

id: 248187
date: 2/10/2010 15:59
refid: 10DJIBOUTI165
origin: Embassy Djibouti
classification: CONFIDENTIAL
destination:
header:
VZCZCXRO0677
RR RUEHROV RUEHTRO
DE RUEHDJ #0165/01 0411559
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
R 101559Z FEB 10
FM AMEMBASSY DJIBOUTI
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 1371
INFO SOMALIA COLLECTIVE

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 DJIBOUTI 000165

SIPDIS
DEPARTMENT FOR AF/E

E.O. 12958: DECL: 2020/02/10
TAGS: PREL, PTER, SO, SU, YM, DJ, ET, KE
SUBJECT: DJIBOUTI: FOREIGN MINISTER UPDATE ON SOMALIA

CLASSIFIED BY: J. Swan, Ambassador; REASON: 1.4(B), (D)

1. (C) SUMMARY. During a February 10 meeting with visiting Director of the National Defense University's Africa Center for Strategic Studies (ACSS) Ambassador William Bellamy, Djiboutian Foreign Minister Mahmoud Ali Youssouf assessed the current situation in Somalia with pragmatism, concern, and a hint of impatience. Despite ongoing international, regional, and Djiboutian support and advice to the Transitional Federal Government (TFG), Youssouf said, extremist activity was still on the rise in Somalia, and directly threatened Djiboutian security and economic interests. He cautioned that if Kenya decided to move forward with its planned Jubaland initiative, Somalis would be quick to use such "interference" as an excuse to foment unrest in Nairobi. Djiboutian President Guelleh speaks with TFG President Sharif nearly every day, Youssouf said, and counsels him to focus on increasing security in Mogadishu, providing services to the population, and ramping up public diplomacy efforts to counter al-Shabaab's all-too-effective messaging. Briefly touching on Sudan, Youssouf said that the Kenyans had asked for an Intergovernmental Authority for Development (IGAD) summit on the Comprehensive Peace Agreement to be convened in two to three weeks' time, but said he had no further details. END SUMMARY.

SOMALIA AND KENYA

2. (C) Current levels of diplomatic and military assistance to the TFG had not been enough to staunch rising extremist activity in Somalia, Yousseuf said. In addition to the direct threat to Djibouti's economic installations and internal security, extremism was increasingly endangering Yemen--and now Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula has threatened international shipping through the Bab-el-Mandeb strait. Ambassador Bellamy noted Kenyans' growing sense of urgency on countering extremist threats emanating from Somalia. Yousseuf said that the GOK's cooperation in combating piracy had "boomeranged" back, with ethnic Somalis demonstrating in Nairobi. Eldoret Airport has become a major point of entry for goods smuggled from Somalia into Kenya, and could mask movement of extremist-linked contraband, he added. Yousseuf likened his reaction to Kenya's Jubaland initiative to his fears about Ethiopia's imminent involvement in Somalia in 2006. This kind of "interference" can only have negative repercussions for Kenya itself, he cautioned. Extremists would quickly turn such intervention into an excuse for undermining Kenya's internal security. On a positive note, Yousseuf praised regional coordination on Somalia policy. With the notable exception of Eritrea, Somalia's Horn of Africa neighbors were much more focused and coordinated on Somalia questions than they had been in some years.

DJIBOUTI TO SHARIF: FOCUS ON THE POPULATION

3. (C) President Guelleh, Yousseuf said, continued to speak by telephone with TFG President Sheik Sharif nearly every day. Guelleh was advising Sharif to focus primarily on security, services for the population, and public outreach. The TFG needed to control Mogadishu first, Yousseuf stressed, moving beyond Villa Somalia into other neighborhoods while an AMISOM cordon prevented al-Shabaab from reinforcing. While dialogue remained important, the TFG should negotiate from a position of strength, balancing the carrot and the stick. Yousseuf agreed with Ambassador Bellamy that the TFG had to create momentum in the security arena, and then use it to begin providing services to the population. He criticized a recent TFG budget for devoting some 50 percent of resources to security and another 20-30 percent to salaries, rather than channeling more to basic services.

4 (C) "Sustainable security of the government itself will stem from the security of the population," Youssouf stressed. He agreed that

DJIBOUTI 00000165 002 OF 002

there was a danger the TFG could concentrate too much on surviving, requesting additional troops for its own protection rather to help start governing. President Sharif was a good leader, Youssouf assessed, but right now Somalia might need more aggressive decision-making. President Guelleh had already counseled President Sharif to focus on governance instead of on keeping peace between the clans. If Sharif could end his term by finishing the constitution and securing 80 percent of Mogadishu, it would be a good accomplishment. If Sharif just tries to mediate between the clans, Youssouf warned, he could end up achieving nothing--following in the footsteps of several of his predecessors. Youssouf said that the TFG was still not doing nearly enough mass outreach. In the wake of the December 3 Shamo Hotel attack, for example, the TFG had broadcast only mourning recitations from the Koran on its radio stations, missing out on a prime opportunity to communicate to the population how extremist attacks hurt ordinary Somalis.

UPCOMING IGAD SUMMIT ON CPA?

5. (C) In an aside on Sudan, Youssouf said that Kenya had recently asked that an IGAD summit be convened in some two or three weeks to discuss the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA). Youssouf said that Djibouti had not yet received an invitation to the event with specific dates. The December 2009 IGAD Ministerial meeting in Djibouti had called for Ethiopian Foreign Minister Seyoum Mesfin and Ugandan Foreign Minister Sam Kutesa to travel to Khartoum and Juba on an IGAD mission to consult the CPA signatories, but Youssouf said that this trip had not occurred.

COMMENT

6. (C) Along with the ongoing Djibouti-Eritrea border dispute,

Somalia remains the GODJ's central security concern. Beyond its hosting of the Djibouti Process, the GODJ clearly remains committed to supporting the TFG. In addition to helping train TFG recruits and planning an AMISOM troop contribution, the GODJ also consults regularly with the TFG leadership on its strategy. Like other GODJ officials, Foreign Minister Yousouf has invested deeply in the TFG's success. Yet as an ethnic Afar, his equities in Somalia are largely professional rather than personal, and he sometimes betrays exasperation over intractable Somali inter-clan struggles. END COMMENT.

7. (U) Ambassador Swan and POL/ECONOff Hunter (notetaker) also participated in this meeting. ACSS Director Ambassador Bellamy did not have an opportunity to clear this cable before departing post.
SWAN

=====CABLE ENDS=====