade exposition.

### **The Legacy of Meles Zenawi**

While it is perhaps too soon after the passing of the late Ethiopian prime minister—today, perhaps not entirely coincidentally, is the tenth-month anniversary of his death—to have either sufficient time or the requisite historical perspective to render anything approaching a definitive judgment on the man and his political legacy, it is worth the effort to at least establish some context by recalling just how far Ethiopia has come since the overthrow of Mengistu Haile Mariam’s Soviet client regime in 1991 by a coalition of opposition groups led by the Tigrayan People’s Liberation Front (TPLF), whose political wing today forms part of the governing Ethiopian People’s Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF).

After overthrowing the Ethiopia’s millennia-old monarchy in 1974, the Derg, backed by massive Soviet support and tens of thousands of Communist Cuban troops, had launched the “Red Terror” that saw thousands of Ethiopians killed outright and, following the Stalinist-style forced resettlement of peasants on collective farms, millions more reduced to mass starvation in the mid-1980s. Meanwhile, the Derg and its Cuban mercenaries fought a brutal counterinsurgency campaign that reduced whole provinces of the country to wasteland.

Today, barely two decades after the unlamented demise of what was a *real* totalitarian dictatorship, it is expected that the country will end its current 2012-2013 fiscal year on July 7 having seen its economic growth accelerate to 10 percent, thanks largely to improved agricultural output combined with heavy public investments in infrastructure. This comes on the heels of 8.5 percent growth in 2011-2012, which made it one of Africa’s fastest growing economies last year. While life remains a struggle for many Ethiopians, millions of others have been lifted out of abject misery in just one generation. Anyone who has visited the country more than once notes the transformation taking place constantly as infrastructure is built out, and will remark on the dynamism of the people.

On the political front, Ethiopia under Meles likewise came a long way since 1995, when the country held the first-ever free and democratic elections in its millennial history. In the May 2005 elections, which I witnessed firsthand, over 90 percent of registered voters went to the

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polls after a vigorous campaign. According to official returns, the ruling EPRDF coalition won 59 percent of the vote and 327 seats in the 547-seat House of Representatives, while the two largest opposition groups, the Coalition for Unity and Democracy (CUD) and the United Ethiopian Democratic Forces (UEDF), together won 30 percent of the vote and 161 seats. Altogether, however, the gains made by opposition parties, which went from 12 members in the previous parliament to 174 members in the legislature elected in 2005, were significant and represented a clear step forward, although it was regrettable that a number of the opposition representatives ultimately refused to take up their seats.

While one might regret the way the late Prime Minister Meles responded to opposition provocations in the wake of the 2005 poll and even find discomfiting the lopsided results of the 2010 elections—the EPRDF won 499 seats, while seven other parties or coalitions and a lone independent picked up 48 seats—one ought to, in all fairness, compare Ethiopia’s electoral record to that of its neighbors, in contrast to whom it appears in a far more favorable light. The northwestern region of Somaliland being the notable exception—and, even in this relative oasis, there has been a regrettable recent inability to hold legislative elections in a timely manner—and setting aside the capacity for self-delusion of certain aspiring statesmen looking for stories of “success” to spin, “Somalia” and “political process” are terms which probably should not be used simultaneously even if the current regime is, admittedly, an improvement over its thoroughly corrupt and utterly ineffective predecessor. In Eritrea, Isaias Afewerki’s rather ironically-named People’s Front for Democracy and Justice (PFDJ) has been in power since independence in 1993 and has yet to hold national elections of any kind. The 2010 elections in Sudan (including South Sudan) just a month before the Ethiopian poll that same year were a farce that, if anything, speeded up the country’s break up. South Sudan, which became independent in 2011, does not even have an elected legislature. Kenya’s 2007 elections degenerated into an orgy of violence for which its current president and deputy president, among others, have been indicted by the International Criminal Court.

