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26 JUN 2006

TO: GUHENNO, UNATIONS, NEW YORK
FROM: ENNIFAR, UNMEE, ADDIS ABABA
DATE: 26 JUNE 2006
NUMBER: MEE
SUBJECT: Meeting with US Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs.

SUMMARY: This CC reports on the meeting with Dr. Frazer and Rear Admiral Hunt. It covers issues related to the peace process and the downsizing of UNMEE; the status of the EEBC interaction with the Parties; the status of the US diplomatic initiative and the "peace package"; the situation in Somalia and its potential impact on the peace process and the way forward.

1. I met on 24 June 2006 with Dr. Jendayi Fraser, US Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs, to exchange views on the situation in the peace process in light of S-C resolution 1681 (2006) and the cancellation of the 15 June EEBC meeting with the Parties, the downsizing of the Mission, the status of the US diplomatic initiative and the way forward, the US position regarding the "peace Package", and the potential impact of the situation in Somalia in the Horn of Africa and the peace process. Dr. Frazer was accompanied by Rear Admiral, US Navy, Richard W. Hunt, Commander Combined Joint Task Force Horn of Africa, Ambassador Vikki Huddleston, US Charge d'Affaires in Addis Ababa as well as Colonel Richard Orth, the Military Attache at the US Embassy in Addis Ababa. I was accompanied by the Force Commander and SPAO Abdel Haireche.

2. I provided a thorough briefing on the potential impact of the downsizing of the Mission, and the persistent political stalemate due to the entrenched positions of the parties. I further informed of the DPKO/UNMEE meeting in The Hague on 14 June, the exchange of letters between the EEBC and the S-G, the correspondence between Eritrean President Isaias and the Border Commission's President, and the latter's exchange with the parties. I expressed the Mission's readiness to provide the necessary support for demarcation, and stressed the *sine qua none* condition that all restrictions on UNMEE are lifted before demarcation could proceed. The Force Commander then provided a detailed explanation on the situation on the ground, as well as the downsizing process and its impact on the Mission's monitoring capabilities. Regarding the parties' reaction to the downsizing, I informed that, while Ethiopia shows concerns about the Mission's monitoring capacity, Eritrea considers the exercise a non-issue. As for the reopening of the EEBC offices in the two capitals, Eritrea stated that, in the absence of demarcation, there would be no need for these offices.

3. In response to my inquiry about the status of the US diplomatic initiative and any future plan of action, Dr. Frazer stated that Washington was asked to step in and help break the deadlock in the

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peace process and put the demarcation process back on track, at a time when the Security Council was contemplating sanctions as referenced in resolution 1640. In her judgement, the US succeeded with the Witnesses of the Algiers Agreement in bringing the Parties and the EEBC back together. The US requested flexibility by the parties and the EEBC in order to make progress. Initially, both the EEBC and Ethiopia had been willing to show that flexibility except Eritrea, which continued to stick to the implementation of the EEBC decision as is. Eritrea is also using the "American excuse" to reject the US initiative and the way forward. In this situation, Dr. Frazer opined that Ethiopia is very eager to walk out of the process.

4. In Dr. Frazer's view, demarcation as Eritrea wants it is not feasible, since as Ethiopia claims, there are other issues that need to be tackled through dialogue. In addition, the US and the international community are concerned about the consequences of the demarcation on communities at the border. She stressed that dialogue is not a separate process from demarcation: "We were hoping to put dialogue in the context of demarcation, and we have the technology for that." She lamented the fact that the EEBC retracted from its initial commitment to show flexibility, but recognized that by itself, the EEBC can only deal with the "manifest impracticabilities" not the human ones. In this situation, Dr. Frazer stated, "We have to develop parallel tracks to deal with the matter."

5. The Assistant Secretary expressed Washington's frustrations with the process and informed that the US has been tempted to give up. She informed however, that her government would ask the UNS-G to deal with the issue by designating someone and the venue to promote the parallel track approach (such as the Witnesses). She predicted that Eritrea would reject the proposal, and stated, "We will be back at the starting point which will also affect the EEBC and UNMEE." Dr. Frazer clarified however that this proposal has not yet been submitted to US senior leadership.

6. I expressed concerns that, if the US walked out of the process, this would have dire consequences and opined that no other country or organization would step in. I underlined that the US initiative has achieved initial success as the Parties and the EEBC had started to make progress in the demarcation process, and asked Dr. Frazer on the way forward and the means to bring the Parties to communicate. The Assistant Secretary put the blame squarely on Eritrea for not showing flexibility and reiterated that Ethiopia had dropped the "in principle" reference to its acceptance of the EEBC decision. She opined that it appears that as if neither Party wanted demarcation, and that the status quo would benefit Ethiopia. In addition, she referred again to the "parallel track" concept, but stressed that the fundamental issue was that the Parties needed to come to term with the fact that conflict and war are not the solution in interstate relations.

7. According to Dr. Frazer, the Witnesses will continue to play an important role in the "parallel track" option as the next feasible step. She warned, however, that she would not propose to Secretary of State Rice to "keep the process going for the sake of the process." Further, she lamented the EEBC's unilateral decision to schedule the 15 June meeting with parties, since the US did not expect a meeting

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to take place that soon after the 17 May encounter "We needed time for the parties and for the process to mature." Finally, she regretted that the EEBC had recently changed its attitude and flexibility on the way forward.

8. Taking clues from your CC 1701 of 23 June 2006, I took the opportunity to elicit Dr. Frazer and the US views on the "peace package" that was shared informally with her at the Witnesses meeting in February 2006. As the Assistant Secretary did not seem to remember the contours and the content of the package, I explained the context and the different aspects of the document. Dr. Frazer requested a copy of the package and promised to look into the matter. I promised that DPKO would send a copy to the State Department.

