

## Talking Peace in the Ogaden

The search for an end to conflict in the Somali Regional State in Ethiopia

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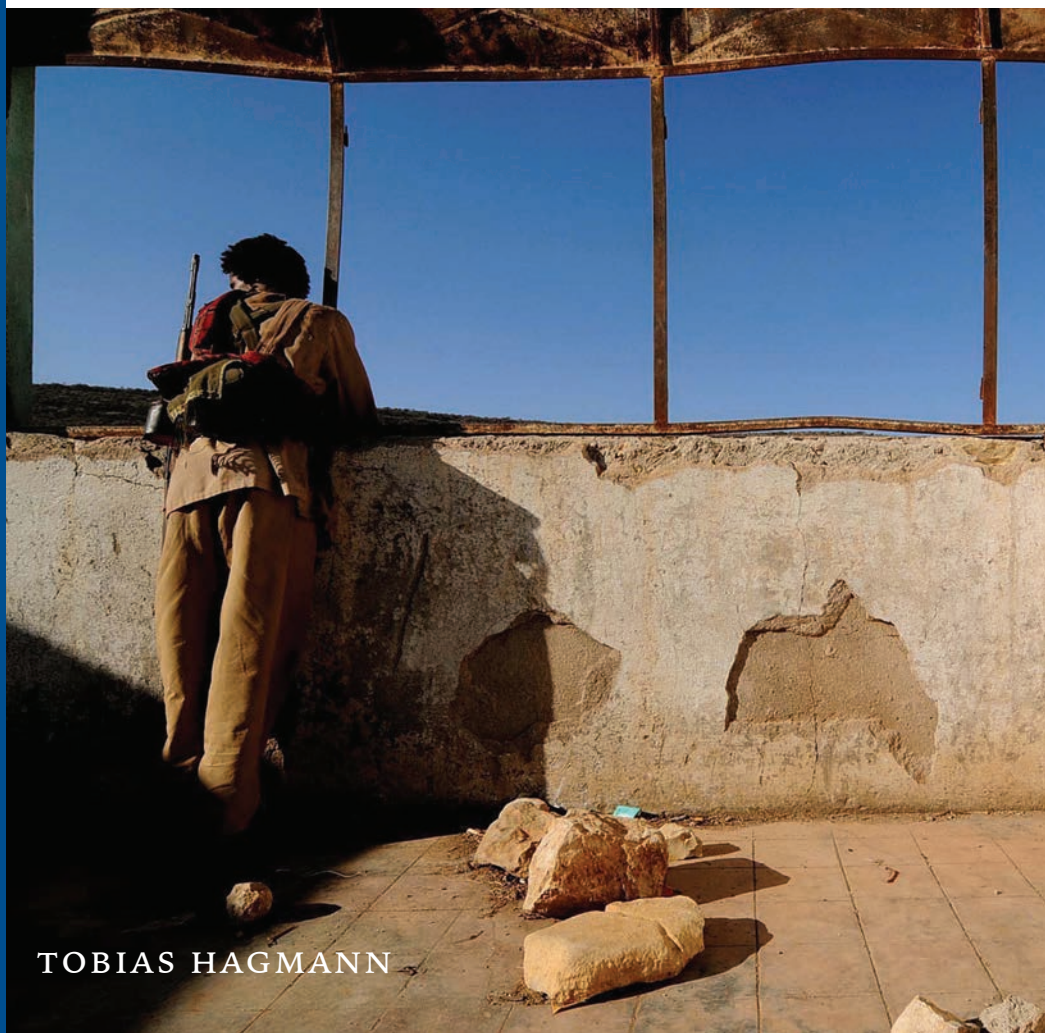
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# Talking Peace in the Ogaden

*The search for an end to conflict in the  
Somali Regional State in Ethiopia*



TOBIAS HAGMANN

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## The search for an end to conflict in the Somali Regional State in Ethiopia

TOBIAS HAGMANN



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COVER: An ONLF soldier rests inside a destroyed school (2009).

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Map 2. The Somali Regional State in Ethiopia

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# Preface

Political affairs in the Somali Regional State (SRS) of Ethiopia are a sensitive, contested topic. Researchers face considerable problems of access to the Ogaden as all the parties involved in the conflict operate with a great deal of secrecy. It is also difficult to obtain reliable information about key determinants of the conflict, including the parties' short-term and long-term objectives, as well as the personnel, organization, strengths, weaknesses and areas of operation of the Ethiopian military, of the regional government's *liyu* police ('special police'), and the rebel Ogaden National Liberation Front (ONLF).

In the absence of much independent media reporting on Ethiopia or systematic human rights monitoring by credible, impartial organizations, there are also no reliable casualty figures. Levels of violence can thus only be gauged using proxy indicators, including the casualty figures of armed combatants, though these are often inflated by the ONLF and understated by the Ethiopian military.

Many Ogaadeeni have sought sanctuary in countries neighbouring Ethiopia in recent years, providing another indication of the severity and extent of the violence. Many, however, live without registering as refugees. It is unclear, for example, how many of the 350,000 refugees registered as 'Somali' by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) in camps in Kenya, are from the SRS as opposed to Somalia itself.<sup>1</sup> Reports in the Kenyan press reflect the presence of Ogaadeeni refugees in Nairobi and the north-east of the country; the Kenyan press has also reported the apparent murders of several ONLF members and their sympathisers on Kenyan soil, allegedly by Ethiopian agents.<sup>2</sup>

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1 UNHCR report, 28 February 2014.

2 *The Standard*, 'Foreign Battles Fought in a Refugee Camp', 4 January 2012.



This report draws on the author's prior knowledge of political developments in the Ethiopian Ogaden, as well as a review of existing literature and more than 30 interviews conducted in person by phone and via Skype between mid-September and mid-October 2013. These interviews were with key informants involved in political and military affairs in Ethiopia's Somali region, as well as others well-versed in what happened at peace talks between the Ethiopian government and the ONLF in Nairobi, the Kenyan capital, in September and October 2012.

The report further draws on interviews by Rashid Abdi, as well as recent unpublished research by Tobias Hagmann and others.<sup>3</sup> To assure confidentiality and the safety of the interlocutors, all sources are kept anonymous, and for the most part, direct quotes have been excluded.

This report is indebted to Aden Abdi, Cedric Barnes, Mark Bradbury, Mohamed Mealin Seid and others for their valuable comments and suggestions on a previous draft. The author bears responsibility for all remaining errors.

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3 Tobias Hagmann, 'The Return of Garrison Rule in the Ethiopian Ogaden, 2006 to 2012' (paper presented at the Center for African Studies, University of Florida at Gainesville, 16 March 2013); 'A Short History of Political and Mass Violence in Ethiopia's Somali Region, circa 1960 to 2012' (DSF research paper, 31 May 2013); "'We Live in the Dark Age': Accounts of State-sponsored Violence and Prospects for Transitional Justice in the Ethiopian Ogaden' (DSF research paper, 9 August 2013). The author is indebted to the German Foundation for Peace Research for funding the research grant for 'Transitional justice in protracted conflict: local and diaspora conceptions of retributive and restorative justice between shari'a, customary, and human rights law in Somalia and Ethiopia's Somali region'.

# Summary

Peace talks between the Ethiopian government and the ONLF, which began in 2012, represent the first real opportunity to solve a near 20 year-old conflict that has exacted a heavy toll on civilians in eastern Ethiopia. The second round of talks facilitated by the Kenyan government in October 2012 ended in stalemate. In early 2014, the parties to the conflict were preparing for a third round of talks.

The ONLF has been diminished militarily and politically in the past five years, and is under pressure from its constituency to chart an alternative way. There are also indications that the ONLF is willing to accept the Ethiopian constitution as a framework for future peace talks and political reforms in the SRS. This would represent a significant concession. While the ONLF believes that Ethiopia's Prime Minister Hailemariam Dessalegn wishes to pursue his predecessor Meles Zenawi's initiative in seeking a political solution to the Ogaden conflict, but the government's security and intelligence branches may not support this goal.

The ONLF has struggled to come up with politically coherent policy options. Over the years, the Ogaadeeni rebels have successfully popularized the notion among their community—within and outside Ethiopia—that the political problems of the Ogaden can only be resolved with a plebiscite. So the ONLF seeks what the Ethiopian constitution promises but the ruling Ethiopian Peoples' Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF), which drafted that constitution, will not agree to: a referendum on self-determination. To remain credible in the eyes of its supporters, the ONLF will have to work towards a peace agreement that allows for increased regional autonomy, the best alternative to the referendum.

Observers interviewed for this report share a considerable amount of scepticism over Ethiopia's willingness to offer anything more than a 'retirement package'—safe return to the region as well as material benefits in the form of a job or other economic rewards—plus minimal concessions for the ONLF. As the stronger negotiating party, Ethiopia

has more to gain and less to lose from the peace talks. The ONLF is primarily interested in peace, which would bolster its standing in the eyes of supporters weary of conflict. The Ethiopian government is more interested in a deal that neutralizes the already weakened Ogaadeeni insurgency, deprives its arch-enemy Eritrea of a proxy, and prepares the ground for more investments and oil exploration in Ethiopia's Somali region.

The Ethiopian delegation to the peace talks has been dominated by members of the security apparatus close to the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF), the party at the core of federal power in the Ethiopia since 1991. This reflects the new realities of Ethiopia's power structure following the death of the country's executive prime minister, Meles Zenawi, in August 2012. It is also the outcome of a new set of patron-client relations connecting powerful officers from Ethiopia's National Defense Forces (ENDF) to SRS president, Abdi Mohamed Omar, who is also known by his Somali nickname 'Iley'. The military's Eastern Command—entrusted with the protection of Ethiopia's borders with Somalia, Kenya, and Djibouti—has economic interests in the Ogaden. President Abdi Mohamed is closely associated with the formation of the *liyu* (special police), a regional militia composed of ethnic Somalis. His career has been dominated by the conflict with the ONLF, but his interests are subordinate to those of the Ethiopian military when it comes to peace negotiations.

The peace talks are problematic in terms of the constituencies represented by the two parties. The talks do not include members of non-Ogaadeeni clans, a demographic majority in the SRS. The ONLF itself represents only a fraction of the Ogaadeeni clan lineages as many Ogaadeeni have switched their support to the regional administration in recent years. The ONLF's refusal to discuss conflict resolution with other Ethiopian-Somali constituencies makes sense from a short-term perspective, but is problematic in view of long-term peacebuilding in the region. The emergence of Darood-led administrations in Puntland, the SRS, and Jubbaland has led some Ogaadeeni clans to reconsider their political options in Ethiopia. The convergence of Ethiopian and Kenyan

interests in forming the Jubbaland administration under Ahmed Madobe, the economic potential of the fertile Jubba regions, and the prospect of developing the Ethiopian Ogaden, are powerful incentives for all parties, including the Kenyan Ogaadeeni facilitators, to reach a peace deal in the SRS. The Kenyan government's facilitation of the peace talks is also motivated by its desire to mend its frayed alliance with Ethiopia and re-align its own policies and interests in Somalia.

The Ogaden peace talks represent a small but real opportunity to address some of the many political problems that have plagued Ethiopia's Somali region. The wait-and-see approach adopted by outside governments is not warranted: given the stark imbalance of power between the Ethiopian government and the ONLF, factors such as international encouragement, pressure, and follow-up from the talks are crucial to improve prospects of a sustainable peace process.

The forced relocation of two ONLF delegates from Nairobi to Ethiopia in January 2014 has cast doubt on the Ethiopian government's sincerity in terms of its commitment to continuing its negotiations with the ONLF. If the talks resume, donors could support them in a number of ways: by encouraging both the parties to the conflict, as well as the Kenyan government, to continue with the talks; by supporting demands for greater humanitarian access; by offering to be guarantors in case of a cessation of hostilities; and by providing assistance for a parallel demobilization of the ONLF and the *liyu* police if an agreement materializes.

# 1. Introduction

This report analyses past and current prospects for the success of peace talks between the Ethiopian government and the ONLF. In doing so, it draws on conventional analytical categories used in conflict analysis. Particular attention is paid to the changing dynamics of the Ogaadeeni insurgency and Ethiopian counter-insurgency; the broader political context in which the 2012 peace talks emerged; and the main issues at stake between the parties to the conflict.

Given the dearth of information available, considerable space is devoted to a review of the composition and motives of the two main parties to this conflict. This has required the report to give less weight to recent dynamics within the SRS administration, to attitudes by non-Ogaadeeni clan leaders towards the ONLF, and to the shifting territorial geographies of the counter-insurgency. Hopefully other researchers will take up the challenge of addressing these gaps.

This report begins by tracing the history of the longstanding conflict between successive Ethiopian regimes and Somali-based insurgencies in the Ethiopian Ogaden, from the nineteenth century to the present day. This is followed by an analysis of recent conflict dynamics involving the ONLF, the Ethiopian government, and the SRS administration. Chapter 3 focuses on the gradual securitization of regional politics, the internationalization of the conflict and the indigenization of the day-to-day fighting in recent years. Chapters 4, 5 and 6 are dedicated to an analysis and discussion of the two parties to the conflict, the various branches of the Ethiopian federal government, the ONLF, and other important stakeholders, most notably the SRS administration. Chapter 7 provides a review of past attempts by the two parties to find a peaceful solution to the conflict, in particular the two rounds of peace talks held in Nairobi in September and October 2012. Chapter 8 identifies key issues and interests that have motivated the positions of the ONLF and the governments of Ethiopia and Kenya vis-à-vis peace talks so far. The report concludes with a number of general observations about the prospects for renewed

talks, and highlights a number of policy considerations for donors and other external actors.

It is necessary to clarify some of the terminology used in the report. With the exception of the historical section, and unless otherwise specified, the phrase 'Ogaden conflict' refers to the armed confrontation between the ONLF and the Ethiopian government. While the ONLF refers to the entire Somali-inhabited part of Ethiopia as 'Ogaden', its administrative name, the Somali Regional State, is used. 'Ogaadeeni' refers to members of the Ogaadeen, a sub-clan of the Darood clan family. The use of 'Ogaden' refers to the Ogaadeeni heartland of the region only, encompassing the five zones of Nogob (Fiq), Fafan (Degehabur), Qabridehar (Korahe), Shabelle (Gode), and Dollo (Wardheer). When not specified otherwise, 'Somali' refers to persons who are ethnic Somalis, not nationals of neighbouring Somalia. Many Somalis are known by their nicknames rather than their given names; in this report these names are shown in inverted commas.



