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Assessing the Strategic Environment

Developing Critical Thinking Skills at the Ethiopian Defense Command and Staff College

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A government's failure to understand the impact of global variables on the domestic environment can result in major destabilizing events. Emperor Tewodros II of Abyssinia (Ethiopia) learned this lesson the hard way. In 1862, after a snub by the British Government, the Emperor took the British Consul and other Europeans hostage to pressure the Crown to meet his request for equipment and training support. Being a somewhat impatient ruler, he also detained the British delegation sent to negotiate the initial hostages' release. Because Britain's ruling Liberal Party was reluctant to engage in "imperial adventures," the hostages were still in loco Abyssinia into 1867. What Emperor Tewodros was unaware of was that the hostages' situation was being played out in the British Press, becoming a factor in the Conservative victory in the 1867 general election. With a sense of obligation to settle the Abyssinia matter, in August 1867, on the Government's recommendation, Queen Victoria directed a punitive expedition to free the hostages. After overcoming major logistical and transportation challenges, the issue was settled with a British victory at Arogi, the successful storming of the Emperor's Citadel at Magdala, and Tewodros' suicide in August 1868.[1]

Tewdros II, Emperor of Abyssinia

This example of separate events taking place 3,600 miles apart, but having major impacts on both countries involved, demonstrates why governments must learn to take into consideration both their domestic and the global environments when developing national security policy and strategy. This is especially critical in today's atmosphere where, thanks to the internet and new media, information is available globally almost instantaneously. Today a Tewodros should be able to assess key global variables, and make decisions that reinforce stability rather than leading to his demise.

Developing Strategic Skills

As military officers progress in rank and responsibility, their perspectives must also evolve. It is critical that they force themselves out of the comfort zone of the tactical level of war and strive to gain an understanding of the complexity of the factors that influence national interaction within the strategic environment. Given the criticality of the Military element of power in national strategy development, it is within a nation's self-interest to ensure its senior military leaders recognize the role of global trends and variables, the strategic challenges that they present, and how they play in the development of a national security framework. Within the professional military education (PME) structure these topics are usually addressed in a nation's senior military institute.

1. The British Empire: Abyssinia Webpage Sourced June 29, 2011 britishempire.co.uk/forces/armycampaigns/africancampaigns/campabyssinia.htm.

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Military educational institutions at this level are well established in the Americas, Europe, the Indian sub-continent, and in Asia. In the Horn of Africa, the Kenyan National Defense College, established in 1992, has this mission:

> *To prepare selected Senior Military Officers and Senior Government Officials of the Republic of Kenya and their equivalent from selected friendly countries for higher responsibilities in the direction and management of defence, security and other related areas of public policy.*[2]

Until 2006, this was the only high-level PME operation in the region. In that year the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia established the Ethiopian Defense Command and Staff College (EDCSC). This two-year program was initiated with on-site support by qualified U.S. military instructors who provided curriculum development and methods of instruction assistance for the Ethiopian military faculty. With the departure of the on-site team in mid-2010, instruction and curriculum development became the responsibility of the senior Ethiopian officers who now head the academic departments. Educated at the national defense institutes of the United States, the United Kingdom, the People's Republic of China, and the Republic of India, these groundbreaking leaders have created an educational atmosphere especially suited to their military audience. Though the instruction is primarily lecture, open discussion is encouraged, and the student contributions are far greater than in previous years.