One does not have to agree with all or even any of the specific policy choices made by the Ethiopian government during his tenure to nonetheless acknowledge the historic achievements of Meles Zenawi. In the two decades since he led the coalition of forces that toppled the Derg, the late prime minister presided over the peaceful secession of Eritrea in 1993, the introduction of legally recognized linguistic pluralism and ethnic federalism in 1994,<sup>1</sup> and the first multiparty elections in the millennial history of the Ethiopian state in 1995. And while the timing and manner of his passing were, most certainly, *not* what any imagines the deceased leader had in mind when he repeatedly assured often skeptical interlocutors that he intended to step down, both as head of the EPRDF and prime minister before the next elections, his exit was, in some respects, a final legacy insofar as, having accomplished much of what he had set out to do in what President Obama has described as “his lifelong contribution to Ethiopia’s development.” and being perhaps unable because of his background and times to go any farther with respect

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<sup>1</sup> See J. Peter Pham, “African Constitutionalism: Forging New Models for Multi-Ethnic Governance and Self-Determination,” in *Africa: Mapping New Boundaries in International Law*, ed. Jeremy I. Levitt (Oxford: Hart Publishing, 2008), 183-203.

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to liberalization, he left the path open to his successors to take the country’s development and political evolution to its next stages.

### **Hailemariam Desalegn: A Very Initial Assessment**

If it is too soon to properly judge the legacy of the late Prime Minister Meles, it most certainly is premature to attempt to render anything beyond a very initial assessment of his successor, Hailemariam Desalegn, who was only confirmed by parliament in his prime ministerial tenure on a permanent basis on September 21, 2012, and subsequently elected as chairman of the EPRDF by the congress of the governing coalition which met in Bahir Dar during the last week of March 2013 (although he did assume the chairmanship of the African Union three months earlier on January 27).

That being said, however, there have been several positive and, indeed, tantalizing indications that while the new prime minister has promised to maintain his predecessor’s policies, he is also slowly blazing out his own trail. These include:

On November 29, 2012, the Ethiopian parliament approved Prime Minister Hailemariam Desalegn’s reshuffle of the Council of Ministers, which reaffirmed the EPRDF’s multi-ethnic framework to give each of the parties in the coalition at least a deputy prime ministerial-ranked position. The prime minister himself hails from the Southern Nations, Nationalities, and People’s Region and previously led the Southern Ethiopian People’s Democratic Movement (SEPDM), while Deputy Prime Minister Demeke Mekonnen is leader of the Amhara National Democratic Movement (ANDM). Civil Service Minister Muktar Kedir of the Oromo People’s Democratic Organization (OPDO) and Minister of Communications and Information Technology Debretsion Gebremichael, deputy chairman of the Tigrayan People’s Liberation Front (TPLF), were confirmed as ministers with the rank of deputy prime minister. While seemingly cosmetic, the appointments potentially represent a balancing of governing coalition which has traditionally been dominated by the TPLF.

On April 29, 2013, during the course of his meeting with UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, Ethiopian Foreign Minister Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus reiterated the offer made by Prime Minister Hailemariam in December to open a dialogue with Eritrea without preconditions “anytime, anywhere and at any level.” While, regrettably, the Eritrean regime has not responded to the invitation to parley, the mere fact that an offer has been tabled represents a not insignificant improvement of the prospects for peace.

On May 10, just days after Prime Minister Hailemariam gave an address denouncing corruption in government, the ministerial-ranked director-general of the Ethiopian Revenues and Customs Authority (ERCA), Melaku Fenta, and two other ERCA officials, along with nine other people, were arrested on suspicion of corruption. Melaku, a senior EPRDF member, is the most high-profile official to be arrested since Siye Abraha, a former defense minister, was charged with abuse of office in 2002 (and, it should be noted that Siye, who was subsequently convicted and jailed for six years, had already left government at the time of his arrest). While Ethiopia’s

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ranking of 113<sup>th</sup> out of 176 states in Transparency International’s 2012 Corruption Perceptions Index puts its above its immediate neighbors, the arrests of Melaku and his alleged cohorts as well as the subsequent arrests of more than fifty people by Ethiopia’s Federal Ethics and Anti-Corruption Commission clearly signal a determination on the part of the new administration to tackle the problem.