## 2. Historic roots of the Ogaden conflict

The conflict in and over the Ogaden has, from the late nineteenth century to the present day, been characterized by repeated cycles of armed Somali resistance to the Ethiopian state on the part of both Ogaadeeni and non-Ogaadeeni clans. State-sponsored violence in the form of counter-insurgencies that target civilian populations has shaped the lives and experiences of Somalis in Ethiopia for the past half century. State violence on the Ethiopia/Somalia frontier has in many ways become normalized.<sup>4</sup>

Successive regimes—be they imperial, socialist or, in the case of the EPRDF, self-declared ‘revolutionary democratic’—have carried out almost identical counter-insurgency campaigns, each of them including arbitrary arrests, executions, torture and disappearances. Counter-insurgency campaigns do not distinguish between combatants and civilians, and treating entire populations as enemies tends to produce more opposition to the government. Authorities have restricted the mobility of people and livestock, denied them access to food and water, and used violence to send a threatening message to the general population.

A historic characteristic of the Ogaden conflict is the absence of moral, judicial or political redress for this. Perpetrators from all sides—Ethiopian, Somali and others—have meted out violence to civilians with complete impunity.<sup>5</sup>

### Imperial conquest

The convoluted political history of the Ethiopian Ogaden dates back to the expansion of the Ethiopian imperial state at the end of the nineteenth century into what are now the south-eastern Somali lowlands of Ethiopia.

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4 Tobias Hagmann and Benedikt Korf, ‘Agamben in the Ogaden: Violence and Sovereignty in the Ethiopian–Somali Frontier’, *Political Geography* 31/4 (2012), pp. 205–14.

5 Hagmann, ‘A Short History’ and “‘We Live in the Dark Age’”; Hagmann and Korf, ‘Agamben in the Ogaden’, pp. 208–12.

For Emperor Menelik, the Ogaden held economic and strategic value because an important trade corridor—linking Harar with the ports of Zeila and Berbera in northern Somalia—crossed it. The Ogaden was and continues to be a livestock reservoir. It also functioned as a buffer zone against encroaching Italian, French and British colonialists.<sup>6</sup> Between 1891 and 1906, imperial Ethiopian soldiers conducted campaigns into the Ogaden to extort tributes from Somali pastoralists. These military incursions—known as *zāmācha* in Amharic—involved thousands of imperial soldiers and usually lasted several months, resulting in the confiscation of large numbers of livestock.<sup>7</sup>

The Ethiopian empire thus expanded its reach in the borderlands between Ethiopia and Somalia, building up its administrative presence until the entire Ogaden region was under its administration in 1927.<sup>8</sup> Imperial politics in the Ogaden evolved from a ‘military-fiscal’ mode—involving tax collection, military campaigns, and exploitation—to a ‘tutelage’ mode of governing, characterized by a patrimonial relationship with selected Somali clans, leading to an increase of the Ethiopian state’s administrative capacity.<sup>9</sup> Control of the region was greatest in the fortified garrison towns—known as *kātāma* in Amharic—where Amhara and other settlers and soldiers were concentrated. It was much less pronounced in the more remote parts of the region.

Growing Ethiopian control of the Ogaden met with armed resistance from different Somali clans and was instrumental in fostering national sentiment in reaction to what Somalis saw as Ethiopian and European

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6 Tibebe Eshete, ‘Towards a History of the Incorporation of the Ogaden: 1887–1935’, *Journal of Ethiopian Studies* 27/2 (1994), pp. 69–87.

7 Peter Garretson, ‘Ethiopian Expansion into the Ogaadeen and its Relations with the Somali (1887 to 1906)’ (mimeo, 2001).

8 Eshete, ‘Towards a History’, p. 78.

9 Cedric Barnes, ‘The Ethiopian State and its Somali Periphery, circa 1888–1948’ (University of Cambridge, PhD thesis, 2000).

colonization of their homeland.<sup>10</sup> Most prominently, Sayyid Mahammad Abdille Hassan—dubbed the ‘Mad Mullah’ by the British—waged, with his *dervish* militia, an armed struggle against Ethiopian, British and Italian troops between 1899 and 1920.<sup>11</sup> The Sayyid’s family (the Bah Gerri sub-clan of the Ogaadeen clan in the larger Darood group), was from the Ogaden. Sayyid fought against foreign invaders in what are today the regions of eastern Ethiopia, Somaliland and Puntland.

The colonial scramble for the Horn of Africa exacerbated international competition, pitting Italy against Ethiopia, both of which sought to extend their political influence and physical presence in the Ogaden. After Italy’s defeat by European Allied forces in 1941, most parts of the pre-1937 Ethiopian empire, including the Ogaden, were administered by Britain.<sup>12</sup> It was only after the negotiation of a staggered withdrawal that Britain ‘returned’ the Ogaden to Ethiopia.<sup>13</sup>

The Ogaadeeni heartland was handed over to Haile Selassie’s government in mid-1948, while the eastern Haud—a grazing area of regional importance for Somali herders—was transferred to Ethiopia in November 1954.<sup>14</sup> The handover of the Ogaden to Ethiopia, approved by the international community and sanctioned by the United Nations, rather than to an expanded Somali state, was a disappointment for Somalis.

10 I. M. Lewis, *A Modern History of the Somali Nation and State in the Horn of Africa* (Oxford: James Currey, 2002), pp. 63–91.

11 Said S. Samatar, *Oral Poetry and Somali Nationalism: The Case of Sayid Mahammad ‘Abdille Hasan* (Cambridge: CUP, 1982), pp. 91–136.

12 Cedric Barnes, ‘The Somali Youth League, Ethiopian Somalis and the Greater Somalia Idea, circa 1946–48’, *Journal of Eastern African Studies* 1/2 (2007), pp. 277–91.

13 Tibebe Eshete, ‘The Root Causes of Political Problems in the Ogaden, 1942–1960’, *Northeast African Studies* 13/1 (1991), pp. 9–28.

14 John Markakis, ‘The Ishaq-Ogaden Dispute’, in *Ecology and Politics: Environmental Stress and Security in Africa* (eds. Areders Hjort Afarnäs and M. A. Mohamed Salih) (Uppsala: Scandinavian Institute of African Studies, 1989), pp. 157–68.

## Armed resistance

Ethiopia's successful claim to sovereignty over the Ogaden as part of the Ethiopian nation-state did not settle the issue. As early as the mid-1950s, a first generation of clandestine activists from within the region, mobilized Somali nationalists in the Ogaden and Eastern Hararghe provinces against the imperial government.<sup>15</sup> Known by the Arabic name *Nasr Allah* ('Victory of God'), this secretive organization was active between 1950 and 1956. It had branches across the Ogaden and was connected to influential Ogaadeeni leaders within the region and outside it, including the cities of Hargeisa and Mogadishu in the neighbouring territories of British-administered Somaliland and Italian-run Somalia. The Ogaden Company for Trade and Industry (OCTI)—in reality a clandestine group lobbying for Ogaadeeni self-determination—emerged at about the same time as *Nasr Allah*. Both groups had branches in what were then the Ogaden's four main administrative urban centres: Degehabur, Qabridehar, Kelafo, and Wardher.<sup>16</sup>

The first concerted challenge to Ethiopian rule in the Ogaden after British withdrawal took place in the early 1960s. The independence of a united Somali Democratic Republic—comprising what are now Somaliland, Somalia, Puntland and Jubbaland—on 1 July 1960, spurred nationalist sentiment in all Somali territories. Ill-feeling towards imperial rule increased in the Ethiopian Ogaden when the government of Haile Selassie, based in Ethiopia's Christian highlands, imposed a head tax. Popular frustration found an outlet in an armed rebellion led by Garad Makthal Dahir. Known as either the *gesh* ('armed force') or the *jabhada* ('front'), it was also referred to as the Ogaden Liberation Front (OLF) or confusingly, *Nasrullah*.<sup>17</sup> The main leaders of the *gesh* were Ogaadeeni

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15 Eshete, 'Root Causes', p. 23.

16 Günther Schröder, 'Von Äthiopisch-Somaliland zum Somalistaat Äthiopiens' (Addis Ababa: mimeo, 1998).

17 John Markakis, *National and Class Conflict in the Horn of Africa* (Cambridge: CUP, 1987), pp. 169–81.

notables who had served the imperial government as district commissioners in their home areas. The *gesh* received arms and ammunition from the nascent government of Somalia and was mostly supported by Ogaadeeni.

The Ethiopian revolution of 1974, and the internal turmoil that followed the rise of what was to become the Derg—the coordinating committee of the armed forces and police that ruled Ethiopia until 1991—had a critical impact on the Ogaden. In Somalia, Siyad Barre, who had come to power in a coup in 1969, saw political disorder in neighbouring Ethiopia as an opportunity to annex the Ogaden by force. Nor was the Ogaden the only region considered ‘Somali’ by his Somali Democratic Republic: it also claimed large portions of what were then Ethiopia’s Bale and Sidama provinces, as well as the two Ethiopian cities of Harar and Dire Dawa.<sup>18</sup>

From the perspective of the Somali government, these lands were part of a greater Somali territory of Somali people, divided up by the imperial powers of Ethiopia, Britain, Italy, and France, so that ethnic Somalis had become nationals of Djibouti, Ethiopia, Kenya and Somalia proper. The Somali government referred to these territories populated by ethnic Somalis, as *Soomaali Galbeed* or ‘Western Somalia’.<sup>19</sup> In the mid-1970s, the Siyad Barre government began sponsoring two separatist rebels groups in south-eastern Ethiopia. The Somali Abo Liberation Front (SALF) operated in Bale, bringing together veteran Oromo, Somali and Sidama ethno-nationalists who opposed imperial Ethiopian rule. The Western Somali Liberation Front (WSLF), a multi-clan Somali rebel group, operated in the Ogaden and parts of Eastern Hararghe.<sup>20</sup>

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18 Gebru Tareke, ‘The Ethiopia-Somalia War of 1977 Revisited’, *International Journal of African Historical Studies* 33/3 (2000), pp. 635–67.

19 Lewis, *Modern History*, pp. 178–95.

20 Markakis, *National and Class Conflict*, pp. 226–27.

Tensions escalated at the beginning of 1977 when WSLF and SALF rebels, exploiting the upheaval in Ethiopia's political centre, occupied large swathes of territory in the Ogaden province and the Bale and Sidama lowlands.<sup>21</sup> Regular forces of the Somali National Army invaded Ethiopia on 13 July 1977: with their local allies, they overran Ethiopian positions, reaching the eastern city of Jijiga in September, and later reaching the lowland city of Dire Dawa on Ethiopia's main railway line.

The Ethiopian-Somali, or Ogaden, war of 1977–1978 was not really one but three conflicts: a local Somali insurgency against the Ethiopian state; an intrastate war involving two sovereign states, Somalia and Ethiopia; and a geopolitical confrontation between Ethiopia and Somalia as Soviet client states in the wider context of the Cold War. Assistance to Ethiopia from the Soviet Union and Cuba tipped the balance of power in favour of Ethiopia's Derg, depriving Somalia, though then 'socialist', of Soviet aid.<sup>22</sup> In March 1978, Ethiopian, Soviet, and Cuban troops defeated the WSLF and drove the Somali army out of the Ogaden, re-establishing Ethiopian rule on the Ethiopian/Somali frontier.

## New beginnings

Political dynamics in the Ethiopian Ogaden took a new direction with the fall of the Derg in May 1991, just three months after the end of the Siyad Barre regime in neighbouring Somalia. With the coming to power of the EPRDF under the leadership of Meles Zenawi and his TPLF, Ethiopia was decentralized. In theory, this regionalization would create self-governing, autonomous political entities, ruled by ethno-national parties. In reality, Ethiopia's states were governed by member parties or satellite parties

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21 Tareke, 'The Ethiopia-Somalia War', p. 641.

22 Lewis, *Modern History*, pp. 231–36.



of the broader EPRDF coalition—and decision making, via the party apparatus, remained highly centralized.<sup>23</sup>

The SRS or ‘Region Five’ became one of these entities, allowing Ethiopian Somalis to administer themselves for the first time and to use the Somali language as a medium of instruction and government.<sup>24</sup> The newly-created Somali Regional State comprised the former Ogaden province as well as parts of what were previously Eastern Hararghe, Bale and Sidama provinces. Its first administration was run by the ONLF, which had successfully competed in local and regional elections in 1992.<sup>25</sup>

After the fall of the Derg, the ONLF had begun to build-up both its membership and its presence within the SRS, successfully inserting itself into a political landscape that placed a premium on ethno-national identity, which in the Somali context translated into clan-based political competition. The ONLF achieved a dominant position in regional politics in the 1992 elections—with its co-founder Abdillahi Mohamed Saadi becoming the SRS’s first president—but its administration lasted only two years. In early 1994, when the ONLF demanded a referendum on self-determination, federal security forces forced it out of office. The movement took to the bush to launch an armed insurgency, and non-Ogaadeeni politicians who enjoyed EPRDF backing established the Ethiopian Somali Democratic League (ESDL), taking over the regional

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23 See Lovise Aalen, *Ethnic Federalism in a Dominant Party State: The Ethiopian experience 1991–2000* (Bergen: Chr. Michael Institute, 2002), pp. 38–105, and ‘Ethnic Federalism and Self-Determination for Nationalities in a Semi-Authoritarian State: The Case of Ethiopia’, *International Journal on Minority and Group Rights* 13/2–3 (2006), pp. 243–61; also International Crisis Group (ICG), ‘Ethiopia: Ethnic Federalism and Its Discontents’, Nairobi/Brussels, 4 September 2009; Edmond J. Keller, ‘Ethnic Federalism, Fiscal Reform, Development and Democracy in Ethiopia’, *African Journal of Political Science* 7/1 (2002), pp. 21–50; and Paulos Chanie, ‘Clientelism and Ethiopia’s Post-1991 Decentralisation’, *Journal of Modern African Studies* 45/3 (2007), pp. 355–84.

24 Tobias Hagmann and Mohamud Hussein Khalif, ‘State and Politics in Ethiopia’s Somali Region since 1991’, *Bildhaan: An International Journal of Somali Studies* 6 (2006), Article 6.

25 John Markakis, ‘The Somali in the New Political Order of Ethiopia’, *Review of African Political Economy* 21/59 (1994), pp. 71–9.

government.<sup>26</sup> The ESDL was replaced by the Somali People's Democratic Party (SPDP) in 1998, bringing together Ogaadeeni and non-Ogaadeeni politicians loyal to the EPRDF. The SPDP has been ruling the SRS as a single party ever since.<sup>27</sup>

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26 For a detailed chronology, see Abdi Ismail Samatar, 'Ethiopian Federalism: Autonomy versus Control in the Somali Region', *Third World Quarterly* 25/6 (2004), pp. 1131–54; also Hagmann and Khalif, 'State and Politics', pp.1136–48.

