

## HORN OF AFRICA: FROM GLORY TO MISERY, AND HOPE?

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### 1. Abstract

During most of the first millennium A.D., the Horn of Africa constituted a region that was a superpower in the affairs of northeastern Africa as well as southern Arabia. Its influence and, at times, its authority extended from Egypt to the Indian Ocean and across the Red Sea all the way to Mecca. The capital for its overseas territory in south Arabia was Sanaa in Yemen. It was a major partner with the other superpowers of the time: Persia, Byzantium, and India on matters of trade as well as political and military issues. Like USA today, the Horn of Africa was the place of refuge for people escaping various forms of oppression such as the first followers of Islam who survived the onslaughts by Meccan authorities by residing in Axum, Ethiopia for some 15 years before they were able to return home.

During the second millennium A.D., the Horn of Africa suffered a severe decline due to internal and external conflicts as well as diminished trade. Not only did it lose its overseas territories but it also became victim to the avarice of colonialists who bit off all the peripheral parts along its borders at the Red Sea, the Gulf of Aden and the Indian Ocean. By the end of the second millennium, the Horn of Africa comprised a number of fragmented countries largely known for their crippling poverty, insecurity, and lack of democracy, severe environmental degradation, prevalence of pandemic diseases such as malaria and HIV/AIDS, illiteracy, and continued tension. The only saving grace during this period was the amazing survival of Ethiopian independence and the liberation of Djibouti and Somalia from colonialism.

At the beginning of the third millennium A.D., the Horn of Africa is still fraught with the major ills and scars that have been afflicting it during the previous millennium. The issue now is whether this region shall continue with its socio-economic and political conditions of misery or transform itself into being, if not a superpower, a self-reliant, peaceful, and democratic entity. Given the current Horn of Africa population of 115 million (expected to increase to 185 million by 2025), taking into account its substantial natural resources including water, agricultural, and mineral, given a more positive role by the international community as well as civic organizations and the private sector, it is the view of this paper that there are good prospects of hope for peace and a sustainable economic development in this beleaguered part of Africa. Such a hope, however, presupposes a more vigorous effort by all internal and external stakeholders including governments, non-governmental and international organizations as well as academic institutions in the formulation, promotion and achievement of appropriate socio-economic and political development strategies for the benefit of the region and the international community. The increasingly active engagement of China and India in the development of the Horn of Africa, especially that of Ethiopia, is a source of encouragement and mutual satisfaction. It is hoped that

the recent move by Iran to have a foothold in the Red Sea region, particularly the Assab port in Eritrea, would promote increased trade and development and not, as some skeptics indicate, create possibilities of another flash point in terms of Iran's negative stance towards Israel and western interests. It is, therefore, suggested that the strategic interests of the United States and its allies in the Horn of Africa be predicated on the long-term intrinsic values of the region and not, as has been the case so far, for the mere protection of the oil lanes/sources, the fight against international terrorism, and Israel's survival.

## 2. Introduction

In his book entitled: "The Horn of Africa: Conflict and Poverty", Mesfin Wolde-Mariam uses "common boundary", as an indicator for determining those countries that constitute the Horn of Africa. Accordingly, he suggests that the "PRINCIPAL" Horn of Africa countries are Djibouti, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Somalia, and Somaliland.(1) He also includes what he calls "PERIPHERAL" countries i.e. Kenya and the Sudan because they share boundaries with the "core country", namely, Ethiopia.

A statement in the German foreign policy strategy on the Horn of Africa, refers to Djibouti, Eritrea, Ethiopia and Somalia as the countries that constitute the region.(2)

Using terms such as "The Greater Horn of Africa", other sources include a wider range of countries, namely, Uganda, Rwanda, and Burundi.

For the purposes of this paper, the countries Mesfin calls "PRINCIPAL" constitute the Horn of Africa region with the exception of Somaliland which is yet to be recognized by the United Nations as an independent country. This is based on their relatively higher level of mutual cultural and social affinity, shared history and interdependence. For a more comprehensive study and analysis of the cultural traits of the people in the Horn of Africa using objective criteria, please see Donald Levine's "Greater Ethiopia", pp 47-64. This paper may appear ethio-centric mainly due to the propensity of Ethiopia's recorded history but it is by no means intended to diminish the historical evolution of the other Horn of African nations.