On June 2, several thousand demonstrators led by the chairman of the Semayawi (“Blue”) Party, Yilkal Getinet, peacefully marched down Addis Ababa’s Churchill Avenue to demand the release of prisoners and to protest unemployment and alleged state meddling in religious affairs. While the number of those who turned out was relatively modest, the march was nonetheless the largest anti-government demonstration since 2005. Moreover, the protesters encountered no police interference—nor, as I have been assured by senior officials, will there be any should the Blues decide to hold more marches as long as organizers respect the requirement that local authorities be given sufficient notice in order to make necessary logistical accommodations. If this proves to be the case, it will certainly be indicative both of the confidence of the new prime minister and his government in the country’s overall stability and of a new opening in its political space.

To these modest points of data, I would add a brief personal observation from having had, even before he became prime minister, the privilege of discussing a broad range of topics with Hailemariam Desalegn. It is well known that the prime minister comes from the Wolayta, an ethnic group that barely approaches 2 percent of the total Ethiopian population. Less well known is the fact that his family is affiliated with a “Oneness” Pentecostal denomination that is itself a small minority within the Protestant minority among Ethiopian Christians. Moreover, I have been rather impressed by not only how well informed Prime Minister Hailemariam is on a variety of issues, but also the methodological rigor of his thought process which allows for a dispassionate examination of problems—perhaps a legacy of his academic and professional background as a civil engineer specializing in water and sanitation projects.

While as a political analyst and not a psychological one, I try not to overemphasize factors like these, one likewise ought to not arbitrarily discount their influence on the perspective any person brings to bear on the questions he or she confronts. In particular, it should be noted that, by and large, those occupying almost all the leading positions in the current Ethiopian government are, unlike their predecessors, *not* former combatants from the long struggle to overthrow the Derg. On the other hand, one should also be cognizant of the political, institutional, and other constraints which someone in Hailemariam Desalegn’s position faces, especially until such time as he or she is able to win a full electoral mandate in his or her own right.

### **Clarifying Some Contentious Issues**

There are several contentious issues which are often either misunderstood or otherwise taken out of context for which some clarification may contribute to a more complete assessment of recent developments in Ethiopia as well as to the Subcommittee’s deliberations as it carries out

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its oversight responsibilities with respect to US policy towards the country in general and questions of democratization and human rights in particular.

*“Land grabs.”* For several years now, there have been a steady stream of sensationalist reports in the media about so-called “land grabs” which are alleged to have forced tens—if not hundreds—of thousands of people off their land in order to lease it to foreign investors. Many of these reports originate in the press releases of self-appointed “watchdog” groups seeking publicity for the extended op-eds masquerading as scientific studies which are the stock in trade of a number of these organizations. For all the rhetorical bombast, the facts on the ground simply do not support the narrative. Ethiopia has exactly 100 million hectares of land, of which it is estimated that more than 70 million hectares are arable, although not all of it is currently under permanent cultivation. Following an exhaustive assessment process by the federal government with the regional governments, some 3.67 million hectares of arable land<sup>2</sup>—less than 4 percent of the country’s total land mass—was identified as underutilized and uninhabited and, consequently, designated as available for large-scale agriculture investment which would, moreover, help assure Ethiopia’s food security. In the several years that this program has been in place, the total amount of land which has been leased to the grand total of 234 foreign investors, including members of the Ethiopian diaspora, is 395,000 hectares<sup>3</sup>—just over 10 percent of land eligible for such leases under the government’s program and barely half of 1 percent of the total arable land in the country. Thus if this issue is even relatively significant enough to raise among the other pressing concerns in our bilateral relationship with Ethiopia, we ought to at the very least ensure that the discussion is grounded in empirical facts—not alarmist headlines and emotional hype—and the amount of time, energy, and political capital dedicated to it commensurate with that reality.