27 Tobias Hagmann, 'Fishing for Votes in the Somali Region: Clan Elders, Bureaucrats, and Party Politics in the 2005 Elections', in *Contested Power in Ethiopia: Traditional Authorities and Multi-Party Elections* (eds. Kjetil Tronvoll and Tobias Hagmann) (Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2012), pp. 61–88.

### 3. Changing conflict dynamics 2007–2012

In April 2007, an ONLF attack on the Abole oil field in Degehabur became a turning point in the Ogaden conflict. At least 65 Ethiopian soldiers and oil workers, as well as nine Chinese employees of the Zhongyuan Petroleum Exploration Bureau, a subsidiary of Sinopec Limited, a Chinese oil and gas company, were killed in the attack.<sup>28</sup> The incident was a major embarrassment for the Ethiopian government in its relationship with China, triggering a counter-insurgency campaign by Ethiopia's National Defense Forces to isolate the ONLF from local communities. The years 2007 to 2010 were marked by numerous human rights violations, including intimidation and arrest, forced displacement, disappearance, torture, and extrajudicial killing.<sup>29</sup>

This strategy of 'total war' authorised Ethiopian soldiers stationed in the region to perpetrate a variety of abuses: the killing of civilians in retaliation for ONLF attacks or as a way of discouraging local populations from supporting the rebels; coercing villagers to denounce the ONLF or other 'anti-peace' elements; forcing individuals to act as informants; arresting, interrogating, and torturing thousands of Ogaadeeni civilians Ethiopian security forces suspected of aiding the rebels; securing bribes in exchange for the release of civilian detainees; raping women and girls as a way of humiliating their communities; killing ONLF fighters and displaying their bodies in public places; controlling population

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28 'In Ethiopia, Fear of Army Brutality', *New York Times*, 18 June 2007. The Abole attack occurred shortly after Ethiopian troops ousted the Islamic Courts Union (ICU) in Mogadishu. Ethiopia accused Eritrea of masterminding the ONLF attack while Ethiopia's own troops were fighting in Somalia.

29 Human Rights Watch (HRW), 'Collective Punishment: War Crimes and Crimes against Humanity in the Ogaden Area of Ethiopia's Somali Regional State', New York, 2008.

movements; intimidating the traditional authorities, civil servants and traders; and cutting-off villages and towns from their food supplies.<sup>30</sup>

The onset of peace talks five years later between the Ethiopian government and the ONLF was very much the result of changes on the ground after—although not necessarily as a direct result of—the 2007 Abole attack. Three broad, parallel trends have marked the Ogaden conflict since: the securitization of politics in Ethiopia's SRS, the internationalization of the conflict, and the indigenization of the day-to-day fighting.<sup>31</sup>

## Securitization of the SRS

The escalation of the ONLF insurgency, and the scale of Ethiopia's counter-insurgency, has accelerated the securitization of politics in Ethiopia's Region Five, the Somali Regional State. Security concerns have always been important in the region but they have come to dominate all other considerations.<sup>32</sup> Security has been used to justify a range of political and military tactics, almost to the point where the rule of law and due process no longer exist. Instead, there is despotic and personalized rule, and a new set of security-driven patron–client relationships.

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30 Mohamud Hussein Khalif and Martin Doornbos, 'The Somali Region in Ethiopia: A Neglected Human Rights Tragedy', *Review of African Political Economy* 29/91 (2002), pp. 73–94; Ulf Terlinden, 'Ethiopia: An Inventory of 28 Conflicts', internal draft report, UN Emergencies Unit for Ethiopia, Addis Ababa, January 2003; Hagmann and Korf, 'Agamben in the Ogaden', pp. 210–12; HRW, 'Collective Punishment'; Integrated Regional Information Network of the United Nations (IRIN), 'Ethiopia: IRIN Special Report on the Ogaden', Nairobi, 11 May 2000; Ogaden Human Rights Committee (OHRC), 'Human Rights Violations in the Ogaden by the Ethiopian Government, 1991 to 1996', Godey, July 1996; OHRC, 'Ogaden: An Endless Human Tragedy', Porrentruy, April 1998; OHRC, 'Ogaden: Graveyard of Rights', Godey, 23 August 1999; OHRC, 'Mass Killings in the Ogaden: Daily Atrocities Against Civilians by the Ethiopian Armed Forces', Godey, 20 February 2006; OHRC, 'Ogaden: Ethiopian Government Forces Massacre, Displace and Starve Out the Civilian Population with Impunity', Geneva, 8 August 2007; also interviews by Tobias Hagmann for this report.

31 The following paragraphs draw on Hagmann, 'The Return of Garrison Rule'.

32 Tobias Hagmann, 'Beyond Clannishness and Colonialism: Understanding Political Disorder in Ethiopia's Somali Region, 1991–2004', *Journal of Modern African Studies* 43/4 (2005), pp. 509–36.

The securitization of the region's politics started with the Ethiopian military and was driven by both its counter-insurgency agenda and the government's need to protect oil and gas fields. The Ogaden basin is divided into 21 energy blocks with the most significant deposits in the Kalub and Hilala gas field in the Shilabo area. In recent years, Petronas (Malaysia), Sinopec (China), Africa Oil Corp/Lundin (Sweden), and SouthWest Energy (Ethiopia), have all explored oil and gas reserves in the SRS.

The systematic harassment of Ogaadeeni civilians had begun before the Abole attack, in 2005, when the Ethiopian military came up with a 'peace plan' that combined military strikes against the ONLF with collecting intelligence about its civilian supporters. Discrediting and dismissing political rivals by accusing them of supporting the ONLF was not a new tactic, but the hunt was increasingly extended to inside the regional administration. Previously, such accusations meant that the individual involved would lose his or her job, or go to prison; after 2007, these allegations became a matter of life and death. As a result of increasingly harsh punishments by the security apparatus, a culture of fear and intimidation set into the region.<sup>33</sup> In 2008, almost 400 police officers were expelled or imprisoned after a *gem gema* session—literally, 'critique and self-critique'—in which they were accused of collaboration with the ONLF.<sup>34</sup>

The securitization of regional politics did not only lead to greater violence; it also had a substantial impact on the region's political elites.

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33 Farhan Mohamud, 'Somali region of Ethiopia: a population living under a cloud of fear', 3 March 2008, [www.kilily.com](http://www.kilily.com).

34 *Gem gema* was developed by the TPLF in its armed struggle against the Derg as a mechanism to review and improve military tactics. It was subsequently institutionalized at all levels of the Ethiopian government to evaluate civil servants. But the process has often been susceptible to abuse by officials who accuse colleagues of corruption or collaboration with the enemy in order to get rid of rivals within the administration; Aalen, *Ethnic Federalism*, pp. 87–9; Hagmann, 'Beyond Clannishness', pp. 321–46; John Young, 'Along Ethiopia's Western Frontier: Gambella and Benishangul in Transition', *Journal of Modern African Studies* 37/2 (1999), pp. 321–46.

The replacement of the SRS's original leadership and rise of the region's president, Abdi Mohamed, are evidence of this trend.

Up until the mid-2000s, the SRS's executive was dominated by an older generation of mostly uneducated politicians with a reputation for personal enrichment. They included politicians like Abdi Jibril, the former regional president, and Ali Kunaye, a former speaker of the regional parliament. Many either lost their positions or fled when the ruling SPDP reorganized in early 2008. They were replaced by a younger generation of fiercely anti-ONLF Ogaadeeni politicians, among them Dau'd Mohamed Ali (from the Makhahil sub-clan of the Ogaadeen clan) and Abdi Mohamed (from the Reer Abdille sub-clan of the Ogaadeen). These two became regional president and regional head of security respectively. This new generation of politicians maintained close ties with the Ethiopian military.

Abdi Mohamed became regional president in July 2010. He has earned a reputation for being mercilessly anti-ONLF, using cash and coercion to subdue, eliminate, or co-opt ONLF supporters. He has imposed lengthy prison sentences on critics of his administration. Some of the regional budget has allegedly been used to silence opposition.<sup>35</sup> A new set of patron–client relationships has thus emerged in the SRS over the past five years, connecting important figures in the federal security apparatus, such as Lieutenant General Samora Yunis and Major General Abraha Wolde Mariam, to the SRS president.

## Internationalization of the conflict

A second major trend of the conflict between the Ethiopian government and the ONLF is its growing internationalization. Although violence is concentrated in the Ogaadeeni-inhabited heartland of the SRS, the conflict has drawn in more and more countries including Eritrea, which supports the ONLF, and Ogaadeeni communities living in Kenya and

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35 Ken Menkhaus, 'Somali Regional State: Preliminary Assessment', report for Development Alternatives Inc., August 2012.



elsewhere in the global diaspora. This is both an opportunity for, and an obstacle to, conflict resolution. It gives emerging Ogaadeeni stakeholders the opportunity to propose initiatives that go beyond Ethiopia's promises of democratization and the ONLF's own promises of self-determination, but it also complicates politics, with decisions affecting regional peace being made as often in the US city of Minneapolis as in Ethiopian city of Jijiga.

The Ogaden diaspora, fully engaged with the conflict, is the target of competing public relations campaigns by the ONLF and the SRS administration. ONLF supporters are involved in global advocacy campaigns, raising awareness about what they label 'genocide' in the Ogaden. In return, the administration of Abdi Mohamed has successfully co-opted members of the diaspora, buying them plane tickets, allocating them land, or giving them other economic opportunities in exchange for their support and for their denunciation of the ONLF. This has been part of a broader, Ethiopian strategy since the 2005 federal and regional elections, when Ethiopia's federal government sought to undermine major opposition groups in general, such as the then popular Coalition for Unity and Democracy (CUD) and its various successors.

Abdi Mohamed has personally toured the diaspora to shore-up support for his administration. Informants in different Ogaadeeni diaspora communities keep track of ONLF supporters. As a result, politically involved Ogaadeeni abroad fear for the safety of their relatives back home.<sup>36</sup>

Another important international dynamic affecting the conflict is the changing political calculus of Ogaadeeni clans in Somali East Africa. In the last two years, there has been a revival of Darood identity across the Somali territories.<sup>37</sup> This has been sparked-off by political prospects in Somalia following military losses inflicted on *Harakat al-Shabaab*

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36 Hagmann, "We Live in the Dark Age", p. 5.

37 Political identification within the Somali clan lineage system is highly fluid. It operates at and shifts between different levels of segmentation along the paternal line.

*al-Muja'eddin* (al-Shabaab), as well as the election of President Hassan Sheikh Mohamud in Somalia in September 2012. Different Darood clans—to which the Ogaadeen belong—appear to have realized they needed to unite if they were to improve their prospects, particularly if they wanted to counter rivals such as the Marehan or Hawiye in south-central Somalia. The Darood narrative is also fuelled by the rise of several Darood strongmen such as former Puntland President Abdirahman Farole (from the Majerteen clan), Abdi Mohamed in Ethiopia's SRS (Ogaadeeni), and Ahmed Madobe in Jubbaland (who is also Ogaadeeni), as well as the rising influence of Ogaadeeni politicians in the Kenyan government since 2008.

For the Darood as a clan family, controlling the economically important Jubba region, Somalia's southernmost area bordering Kenya, is seen as a key strategic objective, and one which also requires improving relations with Ethiopia.

## Indigenization of the confrontation

Historically, counter-insurgency campaigns by the Ethiopian state pitched predominantly non-Somali military personnel against local Somali populations. In the last three years, however, both the perpetrators of violence and its victims have been mostly Somalis. After the Abole attack in 2007, most Ethiopian government repression had been carried out by the federal ENDF, but from 2010 onwards, the *liyu* police—the regional militia composed of ethnic Somalis, mostly Ogaadeeni—has been running counter-insurgency activities against the ONLF and its supporters. Human rights organizations, political observers, and Ogaadeeni activists have accused the *liyu* police of numerous human rights violations and atrocities against civilians. The conflict between the Ethiopian government and the ONLF has thus become indigenized, increasingly resembling a civil war between Ogaadeeni and other clan groups rather than a confrontation between highland Ethiopians and lowland Somalis.

The escalation of the conflict has led to tensions within clan lineages, and even within families torn between the regional government and

its *liyu* police on the one hand and the ONLF on the other. As a result, Ogaadeeni in Ethiopia and the diaspora are split between three broad tendencies. A first group consists of those who continue to push for armed struggle as the only means to ending the military occupation of their homeland, a position often voiced by individuals who have been victims of the conflict or whose relatives have been victims. A second group consists of an increasing number of Ogaadeeni who argue that continued armed insurgency invites further violence and increases the suffering of local communities. This group embraces Ogaadeeni intellectuals who would like to return home, along with former ONLF supporters and various political opposition figures. The third group is made up of supporters of the regional administration who are the followers and clients of the SRS president, himself seen, perhaps ironically, as sponsoring Ogaadeeni against non-Ogaadeeni.

It has become increasingly difficult for Ogaadeeni to overcome these internal divisions, and the indigenization of the conflict has important repercussions for peace talks. The ONLF essentially refuses to acknowledge the existence of the dynamics described above. It argues instead that the *liyu* police are merely a tool in the hands of the federal government; that Ogaadeeni who support the *kilil*—an Amharic term for an ethnically-defined regional state—are either irrelevant or EPRDF stooges; and that the ONLF is the only legitimate political representative of Ethiopian Somali interests. The ONLF's refusal to discuss conflict resolution with any parties other than the federal Ethiopian government might make sense in the short-term but is problematic in terms of long-term peace building, which will also have to include Somalis who oppose the ONLF.

## Conflict casualties

Both the ONLF and the Ethiopian government regularly report battle victories involving the death of anything from a handful to hundreds of enemy combatants. The ONLF reports these in military-styled communiqués disseminated by the ONLF's Radio Freedom and other media outlets supporting the Ogaden cause. Most Ethiopian state media outlets at the federal level then go on to reject the ONLF's claims.

If it is correct to assume that both sides exaggerate their victories, it is impossible to guess by how much. Between March 2007 and January 2013, a period of almost six years, the ONLF claimed to have killed about 3,350 Ethiopian army and *liyu* police personnel combined. Over the same period, the Ethiopian government reported that it had killed about 560 ONLF rebels.<sup>38</sup> While the ONLF may exaggerate more, the Ethiopian government only ever reports the casualties it has allegedly inflicted in response to it.