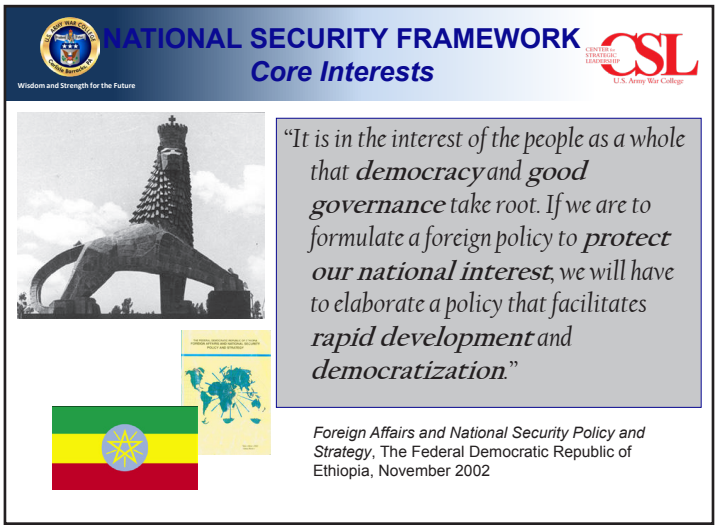
Enhancing the PME Experience

Taking advantage of the relationships developed during the initial formation of the school, the EDCSC enhances its instruction with subject matter experts from the U.S. Army War College (USAWC), and other U.S. senior PME institutions. Recognizing the value this educational assistance provides in support of its security cooperation initiatives on the continent, U.S. Africa Command (USAFRICOM) has funded three USAWC guest lecturers over the past year. Colonel Jim Markley, Dr. Al Stolberg, and Professor Bernard F. Griffard have presented seminars addressing strategic planning, the economics of national security, and national security strategy.

In support of its most recent effort, USAFRICOM invited Professor Griffard of the USAWC Center for Strategic Leadership (CSL) to deliver two seminars to the EDCSC Batch #6 students. These presentations, designed to complement the ongoing strategic analysis lesson, focused on "Assessing the Strategic Environment." To ensure a smooth fit into the curriculum, Prof. Griffard monitored on-going instruction and worked with the EDCSC faculty to refine his seminar material to ensure it built upon previous learning and reinforced the College's learning objectives.

Assessing the Strategic Environment

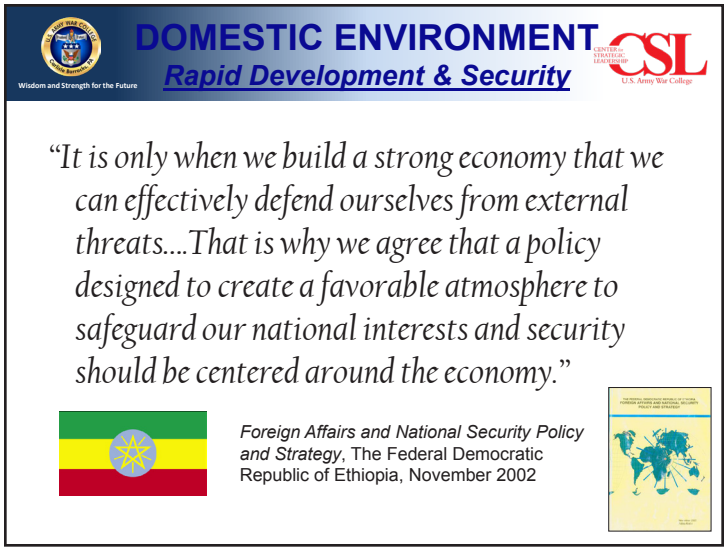
Using the 2002 Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia's Foreign Affairs and National Security Policy and Strategy as a touch point, the seminars' objectives were for the students to understand the Ethiopian strategic environment, the complexity of the factors that influence interaction within that strategic environment, and to assess the state of Ethiopian relationships with neighboring countries, the region, and within the global environment.



Made up of 40 Ethiopian military officers in the ranks of Major through Colonel, each seminar achieved the learning objectives by stepping through the USAWC strategic assessment model. Using Ethiopia's identified core interests of security, good governance, rapid development, and democratization, participants weighed their national interests against the challenges, opportunities, and threats of the global environment. After identifying changes in the operating environment, they discussed how best to employ the elements and tools of national power to reframe the execution of current strategies.