*Agricultural policy.* Ethiopia’s robust economic growth owes a great deal to the strong performance of its agricultural sector, which is another reason it is rather unlikely that the country’s government has it “in” for the estimated 13 to 15 million smallholders who produce more than 95 percent of agricultural output, which in turn contributes nearly half of national GDP and even larger proportions of employment and export earnings. If anything, facilitating the transition of subsistence farmers into the commercial economy would pay rich cross-sector dividends—to say nothing of the political advantage to be gained by whatever administration presides over the shift. In many respects, the government’s infrastructure program with its expansion of roads as well as the power grid and market networks is already benefiting farmers. In addition, the country’s current Five-Year Growth and Transformation Plan aims to

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<sup>2</sup> The land identified as underutilized and uninhabited and, consequently, available for lease to large-scale agricultural projects is found in the Benishangul-Gumuz Region (1,148,852 hectares), Gambella Regional State (1,226,893 hectares), Oromia (1,069,967 hectares), Southern Nations, Nationalities, and People’s Region (209,725 hectares), and the Amhara Region (6,183 hectares).

<sup>3</sup> Overall, some 470,000 hectares were leased to foreign and diaspora investors, but 75,000 hectares was repossessed because the leaseholders either failed to develop the land as agreed upon or violated environmental regulations. These 75,000 hectares have been returned to the pool of land that is potentially available for large-scale agricultural development.

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double the national economy by doubling agricultural output and, simultaneously, to sustainably increase both rural incomes and national food security.

*The Nile.* It is beyond the scope of this hearing to go into the complex issues relating to the use of waters of the Nile River, questions concerning which have been unhelpfully muddied by the overheated rhetoric—and, indeed, threats of violence—pouring forth from Egyptian President Mohamed Morsi and other politicians in Cairo.

At a certain level, the bombast is not surprising since it may be all they have. First, insofar as it has a legal case at all, Egypt’s claims rests on rather weak foundations. During the colonial era, a May 1929 exchange of notes between Egyptian Prime Minister Muhammad Mahmoud Pasha and the British High Commissioner in Egypt, Lord Lloyd of Dolobran, stipulated that no projects affecting the Nile flow would be undertaken in Sudan, then under the Anglo-Egyptian “condominium,” or any other territory then under British rule without the agreement of the Egyptian government which asserted its “natural and historical rights” over the river. Following Sudan’s independence, that country signed the Nile Waters Agreement with Egypt in 1959, which allocated 55.5 billion cubic meters (bcm) of water annually to the Egyptians and 18.5 bcm to the Sudanese. Second, *nemo dat quod non habet* (“you cannot give what you do not have [or own]”) is a bedrock principle of classical international jurisprudence. The lack of reference to other riparian countries and their interests leaves open the question of the Nile Agreement’s legal validity to bind any parties other than Egypt and Sudan which, moreover, contribute virtually nothing to the river’s flow. Ethiopia, the source of an overwhelming part of the Nile’s water, was never a party to either of the agreements, although it was an independent state at the time of both—in fact, at the time of the 1929 accord, Ethiopia had been a full member of the League of Nations for some six years, while Egypt, then under a quasi-protectorate, was not accepted into the organization as a full-fledge sovereign member of the international community until 1937. Moreover, Burundi, the Congo, Eritrea, and Rwanda, are likewise not parties to the accords, having been ruled by other colonial regimes—thus the British did not have any pretext by which to sign away the water rights of those territories. Third, for the talk in Cairo about keeping “all options open” and the armchair speculation about possible attacks against the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GERD), the Morsi regime’s threats are as empty as its treasury: quite simply, the Egyptian military does not have the aerial refueling capability for its aircraft to even make it into Ethiopian airspace, much less bomb the project and return home.<sup>4</sup>

However, the issue of the GERD—which, when completed in 2017, will be Africa’s largest

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<sup>4</sup> It is another matter entirely whether the Egyptian regime, unable to achieve its goals any other way, might resort to covert action, such as supporting and even arming dissident groups seeking the overthrow of the Ethiopian state, irrespective of their prospects for success. It is possible to interpret along similar lines the visit two weeks ago of a high-level Egyptian military delegation to Mogadishu where its members were reported to have expressed interest in equipping and training the Somali regime’s forces for possible action against the unrecognized, but *de facto* independent Republic of Somaliland—which, coincidentally, is one of landlocked Ethiopia’s vital accesses to the sea.