The Ogaden Human Rights Committee (OHRC) has provided the only detailed breakdown of fatalities between 1995 and the middle of 2007, a period of 12 years, documenting about 2,395 extra-judicial killings, 1,945 cases of rape, and more than 3,000 forced disappearances, mostly of Ogaadeeni civilians.<sup>39</sup> Most of these victims were ONLF supporters, suspected or real, and apparently punished by Ethiopian security forces for it. The OHRC details the names of victims and the dates and locations where alleged atrocities occurred. Though independent verification is very difficult, given the problems of access to the Ogaden and the justifiable fear felt by informants on human rights issues, it is plausible that several thousand civilians have died, as the OHRC says, as a direct result of violence.

For as long as it remains impossible for outsiders to accurately determine how many combatants have died on both sides, it remains equally impossible to calculate the overall human cost of the ONLF's rebellion and Ethiopian government's counter-insurgency response to it.<sup>40</sup> On top of this, the OHRC figures do not include the most intense phase of the conflict that set in after April 2007, and which by 2008 had in all likelihood claimed several thousand more lives.

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<sup>38</sup> Based on a compilation of news reports by Tobias Hagmann, which is incomplete but is likely to be the most extensive made so far by an independent analyst.

<sup>39</sup> OHRC, 'Ogaden: Ethiopian Government Forces'.

<sup>40</sup> Hagmann, 'A Short History'.

## 4. Parties to conflict: The Ethiopian federal government

The Ethiopian government is often portrayed as a single and coherent entity, but a closer look at it highlights different federal agencies with different policies towards the SRS, in areas ranging from security to development.

Official government rhetoric portrays Somalis in Ethiopia as among a number of historically oppressed ethnic groups or ‘nations’ liberated by the EPRDF and now enjoying self-administration within the framework of ethnic federalism. In reality though, Somalis in Ethiopia possess a precarious status in terms of their citizenship and political rights under the federal government and in relation to their Ethiopian compatriots.

The federal government’s security objectives in the SRS are three-fold: the containment of armed resistance by the ONLF and its Eritrean patrons; securing the porous border between Ethiopia and the Somali territories from enemy infiltration, notably by radical Islamic groups like al-Shabaab and, before that, by *al-Ittihad al-Islamiya* and the United Western Somali Liberation Front (UWLSF); and influencing political developments in neighbouring Somalia in line with Ethiopian interests.

The Ethiopian government’s security concerns in the region have changed over time. In the mid-1990s, *al-Ittihad al-Islamiya* posed what the government saw as a major threat.<sup>41</sup> A decade later, it saw as another threat, the loose pro-ONLF coalition that brought together the Somali warlord Hussein Aideed, the Islamic Courts Union (ICU), and Eritrea.

As before, Ethiopia wants to keep the Gedo region of south-western Somalia a buffer zone and prevent the emergence of an ONLF-friendly

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41 Andre le Sage, ‘Prospects for *Al Itihad* & Islamist Radicalism in Somalia’, *Review of African Political Economy* 28/89 (2001), pp. 472–77; Roland Marchal, ‘Islamic Political Dynamics in the Somali Civil War’, in *Islamism and its Enemies in the Horn of Africa* (ed. Alex de Waal) (London: Hurst, 2004), pp. 114–41.

group in the southernmost Jubba region. It does this by sponsoring Ahmed Madobe's Ras Kamboni militia, based on the Kenya/Somalia border, and by brokering Jubbaland peace talks.

In recent years, and partly to counter its poor democratization record, the Ethiopian government has begun to claim development successes as its own, in particular the country's double-digit annual economic growth.<sup>42</sup> In the SRS, the rhetoric of the 'developmental state' has translated into initiatives that showcase the administration's achievements in bringing development to the region. These are both real and imagined: the federal government has undoubtedly made substantial investments in the SRS over the past decade, including a new international airport, a university, and new roads. The expanding road network improves the administration's reach, with its impact on security clear, even as long-term socio-economic benefits have yet to materialize. Critics argue that this development emphasis is simply propaganda; they also say that parts of the regional budget are spent without adequate transparency. Public administration in the SRS is embryonic in urban centres and mostly absent in rural areas.<sup>43</sup> A number of federal government agencies are responsible for security.

## National Security Council (NSC)

When it comes to security issues in the SRS, Ethiopia's executive prime minister, Hailemariam Dessalegn, turns to the National Security Council (NSC), which coordinates Ethiopia's security policy, for advice. The key figures in the NSC are Prime Minister Hailemariam, from the Southern Ethiopian Peoples' Democratic Movement (SEPDM); the country's Minister of National Defense, Siraj Fegessa (SEPDM); the minister of

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42 Jon Abbink and Tobias Hagmann (eds.), *Reconfiguring Ethiopia: The Politics of Authoritarian Reform* (London/New York: Routledge, 2013), pp. 449–55

43 Tobias Hagmann, 'Challenges of Decentralisation in Ethiopia's Somali region', *Review of African Political Economy* 32/104–5 (2005), pp. 449–55. See also Ken Menkhaus, 'Somali Regional State' on the difficulties of expanding state presence and infrastructure in the region, as well as recent improvements.



foreign affairs, Tewodros Adhanom (TPLF); the head of the National Intelligence and Security Services, Getachew Assefa (TPLF); the minister of federal affairs, Shiferaw Tekelemariam (SEPDm); the chief of staff, Lieutenant General Samora Yunis (TPLF); and the national security advisor, Tsegaye Berhe (TPLF).

The Ethiopian military forwards its assessments and recommendations made on the basis of intelligence, to the NSC, the Ministry of Federal Affairs (MFA), and the National Intelligence and Security Services (NISS). The NSC assesses it and relays its recommendations on its future moves against the ONLF. It also proposes guidelines for, for example, the conduct of negotiations if they are on the cards.

This centralized but also compartmentalized structure complicates exchanges of information between the three security institutions and any decision making that results from it. All three security institutions are protective of their domain and seek to extend it. With regard to the SRS, they view each other as competitors for resources and influence.

## Ministry of National Defense (MND) and the Eastern Command

In the end, the responsibility for relations with the SRS and the ONLF is entrusted to the Ethiopian army, which makes all the major decisions regarding military operations. The chief of staff, Lieutenant General Samora, commanded Operation Sunset, a decisive offensive by Ethiopia in its 1999 border war with Eritrea.<sup>44</sup> His influence transcends military affairs. Lieutenant General Samora and the country's defence minister, Siraj, are the key figures in Ethiopia's federal Military Command.

The army's Eastern Command, which falls under Lieutenant General Samora's direct supervision, has its headquarters at Harar and is responsible for protecting Ethiopia's borders with Somalia, Kenya, and Djibouti.

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44 Tekeste Negash and Kjetil Tronvoll, *Brothers at War: Making Sense of the Eritrean-Ethiopian War* (Oxford: James Currey, 2000), pp. 2–3.

It is commanded by Major General Abraha Woldemariam (known as 'Quarter'), who like Samora yields considerable power.

The Eastern Command is organized into four infantry divisions: each division or *kifletor* is composed of nine to ten regiments of 500 men each. While critical decisions on security in the SRS are taken in Harar, the four division commanders make most of the tactical decisions in the field. Their mission is straightforward: to contain the activities of the ONLF, which the Eastern Command views as a terrorist organisation supported and supervised by Eritrea. The Ethiopian army accuses Eritrea of providing the ONLF with intelligence, weapons, training and travel documents, enabling the group to pose a credible threat despite the fact that it mostly relies on hit-and-run tactics and has limited elbow room to recruit fighters and supporters.

The Eastern Command is pursuing, accordingly, a complex counter-insurgency mission. It constantly monitors ONLF movements by dint of convoys and patrols, which also clear improvised explosive devices planted by the rebels. The Eastern Command's own analysis of the regional security situation assesses the three zones of Korahey, Fik, and Deghabur to be relatively insecure, with parts of the Gode and Warder zones described as partly affected.

Regional and local officials in the SRS need military patronage: the appointment of civilian administrators has to be approved by the head of the military unit stationed either in or nearest to their district. 'Anybody who has a line with [*sic*] the military has power,' is one observer's remark on this.<sup>45</sup>

A very small group of officers is put in charge of following military operations in the SRS on an almost daily basis. As well as Generals Samora and Abraha, it includes Major General Gebre Adhana, who is the head of the military intelligence department. Its responsibilities include the gathering, reporting and use of political and military intelligence on

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 45 'The Eastern Command's Tasks', 2013.

both the ONLF's activities and its intentions, as well as deploying agents in the SRS and recruiting defectors from the ONLF.

The importance of the presence of Tigreans in senior positions cannot be underestimated: the TPLF at the centre of the EPRDF follows the time-honoured Ethiopian practice of creating a military subservient to, or at the very least serving the interests of, the ruling political elite. The army is deeply embedded in the TPLF with an almost inseparable bond between the officers' corps and the party. All Tigrean officers and soldiers contribute a twelfth of their annual salary to the Tigray Development Association (TDA), a charity closely affiliated with the TPLF. The solidarity between army and party stems from shared experiences and ideals, as well as ethnic and corporate interests, the bonds of past suffering, and a collective fear of political opponents. This legacy explains why TPLF veterans such as Abay Tsehay—special advisor to Hailemariam Dessalegn—are often involved in policy decisions on important matters, such as the SRS.

### Ministry of Federal Affairs (MFA)

The Ministry of Federal Affairs (MFA) also has an extensive presence in the SRS. Although headed by a southerner, as in the military, most significant ministerial officials are Tigrean. The Ministry supports the resolution of territorial disputes between the SRS and neighbouring regions such as Oromiya and assists the regional administration in resolving inter-clan and intra-clan conflicts. Given the security threats and the weakness of the regional administration, it is perhaps not surprising that the MFA has a reputation for active interference in the regional administration's political processes.

Since 2012, for example, the ministry has deployed about 120 district-level experts to the SRS to assist with resettlement, agriculture and water development projects, thus ensuring close federal supervision. In addition, regional officials have to regularly attend meetings in which ministry officials dictate priorities. In the past, too, ministry advisors

have cultivated ties with regional politicians, playing a significant role in the appointments and dismissals of senior regional officials.<sup>46</sup>

The MFA nominally supervises the 30,000-strong Federal Police, including its 16-man intelligence branch. Like the army, the Federal Police has a contingent of its own deployed specifically in the SRS: the Eastern Sector of the Federal Police's Rapid Deployment Force, or *fāt'no dārash*. The Eastern Sector is organized into units called *shalleka*, charged with controlling the proliferation of weapons that had prompted an increase in armed robberies. Between January and August 2013, for example, 25 incidents of armed robbery were reported to the Rapid Deployment Force, almost certainly a case of under-reporting.

### National Intelligence and Security Services (NISS)

The mandate of the NISS is to pursue a number of security priorities in the SRS: watching and neutralizing individuals within and outside the regional government structure; penetrating and controlling the ONLF; controlling all movements across borders; and predicting external developments in Somaliland, Puntland and Somalia that might affect regional security.

To do this, the NISS relies on an elaborate network of thousands of paid informants. It has ample financial resources to undertake covert operations, buy information, recruit assets, arrange training, and dispatch agents from within the local community in the SRS. The prime minister determines and authorizes both operational budgets and additional secret funds. Detailed briefs and intelligence reports from Getachew Assefaw, the head of the NISS, go directly to the office of the prime minister, to whom the NISS chief also has immediate access.

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 46 Hagmann, 'Beyond Clannishness', p. 522.

## Federal decision making after Meles

The death of Meles Zenawi in 2012 has not fundamentally altered federal priorities in the SRS, but it has changed decision making patterns and the relative influence of the different federal agencies involved.

Prime Minister Hailemariam lacks the hold that Meles had on Ethiopia's TPLF-dominated security apparatus. Since his appointment as prime minister, he has not changed the national security team responsible for keeping him briefed on the latest political developments in Ethiopia and neighbouring countries. Many in the ONLF believe that Hailemariam is intent on pursuing Meles's push for a political solution to the Ogaden conflict, but they doubt that his security and intelligence branches also support this goal.

An indication of the prime minister's limited influence over the army in the SRS became apparent in October 2012. There was speculation at the time that Hailemariam intended to dismiss regional president Abdi Mohamed on the recommendation of two senior Somali federal officials. Abdi Mohamed, however, capitalized on his good relations with key military figures, who prevented his sacking.<sup>47</sup>

If the post-Meles era has revealed a gulf between non-TPLF politicians, like Prime Minister Hailemariam, and the TPLF-led security apparatus, it has also highlighted divisions within the TPLF. This became apparent during the arrests of senior TPLF personalities, including the deputy head of the Ethiopian Revenues and Customs Authority, who was an influential figure in SRS politics in his previous assignment as MFA point man for the region.<sup>48</sup> From the point of view of the ONLF the TPLF has always oscillated between two camps: those willing to enter political dialogue with a Somali-based organization like the ONLF and those who refuse to do so. In the ONLF view, while Meles was able to mediate between these positions within the TPLF and transcend them,

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47 ICG, 'Ethiopia: Prospects for Peace in Ogaden', Nairobi/Brussels, 6 August 2013.

48 *Addis Fortune*, 'Another Azeb Mesfin's business partner arrested on corruption charges', 2 October 2013.

Hailemariam cannot. Divisions within the TPLF are thus likely to affect federal policy towards the SRS, as well as towards the ONLF in any negotiations.

## 5. Parties to conflict: The Ogaden National Liberation Front (ONLF)

The ONLF was established in 1984 by six young Ogaadeeni intellectuals who had been members of the WSLF youth league.<sup>49</sup> They felt betrayed by Siyad Barre's manipulation of the WSLF and, more broadly, they felt he had betrayed the Ogaden cause as well. Their view was that the political destiny of what they called 'Ogaadeenia' should be decided by the region's inhabitants rather than the Somali or any other government.<sup>50</sup>

If the period between 1950 and 1980 was marked by Ethiopian Somalis' enthusiasm for Somali nationalism, the 1980s marked a shift to a more indigenous, parochial political contestation in the Ogaden, motivated by a quest for self-determination rather than the pursuit of a 'greater Somalia'.<sup>51</sup> This change was reinforced when Siyad Barre and Derg chairman Mengistu Haile Mariam—both under pressure from domestic rebellions—signed a peace agreement in 1988.<sup>52</sup> The creation of the ONLF in Ethiopia reflected the emergence across the border in Somalia of clan-based, anti-government armed factions at about the same time.<sup>53</sup>

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49 John Markakis, *Ethiopia: The Last Two Frontiers* (Oxford: James Currey, 2011), p. 215. The ONLF's Somali name is *Jabhada Wadaniga Xoreynta Ogadeenya* (JW XO). Its founders were Abdullahi Mohamed Saadi, Sheikh Ibrahim Abdullah, Mohamed Ismail Omar, Abdurahman Yusuf Magan, Abdurahman Mahdi and Abdi Gelle.