Publications on the Horn of Africa tend to dwell, on the most, on the huge constraints encountered in the region and very little on its glorious past as well as the specific strategies for its development. It appears, at times, as if collaboration and integration in the Horn of Africa were a totally new phenomenon. One need only have a closer look at the region's history during the first millennium to discover the level of strength and respect it was able to muster. This paper attempts to fill that gap. This is not to glorify colonialism by any party but simply to underline the importance of unity and collaboration. It is also important for the current and future generations in the Horn of Africa and elsewhere to be aware of

their legacy so that they can aspire for higher goals and objectives. This paper further attempts to draw attention not merely to the challenges and risks being faced but also to the opportunities and benefits available to all the stakeholders and interested parties from the region's vast human and natural resources.

There are substantial sources for work on the Horn of Africa. For the purposes of this paper, few, carefully selected materials are utilized mainly aimed at triggering more intensive and practical discussion and action by concerned individuals, institutions, organizations and governments as well as the private sector.

A special word of appreciation is owed to Prof. Bahru Zewde for his review of this paper and incisive remarks and suggestions.

### 3. Horn of Africa's Glorious Millennium

#### 3.1 Horn of Africa as a Superpower in Eastern Africa and the Middle East

The Horn of Africa used to be known by a variety of names including Punt, Ethiopia/Nubia, and Ethiopia. The area extended from today's eastern parts of the Sudan to the Indian Ocean including today's Djibouti, Eritrea, Ethiopia and Somalia. Please see Figure 1: "Trade Routes to the Land of PUNT".(3) Please see also Figure 2: "The Empire of Ethiopia According to Monumentum Adulitanum".(4) Richard Pankhurst states: "The coastal areas of Ethiopia in Pharonic times formed part of what the ancient Egyptians termed the land of Punt, and sometimes God's Land."(5) According to E. Naville, Punt "...must have begun near Suakim or Massawah and stretched to the south, perhaps even beyond the straits of Bab el-Mandeb and the Cape of Gardafui to the coast of Somalis".(6) Sergew Hable Selassie states: "No doubt that the present (1972) Ethiopian Empire was included within the region of Punt."(7)

During the early parts of the first millennium A.D. the Horn of Africa's (i.e. Ethiopia's) authority extended to South Arabia. H. von Wissman states: "...the first Ethiopian occupation in Arabia lasted over one and a half centuries, from 80 or 90 A.D. to 265 A.D." (8) By the 6<sup>th</sup> century, Ethiopian territory in the Arabian peninsula included not only "the Kingdom of Himyar and Saba but extended further to the north as far as Nagran..." Ethiopian garrisons were present in "key positions" such as Zafar and Nagran.(9)

As the major power in the Horn of Africa and with territories in South Arabia, Ethiopia was treated with the respect and deference due to a superpower. The Emperor of Constantinople "...dispatched an ambassador to Axum (Ethiopia) to negotiate a treaty of alliance with the Negroes and to bring about his friendly attachment to the Roman Empire..."(10) The renowned sociologist, Donald Levine, states: "In the latter part of the third century Mani wrote that Axum (Ethiopia) ranked third among the great powers of the world....To many Byzantine emperors Ethiopia appeared a most desirable ally..."(11) Quoting

Antonio Gramsci, Daniel Kendie states: “Having controlled the Red Sea-Indian Ocean trade,.....Axum carved out an empire that extended from Nubia to Somalia, and from South Arabia to Southern Ethiopia” (12)

Among the numerous occurrences of those times that clearly illustrate the might of Horn of Africa's Ethiopia was the event that took place in Nagran and Zafar. An Arab prince by the name of Dhu Nuwas had converted to the Jewish faith and, in his effort to convert the residents of the two settlements to Judaism, had massacred around 3000 people including Ethiopians. Although the Ethiopian king of the time, Emperor Caleb, was already in the process of taking punitive measures, the head of the Roman Empire, Justin I (518-27) attempted to persuade” ...the Aksumite (Ethiopian) King, Kaleb to go to the rescue of groups of Christians (attacked) by a South Arabian prince who had adopted the Jewish faith.....”(13) Emperor Caleb launched a counter attack using 70 large and 100 small ships built at Adulis in Ethiopia and 60 additional ships obtained from elsewhere along with an army that was reported to range from 70,000 to 120,000. He undertook two military expeditions into Southern Arabia in 523 and 525 which resulted in a complete victory and the restoration of Ethiopian authority over its territory across the Red Sea. (14) “The success of the Abyssinian expedition in 525 A.D. has led to the founding of a new and powerful dynasty at Sanaa, the capital of Yemen”(15)

