

The way forward on the somali crisis



The Somalia crisis Ending the seven year Iraq war in which more than 4400 American soldiers died, tens of thousands injured and billions of dollars spent, President Obama announced no solid victory for the American troops.

“America has had a huge price to pay to give the Iraqis the chance to shape their future,” he said as he welcomed a “time to turn a new page.” His speech fell short of a definite “MISSION ACCOMPLISHED” declaration. This pre-emptive war, premised on flawed intelligence about Saddam Hussein’s possession of nuclear weapons, was quite ambiguous and over ambitious. For all the cost, the war is far from being won. Iraq is still sunk in violence and political instability and America is not securer than it was before the war.

John Boener, a house republican leader from Ohio mused, “Over the past months we have heard about ending the war in Iraq but not much about winning the war.” The UPDF presence in Somalia is quite commendable. However, as in Iraq, the Somalia scenario is a web of deep seated animosities with historical, ethnic, religious and other hatreds of primary political concerns that have erupted into war. Insertion of military forces into such an environment for the purpose of maintaining peace can be a complex endeavor. AU forces are mandated to protect the Transitional Federal Government and peace in Somalia from a neutral vantage point. While the TFG continues to prove very weak against its foes, the Al-shabaab has escalated its operation circles to include Uganda and other peaceful countries.

The Al shabaab are determined to over run the TFG, and annihilate AU forces using indiscriminate killing. Absolute neutrality under such a setting can be extremely risky. A peace-keeping enforcement is workable in a situation where peace, or at least a cease fire, has been established and there is peace, even some semblance of it, to maintain. In contrast, the environment in Somalia is one of an active combat.

Numerous antagonistic factions are at war and the AU forces are caught in between, hands tied by their rigid mandate. The AU leaders` summit in Munyonyo shied away from sanctioning change of mandate for the AU forces from keeping to enforcing peace. The crisis requires a pro-longed stay of our forces to protect a vestigial TFG that has failed to assert control over its base in Baidoa. Prolonged stay when stability possibility is dim will be expensive and could ignite anti-Ugandan sentiments giving the belligerents a sound excuse to launch more offensives in the name of nationalism. Somali history shows that different clans tend to unite against foreign forces when they consider that their country is being invaded.

We need to set clear deadlines for our operations in Somalia. No amount of AU forces can solve the crisis in Somalia with just military might. All alternative solutions must be explored along side the military one. The west, besides funding the AU military presence, should support AU to initiate a peace conference, bring all the antagonists on table so that they work towards a Somali tailored peace and solution to a Somali made crisis. The U. S policy should be all encompassing than a narrow focus on terrorism.

There is also need to cajole more nations into getting concerned. Our army needs to play only a part of a big whole and withdraw gracefully.