50 Abdi M. Abdullahi, 'The Ogaden National Liberation Front (ONLF): The Dilemma of its Struggle in Ethiopia', *Review of African Political Economy* 34 / 113 (2007), pp. 556–62.

51 David D. Laitin, 'The War in the Ogaden: Implications for Siyaad's Role in Somali History', *Journal of Modern African Studies* 17/1 (1979), pp. 95–115; also I.M. Lewis, 'The Western Somali Liberation Front (WSLF) and the Legacy of Sheikh Hussein of Bale', in *Modern Ethiopia: From the Accession of Menilek II to the Present* (ed. Joseph Tubiana) (Rotterdam: Balkema, 1980), pp. 409–15; I.M. Lewis, 'The Ogaden and the Fragility of Somali Segmentary Nationalism', *African Affairs* 88/353 (1989), pp. 573–9.

52 Maria Brons et al., 'The Somali-Ethiopians: The Quest for Alternative Futures', *Eastern Africa Social Science Research Review* 11/2 (1995), pp. 45–70.

53 Mark Bradbury, 'The Somali Conflict: Prospects for Peace', Oxfam, 1 January 1994; Lewis, *Modern History*, pp. 251–54.

In its 30 years of existence, the evolution of the ONLF has been strikingly different from that of the ruling TPLF/EPRDF. While the latter evolved from an armed rebellion in Tigray to become the dominant political party that it is today in Ethiopia, the ONLF was at first a small, secretive diaspora organization with representatives in East Africa, the Arab Gulf States and Europe (1984–1991), then a political party in charge of the newly established SRS (1992–1994), and only after that, an armed opposition group (1994–2014). Throughout, the ONLF has stuck to the same political goal: self-determination through a referendum in the Ethiopian Ogaden—an ambition the group has pushed for and popularized among the Ogaadeen community both inside Ethiopia and outside it.<sup>54</sup> The ONLF draws a comparison with the stance of anti-colonial African liberation movements from the 1960s and 1970s, all of which fought for self-determination.<sup>55</sup>

Since the 1990s, the ONLF has mobilized rural supporters—essentially pastoral communities—by reminding them of their historical animosity towards Christian highlanders, often referred to as *habesha* or *Amaras* (Amharas). Urban and educated Ogaadeeni, by contrast, see the federal structure as existing in name only and have been drawn to ONLF because of its demand for autonomy.<sup>56</sup> So the ONLF combines anti-colonial rhetoric with an agenda for regional political reform.

Much of the ONLF's leadership has resided in the diaspora, at first mainly in the Arab Gulf States and later elsewhere across the globe too. Although rarely present inside Ethiopia, many of these central committee members enjoy a kind of personality cult among their followers. Indeed, their physical absence from the field appears to have added to, rather than diminished, their status as leaders of the movement—there is no evidence they are out of touch with the rank-and-file. The leadership

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54 Hagmann, “‘We Live in the Dark Age’”.

55 Merera Gudina, *Ethiopia: Competing Ethnic Nationalisms and the Quest for Democracy, 1960–2000* (Addis Ababa: Shaker Publishing, 2003), pp. 524–25.

56 Hagmann, ‘Beyond Clannishness’, pp. 524–25; ICG, ‘Ethiopia: Ethnic Federalism’.



communicates regularly online, via short-wave Radio *Xoriyo* ('Freedom'), through outlets such as Ogaden Today and the Ogaden News, and at numerous meetings with Ogaadeen diaspora communities.

The ONLF's military commanders play a crucial role, not only because they are in charge of tactical decisions but also because they represent a link between the political leadership abroad and fighters on the ground. Individual ONLF fighters in the bush may receive formal indoctrination but their decision to join the organization is mostly motivated by personal or family experiences of abuses by Ethiopian troops and their proxies in the SRS.

In the context of the Ethiopian Ogaden, the relationship between Islamic radicals and Ogaadeeni nationalists is of particular interest, as both have fought against the Ethiopian government. Although the ONLF was temporarily allied with *al-Ittihad al-Islamiya*, it has generally opposed—and has fought against—radical Islamist groups.<sup>57</sup> Yet the ONLF has, at times, articulated both a parochial, clannish, Ogaadeeni narrative and an Islamic narrative, amalgamating Somali and Muslim sentiments against highland Ethiopian Christians.<sup>58</sup> In particular, the ONLF's long-time leader, Sheikh Ibrahim Abdulahi, who died in 2008, gave the group a distinctly religious flavour that reflected the idea of resisting Ethiopian Christian hegemony.

One of the reasons for the ONLF's shifting narratives is that its leadership has included both politicians influenced by secular Arab nationalism, especially Syrian Baathism, and others, including Sheikh Ibrahim Abdulahi, who spent their formative years in Saudi Arabia, where they were socialized in a more conservative religious culture.<sup>59</sup>

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57 Tobias Hagmann, 'Radical Islamists in Ethiopia's Somali Region', paper presented to conference on 'Islamic Radicalism in and from North Africa and the Horn of Africa', Madrid, 1 July 2008.

58 Mohammed Mealin Seid, 'The Role of Religion In the Ogaden Conflict: Crisis in the Horn of Africa', New York, Social Science Research Council, 26 January 2009.

59 Markakis, *Ethiopia*, p. 308

## Popular support

Although the ONLF claims to fight for and represent all Somalis in eastern Ethiopia, it is essentially supported by Ogaadeeni clan lineages. The Ogaadeeni make up 40 to 50 per cent of the region's population, but the ONLF claims they are the demographic majority in the SRS. There are only five or six non-Ogaadeeni among the ONLF's approximately 40 central committee members. The vast majority of non-Ogaadeeni clans in the SRS reject the ONLF, which they associate with a political project of regional Ogaadeeni domination, often claiming the short-lived 1992–1994 ONLF administration as evidence of this.<sup>60</sup>

The composition and respective weight of different Ogaadeeni clan groups within the ONLF has changed over time and is as controversial a subject as the demographic size of Ogaadeeni in the region.<sup>61</sup> The same applies to claims that certain Ogaadeeni lineages, for example the Makahil (Wardheer zone) or the Tolomoge (Gode zone), have increasingly opted out of the ONLF in the last decade. As the conflict intensified after April 2007, and both rebels and government forces put pressure on Ogaadeeni communities to take sides, growing civilian casualties and tensions among Ogaadeeni communities led to shifts in the support base of the ONLF.

It is difficult to gauge the respective numerical importance of the two main clan lineages filling the ranks of the ONLF: the Reer Isaak and the Reer Abdille sub-clans of the Ogaadeen clan, as well as the Absame who, like the Ogaadeen, belong to the broader Darood clan family. Available information points to a decrease in the number of the other Ogaadeeni clan lineages supporting the ONLF, but also to a greater commitment on the part of those that do. As well as the Reer Abdille and the Reer

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60 Abdullahi, 'Ogaden National Liberation Front', pp. 557; Samatar, 'Ethiopian Federalism', pp. 1134–41; Hagmann, 'Beyond Clannishness', pp. 514–5.

61 For example, the SRS government has repeatedly claimed that the ONLF is a 'Reer Issak' organization, pointing to the Chairman's clan. In reality, many of the ONLF's senior leadership are from the Reer Abdille.

Isaak, the ONLF support base currently comes from the Makahil and Bah Gerri clan lineages. So while the ONLF claims to represent all Somalis in Ethiopia, it in fact represents only a sizable portion of the Ogaadeeni.

Over the years, the ONLF has consistently maintained that it is open to negotiations with Ethiopia. Its commitment to peace talks in Nairobi, the Kenyan capital, also needs to be understood in light of its constituency's war weariness. Insurgency and counter-insurgency have taken a heavy toll on the Ogaadeeni population in the SRS, including the educated elite and urban population. They see little chance of the ONLF achieving its goals militarily by defeating Ethiopia's different security forces.

So the formation and actions of the *liyu* police can be seen as a successful, if brutal, application of counter-insurgency tactics. Many Ogaadeeni are now placing peace and economic well-being—trade and development—above the ONLF's struggle for self-determination. Even Ogaadeeni intellectuals agree that improvements in political governance, in respect for human rights, and more accountability by local and regional government, would diffuse much of the anger and anxiety that fuels the insurgency.

Dynamics are slightly different in the diaspora where the ONLF used to have many committed supporters, collecting membership fees ranging from US\$30 upwards a month.<sup>62</sup> While many Ogaadeeni in the diaspora are sympathetic to the ONLF and support their demand for a popular plebiscite, not all are ONLF members. The ONLF has always been less than clear about what it means by self-determination: secession from Ethiopia and the creation of a separate 'Ogaadeenia', or regional autonomy within the existing Ethiopian state. Either option appeals to different segments of the diaspora.

In recent years, the ONLF leadership has come under pressure from the diaspora to consider abandoning the armed struggle. Two developments in particular have been important in this regard: first, diaspora

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62 Interviews by Tobias Hagmann, conducted in San Diego and Minneapolis in April and June 2012.

Ogaadeeni share the weariness of conflict that has overcome their relatives back home; and secondly, many Ogaadeeni diaspora intellectuals and businessmen have returned to the SRS.

## Military capacity

The ONLF's military strength has evolved over time. Its rebellion essentially started from scratch when it retreated to the bush from its position in regional government in 1994. In its formative phase, the ONLF drew on the support of veteran military officials from the former Somali Republic and former liberation fighters who had fought against previous Ethiopian regimes. Its military capacity as an insurgent group grew gradually between 1994 and 1998, when Eritrean support in training, weaponry, and indoctrination considerably strengthened its hand. As well as arms, Eritrea sent military advisors to the region and trained several hundred ONLF fighters in Eritrea.<sup>63</sup>

Continuous abuses by Ethiopian soldiers stationed in the region and bitter political competition within the SRS, further swelled ONLF ranks. By 2005, large parts of the region's predominantly Ogaadeeni-inhabited hinterland had become inaccessible to regional government officials, who feared being targeted by the ONLF. The insurgents killed 'highlanders' (non-Ethiopian Somalis) and senior regional officials, as well as burning government vehicles and assaulting lower-ranking government officials.<sup>64</sup> Officials also stopped travelling through ONLF-controlled territory because they were afraid of being accused of being rebel collaborators by the Ethiopian army.

Armed confrontations between the rebels and government forces are concentrated in the five administrative zones predominantly inhabited by Ogaadeeni clan lineages: Nogob (Fik); Fafan (Degehabur); Qabriddehar

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63 Eritrea supplied arms to the ONLF via warlord Hussein Aideed in 1999/2000 and later on through the ICU; Abdullahi, 'Ogaden National Liberation Front', p. 560. Until 2010 and 2011 smaller groups of Eritrean-trained ONLF fighters were able to join their comrades in the region.

64 Hagmann, 'Beyond Clannishness', p. 525.

(Korahe); Shabelle (Gode); and Dollo (Wardheer). Fik zone, with its forests and water sources, has served the ONLF as a refuge for a long time, but the group has carried out attacks north of the Imi-Kelafo road in Gode zone, and has targeted main roads between Qabridehar and Denan, and between Degehabur and Shilabo. Much of the fighting in the past decade or so has been focused on Degehabur and Qabridehar, which has a large Ethiopian garrison.

In classic rebel fashion, the ONLF controls or is present in the bush and hinterland, while Ethiopian security forces are concentrated in major towns. The ONLF's ability to move around the region, with its fighters often walking thousands of kilometres, has allowed it to carry out hit-and-run attacks on military convoys and occasionally on towns, but has prevented the rebels from holding territory or towns more permanently. One consequence of this type of mobile warfare is that Ethiopian security forces target local residents where the ONLF is (or was) active after the rebels have moved on.

The ONLF's military strength peaked 2007–08, when a combination of factors worked to its advantage: Ethiopian military deployment to Somalia; popular dissatisfaction with the SRS administration; the attack on the Abole oil exploration site; and Eritrean military support.

The number of ONLF fighters is highly contested. In 2006–07, the Ethiopian government estimated the ONLF to have some 2,500 to 3,000 fighters.<sup>65</sup> In 2008, one analyst put the figure at some 8,000 fighters.<sup>66</sup> In 2011, a senior ONLF official claimed a number of 15,000. The Ethiopian government claims the ONLF has been reduced to a few hundred fighters, but an estimate based on the ONLF's capacity to strike in localities that are far apart, from Jijiga to Wardheer to Fik, suggests a force of 1,000 to 1,500 fighters. Pressured by the *liyu* police after 2009, the

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65 Sarah Vaughan, 'Understanding the Landscape of Governance and Politics in Ethiopia: Somali National Regional State Case Study', report for DFID Ethiopia, November 2010.

66 Gérard Prunier, 'Armed Movements in Sudan, Chad, CAR, Somalia, Eritrea and Ethiopia', Berlin, Center for International Peace Operations, February 2008.

ONLF withdrew many of its fighters to the Garissa area of Kenya, and into refugee camps there such as Dadaab.<sup>67</sup>

## Leadership and factions

Reliable information on the cohesiveness of the current ONLF leadership is hard to come by. The ONLF has suffered from serious splits over the past two decades: some sources maintain that dissatisfaction with the armed struggle extends to some of its leaders. One source, interviewed for this report, claimed that ONLF commanders who used to shuttle between Kenya and the Ogaden bush had taken to spending time waiting in Nairobi for more talks.

In the event of a peace agreement with the Ethiopian government, the odds of a split within the front's central committee would be high but past and future defections by high-ranking ONLF officials should be assessed in terms of their individual influence and standing within the leadership as a whole. Most key figures are in agreement in terms of major policy decisions. Many senior ONLF figures are based in exile, the chairman, Rtd. Admiral Mohamed Omar Osman (Reer Isaak), in Asmara, the capital of Eritrea,<sup>68</sup> and his vice-chairman Mohamed Ismail (Reer Yusuf Ali/Reer Abdille), in Australia. The ONLF's foreign secretary, Abdirahman Mahdi (Reer Abdille), is based in the UK, where another senior figure, Mohamed Abdi Yassin 'Diirane' (Reer Abdille), is also based. Abdulkadir Hassan Hirmoge 'Adani' (Reer Abdille from Denan), is another senior ONLF official. Were they to fall out, or if other central committee members defected from this core group, the ONLF would still be likely to survive in a reduced form.