The other event that is even more renowned is the expedition to Mecca by the Ethiopian Emperor's representative in South Arabia, Abraha and his army, which was accompanied by elephants. This occurred in 570 A.D. and according to Ethiopian historians, the main purposes of the expedition were to divert trade from Mecca to Sanaa and to destroy the Kabba which was at the time a place for worshipping idols. On his way to Mecca, Abreha's force defeated two resisting armies. The story as to what transpired once the army reached Mecca varies. The Arab version which is related to this day is that the sky was filled with birds each of which had three pebbles of stone, one in its bill and the others in its feet. The birds dropped the pebbles on the Ethiopian army which suffered death and defeat. This expedition is referred to in the Holy Quran as “Um al-Fil” meaning the Year of the Elephant. The Ethiopian version, however, is that the Ethiopian Army was affected by the incidence of smallpox. In any case, Abreha returned with his army to Sanaa and continued his reign until he died and was replaced successively by his sons Yaksum and Masruk. (16)

The Ethiopian occupation of South Arabia was ended as a result of several factors including the waning strength of the Aksumite empire, the harsh rule by Abreha's sons in Southern Arabia, and the intervention by the Persian Empire at the request of one of the Arabian princes, Sayf b. Dhu Yazan.(17)

Nevertheless, the Horn of Africa continued, through Ethiopia, to be a force to be reckoned with in Middle Eastern affairs. This is illustrated by its strong and positive support on the advent of Islam in the 7<sup>th</sup> century when its first followers

suffered persecution and the Prophet Mohammed advised them to take refuge in Ethiopia. He is quoted to have stated that Ethiopia had "...a king under whom none are persecuted. It is a land of righteousness where God will give you relief from what you are suffering."(18) It is interesting to note that the Prophet chose Ethiopia as a place of refuge over Persia and the Byzantine Empire. He was wise in doing so as soon after the first migration took place in 615, the Meccan officials (the Quraysh) followed them to Axum and tried, unsuccessfully, to have them repatriated to South Arabia. The refugees numbering over 100 and including the Prophet's daughter Rockeya and her husband Othman, stayed in Ethiopia for some 15 years and those who wished to do so eventually returned to their country safely.(19)

Another example of the continuing prowess of Horn of Africa's Ethiopia is its invasion of Jeddah in 702 A.D. and its attempt, again, to march to Mecca. Another attack on Jeddah took place in 768. Both attacks were, however, repulsed.(20)

During the first millennium A.D., the Horn of Africa was reputed for its civilization and commerce. It had its own written language, an active trade with Egypt, Persia, the Arab Peninsula and India in valuable products including gold, spices, cassia, calamus, animals and animal products.(21) The Horn of Africa accepted Christianity (22) and Islam peacefully i.e. without any military duress.

With the increasing expansion of the Ottoman and Arab hegemony, Ethiopia and the Horn of Africa became isolated and the region's decline set in during the 9<sup>th</sup> and early 10<sup>th</sup> centuries. In addition, internal conflicts intensified thereby finally ending the glorious reign of the Axumite Empire.

#### 4. Horn of Africa's Millennium of Misery and Struggle for Survival

4.1 The decline of the Axumite Empire was precipitated by external attacks such as the one by the Bejan invasion as well as the devastating impact of Gudit's attacks which resulted in the destruction of numerous churches and monuments. The fall of the Axumite Empire was finally made definite when the Zagwe Dynasty took over during 1030-1050 and lasted up to 1268 or 1270.(23). Nevertheless, as correctly observed by Bahru Zewde, there were periods during this millennium when the Ethiopian empire extended over a much wider area. In his book entitled "Church and State in Ethiopia 1270-1527", Tadesse Tamrat states: "For a period of just over a century and a half after the establishment of the new dynasty in 1270, the Christian kingdom underwent an intensive process of expansion throughout the Ethiopian region. In the south, with the early conquest of Damot and Hadya...the presence of the kingdom was felt ...in the basins of Gibe, Gojeb, and Omo rivers ...The Falasha country was gradually brought under Christian control. King Yishaq (1413-30) probably sent his troops into the country of the so-called Shanqilla west of Agaw-Midir in Gojjam."(24) Tadesse Tamrat further states: "More reliable sources indicate that King Dawit (1380-1412) took

the offensive against Egypt much further than his father ever did. Maqrizi reports that in 1381 news arrived in Cairo that ‘an army sent by Dawit, son of Sayfa-Arad, king of Ethiopia, had entered in the territory of Aswan, had defeated the Arabs.....King Dawit had in fact led his troops beyond the northern frontiers of his kingdom..’ (25)

In reaction to the persecution of Christian Egyptian copts by the Mamluke sultans of Egypt, the Ethiopian King, Zara-Yaiqob (1434-68) “also made a reference to the Nile, which, he said, rose in his realms, and it was within his power to divert its course. He desisted from doing it, only for the fear of God, and in consideration of the human sufferings that would result from it.” (26)

Though such aggressions may not be condoned even in an historical context, these episodes nonetheless clearly indicated the extent of regional power exerted by the Horn of Africa during that period.