2. National Defence College, Ministry of State for Defence, Kenya website. Sourced June 29, 2011 http://mod.go.ke/?page_link=ndc

Because of the active student contributions to the discussion the seminars proved highly educational. The Horn of Africa is a tough neighborhood. With the scheduled July 9, 2011 independence of South Sudan, Ethiopia will share borders with six countries and Somaliland, an unrecognized, self-declared sovereign state. Each neighbor poses a specific set of bilateral considerations. Internal problems between North and South Sudan will cause relations to remain works in progress; Somalia is a failed state undergoing rehabilitation; Ethiopia and Eritrea share an undemarcated border currently patrolled by the United Nations Mission in Ethiopia and Eritrea (UNMEE); Djibouti provides Ethiopia's main trade channel to international commerce; while Kenya and Ethiopia enjoy cordial relations. Although a respected military capability is essential, in keeping with the stated policy in the 2002 National Strategy, the seminar members recognized soft power options focused on strengthening the economy and that regional economic relations were the preferred courses of action.



Critical Thinking

Effectively assessing the strategic environment requires an ability to conceptualize, analyze, and evaluate information. At the USAWC, these skills are referred to as Critical Thinking. Defined as "the use of those cognitive skills or strategies that increase the probability of a desirable outcome, critical thinking is used to describe thinking that is purposeful, reasoned, and goal directed."[3] It is a skill that is developed through use, and is a desirable attribute for a strategic military planner. Though it was not possible to make a general determination of the EDCSC students' critical thinking abilities, individuals in this year's seminars demonstrated commendable analytical skills not observed in previous years' events. This noticeable improvement may be due to the demographics of the student population. In 2009, Batch #4 was top heavy with senior officers (Lieutenant Colonel to Brigadier General). The 2010 class was still on the senior side. This year the population was younger overall (MAJ to COL), and considerably savvier as to the use of information and media. This, combined with the increased experience of the faculty instructors, may account for the more open expression of conclusions and projections.

Seminar Configuration

A major difference between Batch #6 and its predecessors was the absence of foreign officers. In 2009 and 2010 one third of the class was composed of officers from Somaliland and South Sudan. This year's seminars consisted solely of members of the Ethiopian Armed Forces. When asked about this the EDCSC faculty contacts had no substantive input. As the EDCSC continues to fine tune its attendance and curriculum requirements, it will be to its benefit to resume inviting officers from regional nations to participate.

At the U.S. Armed Forces' Senior Level Colleges it is recognized that association and collaboration with senior international officers destined to hold national level policymaking positions is an invaluable opportunity to improve mutual understanding of national security problems, operations, and preparedness. As a result, the International Fellows programs in these schools are in the process of expanding. Thus, given the obvious benefits of including officers from neighboring militaries in these classes, it was a surprise to see their absence in this year's seminars.

Political Influence on Attendance

Like many African nations, Ethiopia has a diverse population, with strong tribal ties. As the country's democratic structures mature it is important that they are seen as inclusive. This is especially true for the Ethiopian Armed Forces. In developing the roadmap to achieve this goal, the Ethiopian PME system plays an increasingly important role. As a

3. Interview: Stephen J. Gerras, Ph.D, Department of Command, Leadership & Management, U.S. Army War College, June 30, 2011

key tool in the integration and continued professionalization of the officer's corps, attendance at the EDCSC must be an opportunity for all eligible officers.

Summary

The continued collaboration with the EDCSC both supports USAFRICOM Security Assistance initiatives, and provides the USAWC faculty the opportunity to visit the HOA region and bring back updates that support regional studies for the war college's resident and non-resident populations. As part of this support, the EDCSC faculty has requested texts and readings used by the USAWC in its curriculum. This request has been filled with the cooperation of the war college's Department of National Security & Strategy (DNSS). It is our goal to ensure that the appropriate bibliographical material and other documents provided by DNSS will help enable the EDCSC faculty to add further rigor to their subject matter.

For USAFRICOM this is an efficient and cost-effective method of executing security cooperation initiatives in the HOA. Currently, the SAO, is working with the EDCSC to develop an SME schedule for next academic year so that USAWC faculty can better program their support efforts.

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