There has been speculation about relatively 'hardline' and relatively 'liberal' personalities and positions within the ONLF. Mohamed Ismail,

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67 Sarah Vaughan, 'Analysis of Peacebuilding and its Prospects in the Ethiopian Somali Region', UK Foreign and Commonwealth Office, December 2011.

68 Vaughan, 'Analysis of Peacebuilding', describes the Admiral as a 'compromise candidate' whose long tenure is primarily explained by the lack of an alternative leader.

the reclusive vice-chairman, as well as a former commander, Mohamed Abdi Yassin 'Diirane', and Osman Bedel are often seen as those most fiercely opposed to a deal with Ethiopia, while Abdirahman Mahdi, probably because of his diplomatic role as the organisation's foreign secretary, is viewed as more accommodating. It is not clear into which camp the ONLF chairman Mohamed Omar Osman falls. A long-term observer of the ONLF says there are no organized factions in the ONLF; most of the leadership hold positions somewhere between pragmatism and 'fighting to the last'.

If divisions within today's ONLF are difficult to identify, the group has certainly been reduced by repeated splits and defections since it went to the bush in 1994. A big split occurred in 1995 when a breakaway faction—led by Bashir Abdi Hassan and subsequently termed by Ethiopia the 'legal ONLF'—joined the EPRDF-backed ESDL, while most followers of Sheikh Ibrahim Abdulahi took up arms. The latter group, the current ONLF, appointed Mohamed Omar Osman as its new chairman in 1998.

In 2006, a major dispute in the ONLF central committee pitted Mohamed Omar Osman, the then vice-chairman Abdulkadir Hassan Hirmoge 'Adani', and general secretary Mohamed Ismail, against a group of 11 central committee members led by Mohamed Sirad Dolaal, a former foreign secretary and head of planning and research. In an attempt to challenge the ONLF leadership by building up his own armed group, Dolaal made his way into the Ogaden with the help of United Western Somali Liberation Front (UWSLF) fighters, but was intercepted and killed by *liyu* police in Denan in January 2009.<sup>69</sup> His death renewed tensions among the Ogaadeeni, particularly between the Reer Isaak (Degehabur) and Reer Abdille (Quabridehar), and was skilfully exploited by the SRS administration.

Other high-ranking ONLF defectors in recent years have included the former ONLF representative in Eritrea, Sultan Adan Yusuf Tani and

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69 ONLF, 'Statement on Execution-style Murder of Dr Mohamed Siraad Dolaal', 24 January 2009.

Sulub Ali Abas, and their militia in 2007.<sup>70</sup> In October 2010, a small faction led by Salahadin Maow, a former central committee member who had been one of Dolaal's supporters, defected from the ONLF. Maow's decision to make peace with the Ethiopian government and join the regional administration was treated as a major event by Ethiopian state media, but proved to be politically insignificant. Finally, the ONLF's former Kenya representative, Abdinur Abdullahi Farah, joined the SRS government in October 2012, and subsequently became an advisor to SRS regional president Abdi Mohamed.

## Critiques of the ONLF

Over the last decade, criticism of the ONLF has intensified from within the Ogaadeeni community. While the armed struggle has always had its critics, the intensification of the counterinsurgency after 2007, the rise of Abdi Mohamed's strongman clan policies, and the changing political dynamics in neighbouring Somalia, have all intensified these criticisms. Many Ogaadeeni intellectuals are not only critical of the Ethiopian government but also of the ONLF, accusing it of lacking a clear vision, refusing to acknowledge realities on the ground, and of being elitist, indecisive and out of touch. One source commented, sardonically, that for as long as the ONLF exaggerates its achievements, 'most ONLF supporters believe the group is about to liberate the region'.

Other criticisms concern the ONLF's refusal to become more inclusive by appealing to other marginalized Somali groups sharing many of the same grievances as the Ogaadeeni. This is most prominently reflected in its refusal to change the name of its organization.<sup>71</sup> The ONLF is also criticized for sticking to an unchanging narrative, one of secession as the panacea for the region's many problems, rather than embracing an agenda of democratization and good governance. This line of argument sees the ONLF as having limited itself to demands for self-determination.

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70 Abdullahi, 'Ogaden National Liberation Front', pp. 559.

71 Karamarda Group, 'ONLF Must Reform', 28 October 2010.



Others suggest the ONLF is weak, lacking in both technical capacity and negotiating expertise, and too beholden to Kenyan interests, and thus likely to be out-manoeuvred by Ethiopia, a large and shrewd adversary the ONLF leadership may not even truly understand.

More recently, the group has been criticized for not having a coherent strategy to deal with the idea of Jubbaland emerging as a regional state in southern Somalia. The ONLF's attitude towards Jubbaland is ambiguous: they cannot reject it because it is an important Ogaadeeni initiative, but it is one that draws support away from the ONLF. Despite these weaknesses, the ONLF continues to draw on local support. In the absence of accountability or justice, and in the face of a despotic government, the ONLF is the only mechanism of redress available to Ogaadeeni who have been victimized by Ethiopian security forces and/or the *liyu* police. The reason the ONLF has survived for so long is more because the grievances that fuel it have continued in the Somali region of Ethiopia, than because of any success on the part of its leadership.

## 6. Other stakeholders

In addition to the Ethiopian government and the ONLF, a number of other actors play important roles in the conflict between the two parties.

### Abdi Mohamed Omar and the *liyu* police

SRS president Abdi Mohamed and his *liyu* police are the most important stakeholders currently left out of the peace talks. Abdi Mohamed is widely reviled amongst the educated elite and urban inhabitants of the region. He has personalized his rule and built up a power base in ways unprecedented in federal Ethiopia. He rose from humble origins as a worker with an electricity company in Degehabur to regional president. Capitalizing on the federal government's agenda for security, he has been instrumental in allowing the Ethiopian military to subcontract the counter-insurgency from the federal to the regional government. He has also capitalized on competition between the different federal agencies active in the SRS, most especially the Ministry of Federal Affairs and the security services.

In the crackdown on the ONLF, Abdi Mohamed has portrayed himself as the best man to serve the cause of the Reer Abdille in particular and the Ogaadeeni clan family more broadly. According to one observer: 'Those who previously supported the ONLF because they wanted Ogaadeeni hegemony in the region, found a natural ally in Abdi Mohamed'. Despite his close connection with the federal security establishment, Abdi Mohamed is not only antagonistic towards the ONLF, but also a competitor to it, with the growth of a following of his own among the Ogaadeeni. Following the first and second rounds of peace talks in September and October 2012 in Nairobi, Abdi Mohamed's administration embarked on a public relations campaign, casting him as the leader of all Ethiopian Somalis. Pro-government media described the ONLF as 'Somalis sitting in the diaspora in Minneapolis', and, to illustrate the contrast with the regional president, broadcast images of him travelling

to rural areas. Televised rallies featured individuals testifying to alleged atrocities committed by the ONLF.

Abdi Mohamed is closely associated with the formation of the special police. The *liyu* police was created in 2009 when he was the head of regional security and Dau'd Mohamed Ali was in charge of the presidency. It mostly consists of members of the Ogaadeeni clan, particularly the Ali Yusuf lineage (Reer Abdille) that Abdi Mohamed belongs to. The *liyu* police has between 10,000 and 15,000 personnel.<sup>72</sup> Many have described its record of treating civilians as even worse than the ENDF's. The international organization, Human Rights Watch, reported an incident in March 2012 when the *liyu* police summarily executed ten people in Gashamo, an area predominantly inhabited by members of the Isaaq clan, after a dispute between a *liyu* police militiamen and local residents.<sup>73</sup> Rarely reported in the international media, dozens of similar events have occurred in the region since the creation of the *liyu* police.<sup>74</sup> The special police operate without accountability, effectively a paramilitary force beyond the reach of the law.

As Abdi Mohamed built his career fighting the ONLF, arguably the only way he can guarantee remaining in power as regional president is if insecurity continues. His personal support base will wane if the ONLF resurfaces as a purely political force. Regional officials and individuals close to Abdi Mohamed are reported to have contacted Ogaadeeni intellectuals and community activists who had publicly supported the peace talks, threatening their families with reprisals if they did not change their stand.

Abdi Mohamed has to follow policy dictated by his superiors in the federal government, so he cannot contradict Ethiopia's commitment to

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72 Vaughan, 'Analysis of Peacebuilding', mentions some 10,000 fighters, while *The Guardian*, 'UK tenders to train Ethiopian paramilitaries accused of abuses', 10 January 2013, talks about up to 14,000 members, citing a Department for International Development (DFID) document.

73 HRW, 'Ethiopia: "Special Police" Execute 10', 28 May 2012.

74 Interviews by Tobias Hagmann for this report in San Diego and Minneapolis, 2012.

peace talks with the ONLF. Despite the key role the SRS president has played in building up the *liyu* police and waging the counter-insurgency, his alleged association with human rights abuses may make him expendable.

Asked about Abdi Mohamed's future prospects in the event of a peace agreement, and whether abuses by the *liyu* police need to be addressed, a senior ONLF leader said: 'We don't blame him ... he is only fulfilling the orders of the Ethiopians'. It is not clear whether a compromise between Abdi Mohamed and the ONLF is as possible as that makes it sound, nor what such a compromise would look like.

### Non-Ogaadeeni clans

Not much is known about the views of those from non-Ogaadeeni clans—the region's demographic majority—towards peace talks between the Ethiopian government and ONLF. Constituting a diverse group in terms of kinship, geography, livelihoods, and political weight, non-Ogaadeeni clan lineages have in the past been very wary of what they perceive as efforts by the Ogaadeeni to dominate regional affairs. This anti-Ogaadeeni reflex dates back to the creation of the SRS when the Ogaadeeni dominated positions and decision-making in the first regional administration.<sup>75</sup> It is further exacerbated by the logic of ethnic-based representation in the *kilil*, the ethnically defined regional states brought into being after the EPRDF took power in 1991, and in Ethiopia more broadly, translating into permanent, quasi-institutionalized struggles to entrench political influence.

Since 2005, all SRS presidents have been from the Ogaadeeni clan. Non-Ogaadeeni are most likely sceptical of a political deal involving the ONLF that would further solidify this existing Ogaadeeni hold over the region.

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75 John Markakis, 'The Somali in the New Political Order of Ethiopia', pp. 71–9.

## The Ogaadeeni diaspora

Members of the Ogaadeeni diaspora are important, highly involved participants in the conflict and the peace talks. As with other diasporas resulting from state-sponsored violence and displacement, Ogaadeeni collective identity is strongly shaped by the experiences, memories and narratives of state repression. Transnational kinship networks, telecommunications, and political engagement in the SRS, explain why the diaspora is actively involved in their home region. According to the ONLF, the Ogaadeeni diaspora is present in more than sixty countries, with sizable communities in the United States, Canada, the United Kingdom, Scandinavia, Kenya, South Africa and the Arab Gulf States.

The Ogaadeeni diaspora is far from homogenous. It consists of older men and women who were born in the region but spent most of their adult life in Somalia; others who left the Ogaden for economic or political reasons in the past two decades; and a younger generation of foreign-born students and professionals who have only recently discovered their Ogaadeeni roots. It is this last group that has become the most vocal in recent years, helping mobilize Ogaadeeni youth globally against the Ethiopian government. Most Ogaadeeni in the diaspora are bitter about the suffering in their home region and frustrated both by the lack of attention given to the conflict and the diplomatic support given to Ethiopia, often decrying this as Western hypocrisy. Many diaspora Ogaadeeni therefore accuse Western governments, especially the United States and the United Kingdom, of indirectly supporting repression in their home region.<sup>76</sup>

Given its variety, it is difficult to gauge what percentage of the Ogaadeeni diaspora supports a peace deal. Conflict weariness and an increasingly critical attitude towards the ONLF might infer a large proportion leaning towards a peace process. That said, a broad majority

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<sup>76</sup> Hagmann, “We Live in the Dark Age”.

of Ogaadeeni are highly critical too of the Ethiopian government, considering a referendum a viable solution to the conflict.

The prospect of returning and investing in the region is a powerful motive for the diaspora in terms of its support for the peace process. Relative to its size, the Ogaadeeni clan family has had little economic clout in Eastern Africa so far.<sup>77</sup> But the rise of Ogaadeeni politicians in Kenya and south-central Somalia has led Ogaadeeni in Ethiopia to move in a similar direction, which means putting a political settlement with Ethiopia above continued armed confrontation. Some Ogaadeeni, for example, are said to have withdrawn their funding from the ONLF when they found the rebels' agenda inside Ethiopia working against their business interests in an emerging Jubbaland. The ONLF draws much of its support from the diaspora and may find it must adapt its negotiating strategy in line with contemporary aspirations.

### Somaliland, Puntland and Jubbaland

The days when the Ogaden was on the agenda of every Somali nationalist are long gone. The ONLF is currently surrounded by pro-Ethiopian administrations in Somaliland, Puntland, and to a lesser extent Mogadishu, as well as Kismayo, denying the rebels safe haven across the Somali border. Ethiopia's Ministry of National Defense sees its most dependable allies in Somalia as 'obviously Somaliland and Puntland'.<sup>78</sup> Ethiopia has established close and beneficial economic relations with Somaliland, making use of Berbera port to receive imports, establishing banks near their common border, and initiating regular Ethiopian Airlines flights between Addis Ababa and Hargeisa, as far back as 2001. It had also established a trade mission in Hargeisa, and a quasi-embassy, upgrading it to a Consulate General in 2006. News reports suggest that Somaliland has,

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77 Ken Menkhaus, 'Jubbaland Politics in Southern Somalia', presentation to Center for African Studies, University of Florida at Gainesville, 16 March 2013.