In any case, subsequent periods of internal conflict coupled with colonial interventions effectively ended the region’s military and economic predominance.

As far as the interests of the Horn of Africa were concerned, this millennium ended with its decline and fragmentation making it vulnerable to its age old enemies which for ever remained bent on weakening the region and attacking it at its moment of disunity and weakness. For instance, the Egyptian ruler, Khedive Ismail was pursuing his dream of establishing a huge African empire in order to make the Nile an Egyptian river and to annex the whole geographical area of its basin.(27) No wonder Egyptians had such ambitions as their country depended, and continues to depend, on Horn of Africa’s Nile River for 85% of their water supply. While the Mahdists of the Sudan were prosecuting their incursions into Ethiopia, Egypt was also trying to encircle it occupying its border on the Red Sea and going far inland up to and including Harar. The Egyptians waged two wars against Ethiopia at Gundet and Gura in 1875 and 1876 assisted by American mercenaries including General Loring who was Chief-of-staff and second in command of their army. The Ethiopians defeated the Egyptian army in both instances.(28)

By the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, European colonialism was at its height and had its sight on the Horn of Africa. The British and the French were competing for the control of the Horn of Africa while the Ottomans and their Egyptian vassals were weakening. When an Egyptian garrison, a British surrogate, was under attack by the Mahdists, the British requested the assistance of the Ethiopian Emperor Yohannes to rescue it. This was undertaken successfully under the infamous Hewitt Treaty between Ethiopia and Britain in June 1884.(29) Under the Hewitt Treaty, a “country called Bogos” was to be restored to Ethiopia. The British, however, committed one of their worst betrayals against Ethiopia and the Horn of Africa. “The problem for Britain was what to do with Massawa. So on October 20, three months after the ratification of the treaty, Lord Granville sounded

Rome's ambassador in London about eventual Italian occupation of Massawa, which he allegedly did not want to leave to the barbarians (read Abyssinia)\* or to a rival power (read France)\*. ....On 5 February 1885 the Italians landed at Massawa.”(30) Thus, the British seed of betrayal subsequently resulted in the establishment of a colony within the Horn of Africa's Ethiopia, which the Italians named Eritrea. The French leased Djibouti from Emperor Minelik while the British and Italians colonized Somaliland and Somalia respectively. The Italian attempt at colonizing the rest of the Horn of Africa i.e. Ethiopia suffered an ignominious defeat at Adowa in 1896. Although the Italians tried again during the Second World War, they were booted out after a short period of occupation.

\*brackets: not mine.

The survival of Ethiopian independence was the beacon of hope from the Horn of Africa that ignited the yearning and struggle for independence by colonized people in Africa and throughout the rest of the world.

From mid-19<sup>th</sup> century onwards, successive Ethiopian Emperors particularly Tewodros, Yohannes, Minelik II and Haile Selassie I were largely engaged in uniting the country and resisting foreign domination. Emperor Tewodros was fully aware of what the colonialists were up to when he stated: “I know. ....the tactics of European governments when they want to seize a country. First they send missionaries, then consuls to support the missionaries, then battalions to sustain the consuls. I am not a raja from Hindustan to be made a fool of like that: I prefer to engage the battalions at once”.(31)

During the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the last period of the 2<sup>nd</sup> millennium A.D. the Horn of Africa comprised of four independent countries most of which have been at war with each other: two wars between Ethiopia and Somalia, and one between Ethiopia and Eritrea. The millennium of misery has left the countries and people of the Horn of Africa destitute with the highest levels of poverty, environmental degradation, illiteracy, absence of democracy, and prevalence of pandemic diseases. Tribalism and corruption are rampant. The Eritrean and Ethiopian Governments are, in the most, not even on talking terms let alone engaging in matters of common interest. Instead of being a place of refuge, the Horn of Africa has become a region of emigrants subject to a continuous brain drain.