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hydropower plant—and the rest of Ethiopia’s ambitious plans for the use of its natural resources also serve to highlight two positive policy developments. First, last week the Ethiopian parliament unanimously ratified the Nile River Cooperative Framework Agreement, which has also been signed by Burundi, Kenya, Rwanda, Tanzania, and Uganda (the Democratic Republic of the Congo and South Sudan have also announced their intention of joining the pact), thus opening the way for what could prove to be a new era of broad cooperation across the region. Second, even as it was ratifying the deal with its upper riparian partners, the Ethiopian government went out of its way to reach out to downstream countries, including representatives from Sudan and Egypt as well as international members in the International Panel of Experts that recently reported on the impact of the GERD. This unprecedented openness on a question of core national interest is a most welcome development, as is the new agreement, reached on Tuesday following the Egyptian foreign minister’s visit to Addis Ababa, for the three countries to conduct further impact studies.

*Muslim protests.* To do justice to the Ethiopian government’s decision to take a more proactive stance to counter radicalization among the country’s Muslims beginning about two years ago and the protests last year over the elections to the country’s Supreme Council of Islamic Affairs, or *Majlis*, would perhaps require the Subcommittee to schedule a separate hearing. It is, however, worth noting that worry over the threat posed by well-resourced extremists to which has been Ethiopia’s hitherto laudable tradition of peaceful coexistence and, indeed, respect between the three Abrahamic religions is a concern among both scholars and policymakers, predating the more recent controversies. I treated it at some length in the entry on “Ethiopia” in the 2011 edition of the *World Almanac of Islamism*<sup>5</sup> and I would add that Ambassador Donald Yamamoto had the occasion to engage this issue during his tenure as the United States ambassador in Addis Ababa in a series of three cables which were subsequently published by WikiLeaks. Without justifying the unauthorized release of classified US diplomatic reports, since the documents have now been widely disseminated, I would respectfully call the Subcommittee’s attention to two passages, one descriptive and the other diagnostic:

Conflicts within the Muslim community have also arisen over control of mosques, which imams should be allowed to preach, and over control of Islamic education. The [Majlis] wants to build an Ethiopian Muslim theological school so that young Ethiopian men will not have to go to the Middle East to study in preparation for becoming Imams, as they must now. These young men are increasingly studying in Saudi Arabia due to the generous scholarships and subsidies available there and when they return to Ethiopia to take up their posts in new Saudi-funded mosques, they continue to receive subsidies from Saudi Arabia or Islamic NGOs. Unfortunately, the Sufi-dominated Muslim community in Ethiopia does not have sufficient funds to start their own theological school, nor can they counter the financial advantage Wahhabis have in Ethiopia.

Ethiopia’s delicate Muslim/Christian balance and historic attitudes between the faith

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<sup>5</sup> See J. Peter Pham, “Ethiopia,” in *World Almanac of Islamism 2011*, ed. Ilan Berman and Jeff M. Smith (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield), 261-370.

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communities regarding tolerance and mutual respect are being challenged, thereby undermining US interests in the region.

Consequently, it would behoove us to keep this larger strategic context in mind in evaluating some of the issues which have arisen *à propos*.

### **Recommendations for US Policy**

With all this in mind, permit me to conclude by commending to the Subcommittee’s consideration five principles to guide US policy toward Ethiopia, which I offer in line with the prudent norm embraced by President Obama in last year’s *U.S. Strategy toward Sub-Saharan Africa*: “Addressing the opportunities and challenges in Africa requires a comprehensive U.S. policy that is proactive, forward-looking, and that balances our long-term interests with near-term imperatives.”