78 Ethiopian Ministry of Defense, 'The Present State of Ethiopia's Relations with Somaliland and Puntland', memorandum, 2011.

in turn, helped the Ethiopian government in its fight against the ONLF.<sup>79</sup> Somaliland is not hostile only to the ONLF: the dominant Issaq clan also perceives Abdi Mohamed's *liyu* police as a threat in the borderlands between Ethiopia and the Somali territories, although Abdi Mohamed has reached out to the Somaliland government in an attempt to mend relations.<sup>80</sup>

Puntland has its own military force, composed of militias who are neither structurally defined nor regularly paid, a police force, and an intelligence service known as the Puntland Intelligence Agency Security Force. The latter is considered to be efficient but, as one Ethiopian intelligence officer put it, 'there is no need for a sophisticated intelligence apparatus in a place where everybody knows everybody'. Ethiopian involvement in Puntland is partly centred on gathering reliable information on the ONLF and preventing it from establishing a foothold in the territory. It is in this framework that the SRS and Puntland signed an all-encompassing Memorandum of Understanding on 28 June 2010 and established a Joint Intelligence and Security Committee.<sup>81</sup> The ONLF has repeatedly denounced both Somaliland's and Puntland's collaboration with the Ethiopian government.<sup>82</sup>

Political developments in Jubbaland have had an impact on the Ogaden conflict; they will have to be observed closely as peace talks between the ONLF and the Ethiopian government resume. Jubbaland's leader Ahmed Madobe—once jailed by Ethiopia for his association with the Islamic Courts Union—currently enjoys good ties with the Ethiopians. His Ras Kamboni militia has received important material supplies, food rations and uniforms from Ethiopia, and Ethiopian protection specialists have

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79 BBC News, 'Somaliland Forces Surround ONLF Rebels near Ethiopia', 13 September 2010.

80 *Somalilandinformer*, 'The President of Somali Regional State in Ethiopia Confers with Somaliland Delegation', 10 August 2013.

81 *Walta Information Center*, 'Somali States Unite to Fight ONLF', 6 July 2010.

82 For example, ONLF, 'Ogaden Somali Tortured to Death in Puntland', 6 November 2009.

trained Madobe's bodyguards. Colonel Gebre Egzabeher Alemseged, known as Gebre, has been a frequent visitor in Kismayo.<sup>83</sup> The Ethiopian government had planned—with approval from Kenya—to establish a small liaison office at Kismayo airport.

Ahmed Madobe and the ONLF are enemies because hundreds of Ogaadeeni rebels fought alongside his rivals after he fell out with a former Somali ally, Hassan al-Turki, in 2010. Madobe had cleverly exploited the ONLF presence in the Jubba region to appeal for help from Ethiopia. This support in turn provoked rancour towards Madobe among members of the ONLF who saw him as a traitor to the Ogaden cause and a stooge of Ethiopia and Kenya.

The existence of Jubbaland offers both these states a powerful incentive to stay engaged in the Ogaden peace process. Competition between the two for influence in the Jubba region could, however, have a negative impact on the Ogaden peace talks.

## Eritrea

The ONLF's most important ally in the Horn of Africa is Eritrea, which has been hosting both ONLF leaders and rank-and-file fighters. Though analysts agree that Eritrea is the main governmental supplier of arms to the ONLF,<sup>84</sup> there is only fragmentary information available on the exact details of this support. Eritrea's chief foreign policy objective has been to undermine the stability of Ethiopia by encouraging and actively supporting Ethiopian insurgent movements. Supporting the ONLF weakens Ethiopia by keeping the Ethiopian government preoccupied with political tension in the SRS, potentially a second front in Eritrea's proxy war.

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83 Gebre, a veteran TPLF commando, was Meles Zenawi's right-hand man on Somalia and was Head of Intelligence during the 2006–8 Ethiopian campaign in the country. He was then seconded to the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) as political advisor to the Office of the Facilitator for Somalia Peace and Reconciliation.

84 *Jane's Defence Weekly*, 'Ogaden National Liberation Front', April 2009.



Eritrea's external intelligence agency has been directly involved in supporting this effort: it has handled day-to-day relations with the ONLF, held some of the internal dissent within it in check, and tightly controlled the ONLF's leadership. Eritrea hosts ONLF leaders and provides the front with training as well as logistical and military support. The Eritrean government's external intelligence wing coordinates logistical arrangements, especially deliveries of weapons and ammunition, and supervises training programs. It also corresponds with ONLF operatives via encrypted e-mail messages and helps them to travel to Asmara via Kenya. Sources disagree, however, on the degree of Eritrea's financial commitment to the ONLF.

The military training of ONLF soldiers in Eritrean military facilities was another important aspect of Eritrea's support. One report from 2003 claimed that 'between 700 and 1,200 ONLF recruits' were being trained in the Kalena and Addis Maskal training camps in Eritrea, from where 'a batch consisting of 100 men divided into three sub-groups was planned to infiltrate into Ethiopia through Djibouti and then Somaliland.'<sup>85</sup> Intelligence on the location and strength of Ethiopian bases, troop movements and lines of communications were passed to the ONLF by Eritrea's external intelligence and proved vital in several high-profile military operations. Eritrean military advisers are widely assumed to have helped prepare the most famous ONLF attack at Abole.<sup>86</sup>

There are claims on the part of Ethiopia that the Eritrean embassy in Djibouti served for many years as a conduit for logistical support and that Eritrean-trained forces were infiltrated into Somaliland via Djibouti or the Red Sea. A significant number of ONLF fighters who had been transiting Somaliland to fight in Ethiopia were arrested in December 2003 and in 2010.

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85 *Somaliland Times*, 'Eritrea Providing Military Training for Hundreds of ONLF Fighters', Issue 98, 2003.

86 *ISN Security Watch*, 'Ethiopia's Ogaden Insurgency Threat', 21 December 2009.

More recently, concerns have been raised about the safety of ONLF fighters remaining in Eritrea, should the ONLF reach a peace deal with Ethiopia, depriving Eritrea of this proxy war.

## 7. Talking peace in the Ogaden

Before they held direct talks in 2012, the ONLF and the Ethiopian government had made several attempts to resolve their conflict peacefully. The first public peace conference took place in January and February 1995 just one year after the fall-out between the ONLF and the EPRDF-led government. The result of the peace conference was the split in the ONLF mentioned above, leading Ethiopia to declare a 'legal ONLF', with some 20 ONLF members, including Bashir Abdi Hassan, joining the SRS parliament.<sup>87</sup> In 1998, contacts between the Ethiopian military and the ONLF were established in order to explore new peace negotiations. These behind-the-scenes manoeuvres came to an abrupt end when the ONLF's negotiation team—consisting of two central committee members and a military commander, Deg Abdi Rasin—were killed by the Ethiopian army somewhere on the Ogaadeeni plateau.

While it is likely that informal exchanges between the two parties continued after 1998, the next attempt to initiate peace talks came some while later in 2005, when a delegation of Ogaadeeni elders attempted to facilitate talks. The elders relayed several messages between the ONLF vice-chairman in the region and the prime minister's office. Their mediation attempt was, however, unsuccessful, as the two parties could not agree either on the location of the talks, the presence (or absence) of a third party, or on the involvement of the Ogaadeeni elders themselves.<sup>88</sup> The Ethiopian government capitalized on this mediation attempt, sending the elders on a tour abroad where they met with the Ogaadeeni diaspora, creating the false impression that the ONLF was to blame for the stalled initiative.

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87 Matt Bryden, 'Peace and Unity Conference of the Somali Nation of Region 5', Addis Ababa, UN Emergencies Unit for Ethiopia, 1995.

88 For a detailed chronology see Hagmann, 'Fishing for Votes', pp. 70–83.

The Ethiopian government signed a much-publicized peace agreement in October 2010 with a small breakaway ONLF faction headed by former central committee member Salahadin Maow. He had promised to bring along some 1,500 fighters, but few of them materialized, leaving him at loggerheads with Abdi Mohamed. Consequently, the ONLF described the peace agreement as a charade and an indication of the lack of genuine commitment on the part of the Ethiopian government.

In a related move, the UWSLF, the small rebel group consisting of former *al-Ittihad* and WSLF fighters led by Sheikh Ibrahim Dheere, signed a peace agreement with the Ethiopian government in June 2010. This peace deal allowed a couple of hundred Reer Abdille members of the UWSLF to return to the region, where many took up business opportunities. Many observers see this agreement as an important blueprint for a possible accord between the ONLF and the Ethiopian government.<sup>89</sup>

At the end of 2013, the ONLF and the Ethiopian government insisted they were willing to strive for an end to their conflict on the basis of negotiations. Major stumbling blocks remained, however, including a prevailing mutual lack of trust, and residual reservations, perhaps, about whether to allow Kenya, or anyone, a role as facilitator. Prior to Kenya's involvement, the Ethiopian government had been keen to avoid adding an international dimension to negotiations by involving outsiders.

### Initiating direct talks

Several accounts exist of how the 2012 peace talks between the Ethiopian government and the ONLF were agreed upon, and who it was who took the initiative to push for them.

The first version was that, after a request made by Meles Zenawi to the Kenyan President Mwai Kibaki, Ethiopian officials sounded out

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89 Vaughan, 'Analysis of Peacebuilding'.

Kenyan officials, including a Kenyan Somali sympathetic to the ONLF, Farah Malim.<sup>90</sup>

The second version, and one dominant in Ogaadeeni circles in Nairobi, was that the Ethiopian government first contacted Yusuf Haji, a former Kenyan defence minister, and Yusuf Hassan, MP for Kamukunji, a Nairobi constituency containing the Somali-dominated suburb of Eastleigh. They then made contact with the ONLF, which agreed to allow them to approach the Ethiopian government. The ONLF insisted that they should not do so privately, but in the name of the Kenyan government. Ethiopia acceded and officially requested the Kenyan government to facilitate direct talks.

Another account put forward by some Ogaadeeni intellectuals is that senior Kenyan Ogaadeenis sought to allay Ethiopia's worries about Kenya's military intervention in southern Somalia, by helping persuade the ONLF to give up fight against Ethiopia. The architects of this plan were said to have visited Addis Ababa and pitched the idea to Meles himself.

Once underway, a number of factors converged to persuade the ONLF and the Ethiopian government to meet directly. The ONLF's military situation was increasingly difficult, some Kenyan Somalis wanted a settlement in the Ogaden in order to capitalize on Kenya's presence in southern Somalia, and Ethiopia saw an opportunity to end a long-running insurgency on its eastern periphery at last.

## Round 1: 6–7 September 2012

Following several months of preparations and preliminary discussions between the Kenyans and the parties, the ONLF and the Ethiopian government met for the first time in Nairobi on 6 and 7 September 2012.

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90 Farah Malim has a reputation among Somalis as a nationalist and was seen as sympathetic to the ONLF struggle. As an Ogaadeeni intellectual described it, Ethiopia had 'played the right card' by approaching him.

The meeting took place shortly after Meles's death while the EPRDF was busy reshuffling its leadership and organizing his succession.

The Ethiopian delegation was led by their defence minister, Siraj Fegessa, and consisted of five senior military and intelligence officials, including Brigadier General Gebre Adhana, head of the military intelligence department. It was observed early on that the general appeared to outrank the minister.<sup>91</sup> The ONLF delegation was led by its foreign secretary, Abdirahman Mahdi, and included six senior ONLF officials, including one military commander, and Mahmoud Ugas, of the Ogaden Human Rights Committee. The first round of talks revealed that the ONLF had come to the talks better prepared than their counterparts. It also revealed the inexperience of the Kenyan facilitation team.

The two days were used to clarify the role of the Kenyans with the Ethiopian delegation insisting that Kenya act as a facilitator, not a mediator, a demand to which the ONLF eventually conceded. In return, the Ethiopian delegation accepted the ONLF's proposed agenda for the actual talks. The delegates discussed at length the name of the region, which the ONLF calls 'Ogaden' while Ethiopia prefers 'Somali Regional State' or 'Somali *kilil*'. More importantly, the two parties agreed that no preconditions would hamper future talks and that major conflict issues would be thoroughly discussed under the headings of politics, security, humanitarian access, economy, and resource sharing.

Both parties also agreed on the need for a peaceful resolution of the conflict and to meet again. They agreed that talks would be exclusively between the federal government and the ONLF. This was received with a great deal of interest in the region and beyond: it raised hopes that a genuine and lasting peace might be possible in eastern Ethiopia. In the words of one ONLF delegation member: 'The first round [of talks] was very good!'.<sup>92</sup>

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91 Karamarda Group, 'Failed Negotiations: The Prospects of Somali Region and ONLF', 16 January 2013.

92 ONLF press release, 8 September 2012, online at [www.onlf.org](http://www.onlf.org).

## Round 2: 15–17 October 2012

The second round of talks occurred a little over a month later. Major General Abraha Wolde Mariam, head of the eastern command, joined the Ethiopian delegation, having been too preoccupied with the burial of Meles and the subsequent political transition in Ethiopia to attend the first. With the exception of one delegate, the ONLF delegation was the same. But while the ONLF had brought position papers to the negotiating table, the Ethiopian delegation adopted an antagonistic approach, insisting on preconditions.

On the first day, the Ethiopian delegation declared that Ethiopia consisted of different ethnically defined political entities (*kilils*) and that as one of them, the SRS government should therefore also participate in the talks. To the surprise of both the Kenyan facilitation team and the ONLF—and in contradiction to earlier agreements—the Ethiopian delegation brought Mowlid Hayer, an SRS civil servant and confidant of President Abdi Mohamed along. The ONLF rejected him, along with the idea of negotiating with representatives from what they considered ‘their’ region. After a number of exchanges, it was decided that the talks would continue without the SRS representative.

On the second day, the Ethiopian delegation abruptly demanded that the ONLF accept the Ethiopian constitution before negotiations could continue. The ONLF replied by demanding that Ethiopia allow the holding of an internationally monitored referendum. The ONLF also argued that the Ogaden conflict predated the 1995 constitution of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia (FDRE), and could thus not be solved by their endorsement of the constitution. The delegations agreed to a Kenyan suggestion to reduce the number of delegates to three from each side while plenary discussions continued. According to one ONLF delegation member interviewed for this report, the Ethiopians used these more private talks to invite the ONLF to ‘come back to the region and join us’.

As neither side was willing to move, the confrontation came to a climax on the third day, when the Ethiopian delegation stood up and

waved the blue booklet of the FDRE constitution, threatening to leave the talks if the ONLF did not accept it as a framework for the negotiations. As a face-saving measure, the Kenyan team cobbled together a joint statement that reaffirmed the willingness of both parties to keep working for a peaceful solution. The Ethiopians were not interested: instead they withdrew to have lunch at the Ethiopian embassy, effectively bringing the talks to a halt.

If intransigence scuttled the second round of talks, different interpretations have been made of it. The ONLF delegation claimed that the Ethiopians had never had any intention of negotiating in good faith, because they had no mandate to do so. In other words, while the first Ethiopian delegation had met with the ONLF in pursuit of Meles Zenawi's personal agenda, by the time the second round came along, that mandate to push the talks further had disappeared with the death of Meles.