##### 5. Horn of Africa's Millennium of Hope?

At the start of the 3<sup>rd</sup> millennium A.D. the Horn of Africa finds itself facing extremely serious socio-economic and political challenges as well as opportunities. The big question at this stage is which direction the countries in the region as well as the international community should take for their long-term mutual benefits. There are options: at least two. One that is unacceptable is to continue with the legacy of the misery that afflicted the region during the 2<sup>nd</sup> millennium A.D. Regrettably, current trends seem to indicate that this option is

being pursued. Ethiopia had occupied southern Somalia in 2006 in reaction to threats by fundamentalist Somali leaders but later exited the country only to reoccupy parts of Somalia in support of its transitional government. There was also a brief clash between Djibouti and Eritrea. The untenable situation of a no-war and no-peace condition between Eritrea and Ethiopia continues to be a source of serious concern to the people in the region as well as the international community. Somalia is known to be a failed state torn as its by clan affiliations, the establishment of semi-independent states, namely, Somaliland and Puntland, as well as the advent of Islamic fundamentalists e.g. the Al Shabab group. The second option is to systematically do away with the fundamental causes that brought about the region's current predicaments and make a concerted effort in achieving peace and development in the Horn of Africa in a context of democracy, respect for human rights, transparency and accountability. The following aspects deserve a special consideration:

### 5.1 Need for a Positive Vision and a Comprehensive Development Strategy

The most fundamental challenge facing the Horn of Africa today is the abject poverty that its people are suffering under. This is mainly due to a lack of collaboration among the regimes in the Horn of Africa as well as due to the prevailing poor governance, and underutilization of the region's huge natural and human resources. At the international conference on possibilities for a confederation in the Horn of Africa, organized by the University of South Florida in November 2002, it had been resolved to recommend, inter alia, to initiate the preliminary measures needed to facilitate a confederation among Djibouti, Eritrea, Ethiopia, and Somalia. It was also recommended that steps be taken to formulate a comprehensive development strategy for the region.<sup>(32)</sup> Accordingly, a series of international consultative meetings are expected to take place the first one of which was organized by the Africa Program at the University of Texas (Arlington) in collaboration with the Horn of Africa Peace and Development Center in Dallas, Texas during October 23-25, 2006. The proceedings of the conference can be viewed at [www.hafrica.com](http://www.hafrica.com). There is no doubt that a carefully formulated and practical action towards a confederation in the Horn of Africa as well as the implementation of a comprehensive development strategy will be a catalyst for achieving an enhanced collaboration leading to an enduring peace and prosperity in the region.

### 5.2 Need for Democracy and Rule of Law

The need to enhance democracy and rule of law is one other fundamental requirement in the Horn. Tribalism, corruption, arbitrary arrests and trampling on human rights are rampant. These are the realities that fuel the grinding poverty in the region and the breeding grounds for international terrorism. Meaningful changes for improvement can be achieved only if internal efforts are strengthened by concrete support from the international community which is capable of taking effective steps to inhibit dictatorship and create suitable incentives for positive



change. Horn of Africa people living in the diaspora could also play a pivotal role by working together for achieving a meaningful change in the region. In his book: “Yekihedet Qulqulet” (approximate translation: The slippery slope of Betrayal), Mesfin Wolde-Mariam states: “When those who have the responsibility for ensuring the respect of law trample on it irresponsibly, they are leaving the door open for others to do the same.” He goes on to state: “We should learn from the sad conditions in Somalia how harmful and endless tribal conflicts are.”(33)

### 5.3 Horn of Africa’s Potential and Its Strategic Value

In this age of globalization and the pursuit of direct interests, it is essential to determine the extent to which there is a positive internal and external perception about the importance of the Horn of Africa.

#### 5.3.1 Internal Perception

It is evident that the current governments and intellectuals in the Horn of Africa give, in the most, scant regard to the strategic interests of the region as a whole bent as they are on internal conflicts and their mutual tensions. This attribute makes them part of the basic problem facing the Horn. On the individual level, some have been known to ask what, for instance, Ethiopia would benefit from collaboration in the Horn context. It would not be surprising if the same query is raised by individuals in the other Horn countries. The answer to such questions is that no enduring peace and development can be achieved in the Horn without mutual collaboration in the region based on democracy and mutual respect. The absence of collaboration will only mean the continuation of conflicts, tension and heavy spending on defense and security instead of investing the scarce resources for the benefit of the poorest people on earth. Loud words of bravado notwithstanding, the Horn of Africa ports on the Red Sea and the Indian Ocean are important to Ethiopia while the huge natural resources in Ethiopia are essential for the other Horn countries. Above all, what bind the people in the Horn of Africa are their common history, culture, shared values, interests and geography.