9. Regarding the conflict in Somalia and its potential impact on the peace process, Dr. Frazer considered the situation as "uncertain" and put forward different scenarios. The best-case scenario posits that the Union of Islamic Courts (UICs) and the Transitional Federal Government (TFG) enter into dialogue, and as a result, moderates would emerge thus leading to stability in the country and the rebuilding of the State. The worst-case scenario would result from a total control by the UICs over Somalia and the disintegration of the TFG. This would have a major negative impact on the Horn, and the US [and IGAD] would not allow it. Further, this scenario would pull in Ethiopia which, through a rapid in and out intervention, would strike before the UICs could get to Baidoa [HQs of the TFG]. While the US fears this type of reaction, it would rally with Ethiopia if the "Jihadist" took over. Dr. Frazer opined that Ethiopia would not need to pull troops from its border with Eritrea since it has enough military capabilities. However, she fears that Ethiopian action in Somalia might bring in "foreign elements," and expressed the view that the next weeks would be crucial for capacity building [dialogue UICs-TFG] and stabilization in Somalia. She further confided that the Ethiopians view Eritrean actions in Somalia as tantamount to opening a second front against Ethiopia.

10. The US military attaché concurred with the Assistant Secretary and explained that Ethiopia would move forces from the Eastern and Western regions to the Somali border, and use anti aircraft units and artillery against the "technicals". For this reason it would not need to pull troops from the northern border. He also informed that, since March 2006, the Ethiopian army has been fighting a small insurgency in the North.

11. For his part, Rear Admiral Hunt also informed of the military problems Ethiopia is facing with the Ogaden National Liberation Front (ONLF) operating in the border areas with Somalia, and predicted that, if Baidoa were threatened, the Ethiopian army would march towards Mogadishu. In this case, however, Ethiopia would need to pull troops from the Ethio-Eritrean border with the potential risk of Eritrea taking advantage of the situation and making a move. Ethiopia does not have enough force to sustain a march on Mogadishu, therefore it would need to pull elements from the 21 divisions in the north and along the Temporary Security Zone. The Rear Admiral expressed the view that the Ethiopian army could not sustain two fronts simultaneously, and inquired if UNMEE had the capacity to monitor

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military preparations by the Eritrean and Ethiopian armies at the border.

12. Reverting to the border issue, I probed Dr. Frazer on the potential reaction by the Ethiopian government to the EEBC President's response to President Isaias' letter. I also suggested that demarcation could start in non-controversial areas, and for the Parties to engage in dialogue where and when the process face difficulties on the ground. Both, Dr. Frazer and the Charge d'Affaires stated that the Ethiopians have already declared that the response shows that the EEBC and its President are biased in favor of Eritrea. Ethiopia is prepared to "freeze" demarcation, and will continue to maintain its position that demarcation would not take place without dialogue. The Assistant Secretary informed that the US even proposed "open borders" between the parties, but this proposal was turned down. On the issue of communication between the parties, she confided that the Ethiopian leadership attempted to send messages to Eritrea, but the latter refused to listen. In her opinion, it is not in the mentality of the Eritrean leadership to negotiate. It is rather to force action. Even when Eritrea solicited the US intervention in the peace process, it was with the view that Washington would impose a solution on Ethiopia. As the Eritrean leadership has become involved in regional issues such as the mediation between warring parties in the Sudan, it is becoming increasingly bolder, arrogant and uncompromising in its stances.

13. On the way forward, Dr. Frazer quoted Prime Minister Meles as saying "We make strategic decisions and everything flows from there." Eritrea has made a strategic decision to go to war with Ethiopia (in the past). According to her, Asmara has also "crossed the red line in Somalia by supporting extremists, and they will pay for it". It has also crossed the red line by arming extremists all over. Therefore, Eritrea has lost legitimacy in the Region. Finally, she cautioned that if Ethiopia intervened in Somalia, it would be a mistake for the international community to condemn it.

14. I reiterated my appeal for full engagement by the international community to break the deadlock in the peace process and for Washington to stay the course to give its diplomatic initiative a new impetus for success. I cautioned that any further downsizing of the Mission or any tempering with the mandate by the Security Council comes September 30, 2006, would hurt the peace process. The Force Commander joined me to emphasize this point and to stress the need to incorporate the new regional realities in any further considerations on UNMEE.

Comments:

The US Assistant Secretary's visit to Addis Ababa and meetings with Prime Minister Meles and the presence of Rear Admiral Hunt at her side show Washington's growing concerns about the evolving situation in Somalia and the Region. If in the past, the US and Ethiopia had diverging views and strategies on the way forward in Somalia (ref our CC CSX 103 of 21/6/06), the UICs military achievements have definitely led to a rapprochement and to the potential development of a common approach to the problem. Any Ethiopian action in Somalia would have Washington's blessing.

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In the Somali conflict, Eritrea has openly challenged the US policies in the Region. By supporting the UICs, President Isaias has, in the eyes of the US, aligned himself with "extremists" and therefore crossed the "red line." The impact of this development on the peace process could not be overemphasized.

The current priority for the US in the Region is to find an acceptable solution to the Somali question. Therefore, the demarcation process has receded to the background, and the US diplomatic initiative has lost some of its momentum at a time when the Mission is undergoing an important and difficult transition through downsizing.

What is clear is that Washington shares Ethiopia's view that demarcation could not proceed without dialogue. In the current context, one should not expect any change in this position or pressure on the Ethiopian leadership to demarcate the border. This, combined with Eritrea's refusal to attend the 15 June 2006 EEBC meeting, the radicalisation of its position, its attacks against the US initiative, and its position in Somalia, are ingredients that would reinforce the stalemate in the peace process.

Best regards,

[Drafted by: OIC-Ennifar and SPAO Abdel Maireche]