*First, understand that Ethiopia is an ancient country populated by proud peoples imbued with a deep sense of history and nationhood, all of which has a profound impact on current political reality.* This statement is not just trope, but rather key to even beginning to grasp what is arguably the only country in Sub-Saharan Africa that is the product of history and geography, rather than being “*l’état importé*” willed into existence and preserved because some colonizer drew an imaginary line on a near-empty map. While the Ethiopian central state’s internal unity and its control of peripheral regions has waxed and waned in the many centuries since the glory days of the kingdom of Axum, “the core fact of regional politics is the Ethiopian state, lineally descended from the empires that have controlled the northern highlands over some two thousand years, and in the process extended their dominion, to the extent that they were able to do so, over their less densely populated peripheries.”<sup>6</sup> In short, unlike some of its neighbors and notwithstanding the fevered delusions of some who do not wish it well, Ethiopia is a viable state inhabited by people with a vibrant underlying sense of nationhood and identity who can be expected to overcome divisions and other challenges.

*Second, recognize both the opportunities within the historic moment and the delicate balance that needs to be maintained.* There is no denying that, whatever one’s view of the late Prime Minister Meles, his passing after more than two decades at the helm is a historic turning point for Ethiopia. However, like all transitions, it is fraught with both opportunities and challenges. While one can have confidence in Prime Minister Hailemariam Desalegn, his abilities, and his vision, one should not ignore the fact that, at least through the national elections due in two years’ time, he has his work cut out for him, both internally and externally. One should be leery of any actions which might upset the careful political balance being struck. Rather, what needs to be appreciated is that Ethiopia is at a crossroad and how its partners manage their relations with the country may well influence which direction it takes. Nagging, hectoring, and threat making will likely result in the opposite of the outcome sought, while patient and supportive diplomacy may reap considerable fruit.

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<sup>6</sup> Christopher Clapham, “Ethiopia: The Perils of Reform,” in *On the Fault Line: Managing Tensions and Divisions within Societies*, ed. Jeffrey Herbst, Terence McNamee, and Greg Mills (London: Profile, 2012), 138.

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*Third, be realistic about what the United States can and cannot do with respect to the direction of social, economic, and political developments in Ethiopia.* It goes without saying that America has influence and, where possible, it ought to be used judiciously for good—as long as it does not imperil what Hans Morgenthau characterized as the “moral duty for a nation to always follow in its dealings with other nations but one guiding star, one standard for thought, one rule for action, THE NATIONAL INTEREST.”<sup>7</sup> However—and perhaps these are notions somewhat foreign to us as modern Americans both used to instant gratification and unaccustomed to limits, political as well as fiscal—we need a healthy sense of humility about what we can hope to accomplish. A few years ago, Ambassador David Shinn published a short commentary, the salient points of which it would be useful to recall:

Those in the Ethiopian diaspora who oppose the Ethiopian government usually suggest that American assistance to Ethiopia can and should serve as the leverage for forcing change in the country. The level of U.S. assistance in recent years has been impressive. In fiscal year 2007, it was about \$474 million and in fiscal year 2008 about \$456 million. It is important, however, to look more closely at this assistance...

In fiscal year 2008, by my calculations, 73 percent of USAID’s budget for Ethiopia went to HIV/AIDS treatment and prevention, 12 percent to child survival and health, 9 percent to development assistance, 5 percent for food aid and less than 1 percent for a combination of foreign military financing (FMF) and international military education and training (IMET). The amount for FMF was \$843,000 and for IMET \$620,000.

This is not an assistance program that has significant political leverage. In 2007, almost 95 percent of the assistance program went to HIV/AIDS, emergency food aid and child survival. In 2008, the figure was about 90 percent for these programs. There are very few members of Congress and even fewer in the Executive Branch who are interested in cutting funding for HIV/AIDS, child survival and emergency food aid in an effort to change governmental policies in Ethiopia.<sup>8</sup>

The thrust of Ambassador Shinn’s argument is as valid today as when he made them. If anything, room for maneuver is even tighter and America’s overall leverage significantly diminished by the combination of our own general cutbacks in foreign assistance—in the current fiscal year, total US assistance to Ethiopia amounted to some \$351 million before sequestration, down approximately one-fourth from the levels just five years ago<sup>9</sup>—and the emergence of other countries and international actors able and willing to work with the

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<sup>7</sup> Hans J. Morgenthau, *In Defense of the National Interest: A Critical Examination of American Foreign Policy* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1951), 241-242

<sup>8</sup> David H. Shinn, “U.S. Aid Has Its Limits,” *The Official Blog of Amb. David H. Shinn*, November 2, 2009, <http://davidshinn.blogspot.com/2009/11/us-aid-has-limits-too.html>.