Ironic as it may seem, the Horn of Africa which is at the bottom of any scale of economic development, does have substantial human, agricultural, water and mineral resources which, with good management and governance, would extricate it from the grips of the stifling poverty. In his excellent work expounding the potential for economic cooperation, Daniel Kendie has identified specific and practical development schemes that could transform the Horn of Africa into a self-sustaining and stable region which would not be vulnerable to international terrorists. The schemes he refers to include the establishment of a transport and communication system to link the various countries, the development of the Wabi Shebelle and Juba River basins, the exploitation of the natural gas and oil resources discovered in the Ogaden region, and the full utilization of the substantial agricultural and water resources.(34) The accelerated development of

such a huge potential ought to be of direct interest to the people of the Horn as well as to the international community.

For their own selfish agenda, some so called leaders and intellectuals betray their legacy by alleging, for instance, that Ethiopia's history is only a century old! For a fascinating discussion of this subject, please refer to Mesfin Wolde-Mariam's book: "Yekehedet Qulqulet". Horn of Africa's rich history over several millennia is a matter of an established record not subject to whimsical manipulations based on narrow and myopic objectives of tribalism and thirst for power.

### 5.3.2 Importance of the Horn of Africa to USA Interests

According to Jeffrey A. Lefebvre, Ethiopia (including Eritrea at the time of his writing) was of interest to USA only in terms of "its location across the Red Sea from Saudi Arabia, (and) was of no direct strategic value." (35) He goes on to state that USA interests in the Horn were for the purposes of:

- (a) Protecting the sea lines of communication or oil lanes;
- (b) "Supporting Egypt's efforts to protect its southern flank and the Nile waters"; and
- (c) Blunting destabilization activities aimed at Saudi Arabia and other pro-Western States. (36)

Mesfin Wolde-Mariam states: "For the United States, none of the countries of the Horn have any significance outside its material interests on the Arabian Peninsula, and the prosperity and military strength of Israel." (37) He adds: "No country in the Horn or the Middle East has any strategic importance in a modern global and military sense. Their importance is purely regional and can be assessed only in terms of their capacities to affect each other. Beyond that they were of very little use to the superpowers, and they have very little use to the US today." (38) Since the 9/11's Al Qaeda attack on the United States and the ensuing wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, the importance of the Horn of Africa has somewhat been enhanced in the context of the war against international terrorism. Ethiopia's occupation of Southern Somalia has had the blessing of the international community despite an earlier resolution by the UN Security Council to the effect that the armies of the countries neighboring Somalia should not have been involved in dealing with the vocal challenges encountered from the fundamentalists in Mogadishu. It should be noted that the continued weakness of Somalia's Transitional Federal Government (TFG) on the one hand and the increasingly emboldened fundamentalist, Al Shabab group, has left no option but direct incursion by Ethiopia in central and southern Somalia at TFG's behest. Kenya has also invaded part of southern Somalia. The African Union and IGAAD have so far been unable to provide an adequate peace making and keeping force in Somalia without involving Ethiopia. It is a matter of serious concern that unless Ethiopia extricates itself from the continued occupation of Southern Somalia, it is

bound to leave a scar that would complicate its relationship with Somalia as a whole in the long-term.

It would appear, from the above, that the Horn of Africa is sadly of no strategic interest to the international community except in the context of international terrorism and the specific interests of some Western countries. It would also seem that the USA and French forces present in the Horn of Africa (in Djibouti and Ethiopia) are there, arguably, as preventive measures of containment in the Horn. Sadly, the regimes in the Horn of Africa are playing along with the myopic western view about the region. Be that as it may, in the opinion of this writer, the strategic importance of the Horn would be in direct correlation with the extent to which there is unity, peace and development in the region. A divided house commands no respect or as per an Ethiopian saying: “Salt, be tasteful for your own sake”.

### 5.3.3 Arab Interests in the Horn of Africa

It has often been stated that Egypt is “the gift of the Nile” in view of its almost total dependence on the Horn of Africa, particularly Ethiopia, for its water supply. Mesfin Wolde-Mariam states: “The Horn of Africa constitutes, for the Arab Peninsula, the gateway to the heart of Africa” (39) The relationship between the Horn of Africa and the Arabs in general over the last two millennia has not been one of a sustained collaboration and mutual respect. As has been presented above, the Horn had the upper hand during the first millennium while the Arabs have been having a negative impact on the region’s internal affairs during the second millennium. This, again, is the result of the Horn’s own internal fragmentation and disunity albeit resulting, partly, from the Ottoman, Arab, British, French, and Italian colonial onslaught on the region. The best option for both the people of the Horn and the Arabs is to take new and positive initiatives for the mutual benefit of both regions as well as the international community. Specific examples of such measures include: (a) The Nile Basin Initiative being promoted by the World Bank as long as the interests of the upstream states are duly protected; and (b) the proposal to establish a Red Sea Co-operative Council comprising all the countries surrounding the Red Sea including Ethiopia.(40) Such an institutional capacity would enable the 400 million people living in the wider region to take advantage of their complementary resources: human, agricultural, water, and mineral on the part of the Horn, and oil as well as investment resources on the Arab side, as well as technology from the Israelis. The enhanced peace and development that could ensue from such initiatives would no doubt be of great benefit locally as well as internationally moving away from two millennia of conflict and distrust to an enduring partnership based on mutual respect.

### 5.3.4 Horn of Africa’s Importance to Africa

As the only region that had, in part (i.e. Ethiopia), successfully survived the onslaught of Arab and European colonialism, the Horn of Africa certainly

contributed positively to the continent's renaissance and achievement of independence in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. No wonder that all the most important regional institutions concerning Africa i.e. the African Union, the UN Economic Commission for Africa, and IGAAD are all located in the Horn of Africa. The Horn of Africa has been an active participant in African and UN affairs. Peacekeeping forces were sent to Korea, the Congo, Liberia, and Burundi from the Horn. The challenge in the 3<sup>rd</sup> millennium is how the regional institutions based in the Horn of Africa could make effective contributions to bring about concrete improvements in terms of socio-economic and political developments. Collaboration within the Horn of Africa would facilitate and enhance the achievement of the objectives of African unity as well as development efforts through the UNECA, the World Bank, NEPAD, COMESA, IGAAD, etc.

#### 5.3.5 The Chinese and the Indians Are Coming!

One of the most important developments at the onset of the 3<sup>rd</sup> millennium in the Horn of Africa, especially Ethiopia, is the increasingly substantial involvement of China, and, to a lesser extent, of India in the region's trade and development. It is hoped that this development would be taken as an exemplary step especially by the neighboring Arab countries and the international community as a whole for mutual benefits so that the Horn of Africa region would extricate itself from its current abject poverty and become an effective partner in economic prosperity.

#### 5.3.6 The Iranian Interest in the Red Sea

There are reports to the effect that Iran, with Eritrea's collaboration, is showing interest in setting foot in the Red Sea, particularly the port of Assab. (41) Notwithstanding the concerns of some skeptics as to Iran's motives, especially those that contend that Iranian presence in the Red Sea area would pose a threat to the important international sea lane that is critical especially to the west, it is hoped that Iran's genuine intention is to contribute to the development of trade in and with the Horn of Africa rather than increasing the tension that is already debilitating the region. Nevertheless, there is no doubt that Iran's move would be watched by the international community with a great deal of interest.

#### 5.4 Need to Emphasize Horn of Africa's Mutual Interests and Reduce Animosity

In his farewell address on September 17, 1796, George Washington stated: "The nation which indulges toward another an habitual hatred or an habitual fondness is in some degree a slave. It is a slave to its animosity or to its affection, either of which is sufficient to lead it astray from its duty and its interest."(42)

In 1993, Tesfatsion Medhanie had urged Eritrea and Ethiopia "...to work for a process whereby the two states would be reunited within a framework of confederation". (43) His prophecy that the alternative would be war turned out to be regrettably quite accurate. The ill-conceived policy of secession has brought about disastrous consequences including a war between Eritrea and Ethiopia in

which over 70,000 people lost their lives. Since the UN peacekeeping force left the Eritrean side of the border, the tension between the two nations is causing serious concern among the affected people as well as the international community. Somalia's previous attacks, though repulsed many years ago, continue to cause rancor like an open wound, mainly because the chaotic and fragmented Somali nation has yet to abandon its claim on a huge part of Ethiopia's territory. On the other hand, Ethiopia's continued incursions Southern Somalia, albeit with the Somali Government's invitation, is nevertheless likely to leave a lingering feeling of vulnerability and victimization among the Somali people.