<sup>9</sup> Of this total, 26.1 percent went to development assistance in governance, education, and economic growth and agriculture; 15.4 percent went to HIV/AIDS programs; 30.4 percent went to global health programs; and 27.9 percent went to emergency food relief—and one-tenth of 1 percent, some \$500,000, went to military training and education—mostly to areas like border security in which the United States has an interest and which were exempted by Congress from restrictions.

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Ethiopian government—as underscored by Prime Minister Hailemariam’s visit to Beijing last week and the high-level meetings he had there with Chinese political leaders as well as bankers and other investors.

*Fourth, take advantage of Ethiopia’s application to join the World Trade Organization (WTO) to constructively engage with the country’s government not only about economic liberalization, but other rule of law and governance concerns.* While Ethiopia applied to join the bloc a decade ago, the application has acquired greater momentum in recent months with the government pulling out all stops to be in a position to present its initial offer on trade in services in the coming months as a basis for bringing forward its negotiations with WTO member states. In Addis Ababa last month, Secretary of State John Kerry stated, “We also support Ethiopia’s accession to the WTO, and we are going to work with Ethiopia in an effort to try to help that transition.” This is the correct position, not only in its own right with respect to promoting business and investment—as Secretary Kerry noted, “our private sector businesses need to focus on Ethiopia and recognize the opportunities that are here and hopefully we can encourage more companies to come here and be engaged and help take part in this”—but for the “knock-on” effects of integrating the country into the global trade framework. Even if the publicly stated goal of completing accession in 2014 is unlikely to be achieved, the effort does present the United States and other international partners with a unique opportunity for more intense dialogue with their Ethiopian counterparts, contribute to enhancing the latter’s technical administrative and regulatory capabilities, and advance policy objectives ranging from liberalizing the banking and telecommunications sectors to securing private property and other legal rights.

*Fifth, become more engaged in Ethiopia’s rapidly transforming higher education sector.* Ethiopia has gone from three national universities in 2001 to thirty-one this year—a rapid expansion that is perhaps unique in the world and certainly among developing countries. Some 20 percent of Ethiopia’s national budget is spent on education, a commendable investment in the country’s future. Both Prime Minister Hailemariam, who spent most of his early career in different academic and administrative posts at what has become Arba Minch University, and Deputy Prime Minister Demeke, a onetime high school biology teacher and former minister of education, have backgrounds in the classroom. If the US government could encourage American colleges and universities to become more engaged with their Ethiopian counterparts, there is the prospect over the long term of considerable return, both in terms of consolidating the cultural and political bonds between our countries and people as well as advancing democratic and human development.

### **Conclusion**

Chairman Smith, Ranking Member Bass, Distinguished Members of the Subcommittee:

In the *U.S. Strategy toward Sub-Saharan Africa*, the President acknowledged that “it is clear that Africa is more important than ever to the security and prosperity of the international community, and to the United States in particular.” What is true of the continent is, if anything,

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even more the case with the country that hosts the seat of the African Union.

It goes without saying that there are a number of things that one might wish to see done differently, perhaps even better, with respect to the ongoing social, economic, and political development of Ethiopia. Nevertheless, the context in which the post-Meles transition and other developments are occurring needs to be taken into account and objective progress, both in absolute terms and relative to the rest of a very troubled, but geopolitically strategic, region. In that perspective, it would behoove policymakers and analysts in the United States and Ethiopia’s other international partners to keep in mind Voltaire’s warning that “*le mieux est l’ennemi du bien*” and, allowing a healthy dose of political realism about their own interests and those of the peoples of Ethiopia to temper judgmentalist impulses, devote their energies instead to where they can be most effective in encouraging, facilitating, and sustaining continued stability and progress in Ethiopia and, beyond it, in the Greater Horn of Africa.