Consequently, personal animosities are still rampant even among certain so called intellectuals in the diaspora. Instead of being preoccupied with finding solutions to the ongoing problems, they prefer to give vent to their jingoistic zeal by attacking any initiative aimed at achieving peace and development in the Horn. This was certainly the case during the preparations for and arrangement of the international conference on prospects of a confederation in the Horn of Africa which took place in Tampa, Florida ([www.hafrica.com](http://www.hafrica.com)).

The fundamental causes of such extreme animosities vary but they could be ascribed to the highly controversial and negative policy of secession and ethnicity adopted in the Ethiopian constitution and the lack of focus on opportunities for the common benefit of the region's population. It is surprising to note, for instance, that certain political entities try to use Horn of Africa wide efforts for the promotion of their narrow minded ethnic oriented agenda instead of promoting visions of unity and integration. They care little for the dire consequences of pitting tribe against tribe. Others are engaging in religious fundamentalism. The article in the Reporter on 1/12/04 about the attempt by the Wahabists to influence the election of officers for the National Ethiopian Majlis for Islamic Affairs using 4 million Saudi Riyals is very revealing. For more details, please see Hibret Selamu's article: "Proof of Wahabi Activities in Ethiopia", on Ben's News Page. It would seem that external elements with latent motives intend, hopefully in vain, to arouse religious conflicts in Ethiopia.

It is incumbent on all interested parties, including those in the diaspora, to seek all ways and means of responding to the divisive issues afflicting the Horn in a positive manner having regard to the interests of the poor people and not for the mere perpetuation of power. In this regard, it would be useful to consider seriously the findings and recommendations contained in the Declaration on Conflict Prevention and Resolution in the Horn of Africa adopted at the conclusion of an international conference held at the Southern Methodist University in Dallas, Texas, USA on November 11, 2011 (please see [www.hafrica.com](http://www.hafrica.com)).

## 5.5 Need to Establish Mechanisms for an Effective Dialogue

As stated above, governments in the Horn are not engaged in efforts to promote peace and development in the region. This tragic state of affairs would benefit only those countries which wish to keep the region fragmented and weak. Therefore, urgent and meaningful initiatives need to be taken especially in the diaspora in order to facilitate practical discussions and awareness of the opportunities and challenges facing the Horn and the international community. An example of such an initiative is the recent establishment of the Horn of Africa Peace and Development Centre as per Texas laws ([www.hafrica.com](http://www.hafrica.com)). The Centre's mission is to facilitate dialogues and research on the Horn's socio-economic and political issues. The institutional arrangement of the Centre is such that while its headquarter will, at least for the time being, remain in USA, its sub-committees will be established, in due course, in each of the four Horn countries.

Another important shortcoming is the lack of focus by Horn political parties on the region's issues. It is time that they recognize the fact that they need to widen their perspective to regional and international issues if they do intend to strengthen peace and development in their own respective countries.

The active participation of political, civic, community based and non-governmental organizations including associations, churches, mosques, academic institutions, the media especially the private sector, etc. in the important quest for peace and development in the Horn within a democratic and equitable framework could go a long way to achieving the eventual objective of a united, strong and self-reliant Horn of Africa.

## 6. Conclusion

The main lesson to be learned from the Horn of Africa's experience during the 1<sup>st</sup> millennium A.D. is that it was a world power when the people were at peace and united. When they were able to devote energies to the defense and development of their region, they achieved a high rate of success both at home and abroad.

The Horn fell to bad times during the 2<sup>nd</sup> millennium A.D. There are lessons that should be learned from the negative causes that brought the region to such depths of utter poverty and insecurity. Quite aside from external factors such as colonialism, the main factors that had devastating effects on the Horn were and continue to be internal. These include the highly devastating effects of myopic tribalism or ethnicism, lack of democracy and good governance, corruption, and the absence of a cohesive vision and strategy that could bind the people of the Horn together for the common good.

There is now a fresh opportunity to learn the right lessons from the successes and failures of the past two millennia and proceed positively on the path of peace, unity, democracy and sustainable development during the 3<sup>rd</sup> millennium A.D.

Will there be hope for the Horn of Africa?

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Note: Kidane Alemayehu is a retired United Nations official after serving for 28 years as Senior Advisor in Africa (Nigeria, Tanzania, Kenya, Uganda, The Gambia, Botswana, Lesotho, Malawi, and Swaziland) and the Middle East (Qatar, and the United Arab Emirates). Prior to that he had served for 12 years during Haile Selassie's government as a senior official in the ministries of Education, and Interior as well as the Telecommunications Board in Ethiopia. Among his many activities, he is credited for having founded the Horn of Africa Peace and Development Centre.

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