Others, including the author of this report, see the Ethiopian demand to accept the constitution as a coded invitation to the ONLF to surrender. The composition of the Ethiopian delegation—especially its heavy military bias—could be seen as a deliberate attempt by the Ethiopian security apparatus to sabotage the talks. Given Major General Abraha Wolde Mariam's dominant position in military affairs in the SRS, and his relation with regional President Abdi Mohamed, many Ogaadeeni observers speculated that the latter had orchestrated the talk's demise. The second round of talks clearly indicated that senior Ethiopian military officials had a stake in the SRS and a strong influence on any future agreement and regional political reconfiguration. On a more positive note, the Ethiopian delegation tabled a number of offers to the ONLF, namely amnesty and the option of becoming a political party.

The second round also demonstrated the limited ability of the Kenyan facilitation team to steer the process when the Ethiopian delegation grew uncompromising. Kenyan facilitators were themselves in the middle of an election campaign, and hampered from giving the negotiating process their full attention. A Kenyan source said that Ethiopian insistence on getting the ONLF to agree to the constitution was 'just a trap' to halt the talks.



As the second round of talks had ended abruptly in disagreement, many observers assumed the talks had collapsed entirely. Yet, both parties reiterated their interest in pursuing further dialogue.

## Towards renewed talks

By late 2013 preparations were underway to convene a third round of talks. Following the election of President Uhuru Kenyatta in March 2013, the Kenyan facilitation team embarked on a round of shuttle diplomacy to clarify the expectations of the two parties before they reconvened. In a meeting with senior Ethiopian officials in Addis Ababa, they reportedly raised the issue of the proportion of military representation in the Ethiopian negotiating team. In September 2013, they met the ONLF chairman and foreign secretary in London, informing them that the Ethiopian government was ready to resume talks. In mid-October, the Kenyan facilitators met once again with Ethiopian officials in Addis Ababa.

In a parallel process, Conciliation Resources, a London-based peace-building organization that has been advising both the Kenyan facilitation team and the ONLF delegation, visited the US city of Minnesota in February 2013 to meet members of the Ogaadeeni diaspora. Many of those who met them suggested that the Ethiopian constitution should not be allowed to become a stumbling block for further talks, particularly as the ONLF had already worked within it as part of the SRS administration from 1992–1994.

The ONLF has publicly affirmed its commitment to continue the peace talks. Following a meeting of its central committee in the Eritrean capital of Asmara in August 2013, its chairman Mohamed Omar Osman announced on ONLF radio that the rebels were ready to return to the negotiating table, partly to see carried out the referendum they have long desired.<sup>93</sup>

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93 *Ogaden Today Press*, 'ONLF Concludes its 6th Central Committee Meeting', 23 August 2013.

The ONLF's foreign secretary, Abdirahman Mahdi, has emphasized the key issue at stake is one of 'democratic rights with international guarantees': 'We are not stuck on the idea of a referendum,' he said, 'but we want ... something that is implementable.' Another ONLF member has expressed his optimism about a third round of talks, conceding that 'both the problem and solution are in Ethiopia's hand'. In October 2013, senior ONLF leaders held a three-day meeting with members of the Ogaadeeni community in Pretoria, South Africa, to discuss the Ogaden region, including prospects for continued peace talks with the Ethiopian government.

Observers close to the ONLF believe it is ready to accept the Ethiopian constitution as a framework for future talks while more substantive constitutional and political issues are being addressed. The Kenyan facilitation team has a written commitment from the ONLF stating this, according to another source. There is speculation as to what the ONLF will ask for in exchange, but also indications that it may demand a 'transitional period' in the SRS to pave the way for what they would want to see as an ONLF-endorsed or even ONLF-led, regional administration.

Less is known about the Ethiopian position for the next round of talks. Sources in the Ministry of Federal Affairs maintain that if the defence minister, Siraj Fegessa, were to lead the Ethiopian delegation again, he would ask the ONLF to accept the Ethiopian constitution and 'unilaterally end all armed activities' as preconditions for negotiations to continue.

Few are confident of an early breakthrough. The Kenyan facilitation team appears concerned about the degree of seriousness and level of preparedness of the interlocutors, arguing the only way to test the commitment of the two parties is to continue the talks. In consultation with the two parties, the Kenyans have been drawing up a modestly ambitious agenda, which broadly maps out issues clustered into such categories as political, security, humanitarian, and economic.

Reports of the abduction of two ONLF delegates from central Nairobi to Ethiopia in January 2014, however, cast further doubt on the resumption of the talks. The ONLF sees the abductions as 'a breach of confidence'

that ‘will gravely hamper any further talks with Ethiopia’.<sup>94</sup> It has repudiated claims by an SRS official that the delegates, Sulub Ahmed and Ali Hussein, had chosen to defect to escape ONLF assassination.<sup>95</sup>

Most donor nations represented in Ethiopia remained silent about the abductions, leaving it to Kenya to make a formal protest. The Kenyan government swiftly charged two of its own policemen in a Nairobi court for aiding the abductions.<sup>96</sup> It also asked Ethiopia for confirmation of the status of the two delegates, saying it did not want the talks to collapse but needed to consult parties to the talks before knowing how to proceed.<sup>97</sup>

### Kenyan facilitation

The Kenyan team set up to facilitate and supervise the talks is exclusively made-up of ethnic Somalis from the Ogaadeeni clan. Since May 2012, it has been led by Senator Yusuf Haji. This unusual arrangement has elicited mixed reactions: the team sees their clan affiliation as a huge asset allowing them to gain the trust of the ONLF. The Ethiopian government seems content with this too; so far, it has neither objected to the composition of the team nor cast aspersions on its neutrality given the ties of clan kinship between the facilitators and the ONLF. Some fear Ethiopia may, however, use this as a pretext later to once again scuttle the process. The Kenyan facilitation team can use kinship for the benefit of conflict resolution, but not if Ethiopia chooses to raise issues of fairness and neutrality.

Kenya’s role—and the involvement of its Ogaadeeni elite—has so far been a source of strength, lending confidence and credibility to the negotiating process. The facilitation team has enjoyed the full backing of

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94 ONLF statement, 27 January 2014.

95 *A Week in the Horn*, 21 February 2014.

96 *The Standard*, ‘Police investigating alleged abduction of two Ethiopians in Nairobi’, 29 January 2014.

97 Ali Korane, coordinator of the Kenyan facilitation team, private communication, March 2014.

President Kenyatta, who himself drives Kenyan foreign policy. It has, so far at least, been adequately funded by Kenya's Office of the President. The team also enjoys the support of Amina Mohamed, Kenya's new Cabinet Secretary for Foreign Affairs and herself an ethnic Somali.

There are, though, doubts that this is sustainable as a long-term arrangement. First, the facilitation team is by its own admission motivated by kinship and clan affiliation: Kenyan Ogaadeeni have a strong interest in pacifying the Ogaden as this could improve prospects for them in Jubbaland, where the Ogaadeen, Marehan, and Harti sub-clans vie for political control and compete for natural and economic resources. There is also an unresolved ambiguity in Kenya's role as facilitator rather than mediator. Ethiopia's insistence on the former accommodates its view of Kenya as a go-between. Some hope Kenya's role will evolve towards mediation, as the more passive role of facilitation has undermined its authority.

Since the abductions though, the Kenyans have had reason to doubt Ethiopia's commitment to negotiate, and already, some feel Ethiopia's interest in negotiating with the ONLF is waning. The view of the facilitation team is that key Ethiopian allies, such as the United States and the United Kingdom, need to apply pressure to get the Ethiopian government to stay engaged in the process.

## 8. Issues and interests

What motivates the Ethiopian government, the ONLF, and the Kenyan facilitation team most? This section tries to identify the major issues at stake in future peace talks and discusses possible scenarios.

### The ONLF

The ONLF thrives on largely Ethiopian-inflicted grievances, especially human rights violations against the civilian population. It has, however, struggled to come up with politically coherent policies. Instead, it remains fixated on a 1970s discourse of self-determination, with the referendum the pinnacle as its programme.

Any of the possible outcomes of a referendum would be unlikely to work. Secession would be unlikely to find international support; irredentism—the transfer of Somali territory to Somalia proper—is no more realistic, as Somalia itself remains fragmented. There is little international support for redrawing national boundaries either. Regional autonomy might be a more realistic option for the ONLF but the EPRDF runs an authoritarian regime with a sophisticated constitution. In practice, the Ethiopian government is unlikely to allow greater regional autonomy towards its Somali population, or other groups in Ethiopia.

There is pressure on the ONLF leadership to accept the Ethiopian constitution as the framework for a peace agreement. Semantics are important here: while proponents of a peace deal have emphasized the ‘framework’ of the Ethiopian demand, the broader public might, if the ONLF agreed to it, want to emphasize the ‘constitution’ itself. Those encouraging the ONLF to endorse the Ethiopian constitution argue that Ogaadeeni rebels need to show they are serious about a peaceful settlement. This would mean the ONLF accepting the Ethiopian constitutional framework but also insisting on its implementation before more talks.

For those unfamiliar with Ethiopian politics since 1991, the ONLF’s initial rejection of the constitution may seem contradictory, as this constitution is among the very few in the world to feature a provision

for a referendum on self-determination. Article 39 of the constitution even provides an option for secession.<sup>98</sup>

What explains the ONLF's reluctance to endorse the Ethiopian constitution? In Ethiopia, it is commonly held that although Article 39 exists, is not intended to be implemented. Approving the Ethiopian constitution would not necessarily bring the ONLF any closer to holding a referendum. The ONLF has been the only regional party to request the holding of a referendum on self-determination. In response, the TPLF/EPRDF cracked down on the ONLF and the rebellion began.

So the ONLF faces a dilemma: it seeks what the FDRE constitution promises, but what the EPRDF, the drafters of the constitution, will not agree to: a referendum on self-determination. In reaction to the Ethiopian request for the ONLF to accept the constitution as a framework for the negotiations, the ONLF gave a range of justifications for its refusal, chief among them its experience in regional government in 1994. Other ONLF counter-arguments are: first, that Somalis in Ethiopia had never really been involved in drafting the transitional charter and so, free from any obligation to the FDRE constitution, should instead hold a referendum in which they would endorse or reject it; second, that the Ethiopian government needs to first implement the constitution before forcing others to approve it; third, that without international supervision, Ethiopia cannot be trusted to organize a referendum; fourth, that Article 39 remains too vague and needs to be more detailed; and fifth, that the Ethiopian government should propose confidence-building measures and agree to discuss a series of 'substantial issues' before focusing on the constitution.<sup>99</sup> There are also differences within the ONLF leadership, with some members rejecting the constitution as a whole, while others refer to Article 39 to back up their request for a referendum.

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98 Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia, 'Constitution of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia Proclamation No. 1/1995', Addis Ababa, 1995.

99 Jon Abbink, 'Breaking and Making the State: The Dynamics of Ethnic Democracy in Ethiopia', *Journal of Contemporary African Studies* 13/2 (1995), pp. 149–63.

The ONLF appears to have moved towards an endorsement of the Ethiopian constitution as a framework for the talks. In return, it may demand that Ethiopia implements a number of political reforms. While the Ethiopian government will not grant the ONLF a referendum—not least because it would trigger a similar demand from other ethno-national groups unhappy with the current government—it might agree to a loosely defined transitional period if the ONLF abandons the armed struggle. Both parties could claim such a deal as a victory for their cause, especially if it emphasized regional autonomy. The ONLF could present it to its followers as a step towards realizing self-determination, while the Ethiopian government could claim that ethnic federalism really does work.

If regional autonomy provided a compromise between the status quo and the ONLF's secessionist aspirations, the Ogaadeeni rebels would have to work hard to convince their followers that such a project has a realistic chance of success. Although the ONLF denies that it is interested in taking over the SRS administration, it is likely that given the chance, it would push for a transitional period that could bring key ONLF leaders or sympathizers back into the region's executive. The justification for this would be that any new regional administration that followed a peace agreement would have to implement reforms in support of greater regional autonomy, namely devolution as well as a number of other institutional reforms. Be that as it may, a peace agreement with the Ethiopian government would gain the ONLF renewed relevance and boost its standing as the only organized political group in the SRS not controlled by the EPRDF. Interestingly, although the ONLF has placed human rights issues on the agenda for peace talks, it has not so far raised accountability for past human rights abuses as an obstacle to talks.<sup>100</sup> In addition, the ONLF might sign a peace agreement in exchange for

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100 Hagmann, "We Live in the Dark Age". The only exception is a press release by the Ogaden Human Rights Committee dated 14 September 2012 calling upon the two parties to take human rights into account in the talks.

Ethiopian assurances that it would accept de facto Ogaadeeni rule in neighbouring Jubbaland.

## The Ethiopian government

Interlocutors in contact with Ethiopian officials have had no indication that the Ethiopian government is inclined to make any substantial political concessions to the ONLF. The Ethiopian delegation to the talks has not disclosed any strategy that would bring substantial issues to the table.

Why did Ethiopia initiate the peace talks with the ONLF, even reluctantly agreeing to third-party facilitation, if it did not fully intend to carry them through? Ethiopia may simply have had nothing to lose in doing so. The ONLF, diminished militarily and politically in the past five years, is under pressure from its constituency to find an alternative path to armed rebellion. The Ethiopian government, under no such pressure itself, would nonetheless find a peace deal beneficial.

Firstly, it would improve the security required to accelerate the exploration of the Ogaden's gas and oil reserves, a major economic factor for Ethiopia in view of the Lamu Port–South Sudan–Ethiopia Transport (LAPSSET) Corridor. The government is short of foreign currency and, according to recent projections, short of the cash needed to fund grandiose development projects underpinning its development strategy.<sup>101</sup> Tapping the Ogaden's resources is thus an important long term economic objective.

Secondly, investments in infrastructure and development projects have been hampered by insecurity in the SRS. Public expenditure and resource allocation would benefit from an end to hostilities.

Thirdly, convincing the ONLF to lay down its arms would deprive Ethiopia's arch-enemy Eritrea of a proxy force in eastern Ethiopia.

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<sup>101</sup> Bloomberg News, 'IMF Says Ethiopian Economic Growth May Slow Without Policy Shift', 18 October 2013.



Fourthly, human rights abuses by the Ethiopian National Defense Forces and *liyu* policemen have, without totally alienating them, at least damaged Ethiopia's reputation with donor nations. They have also radicalized a younger generation of Ogaadeeni in the diaspora to turn against Ethiopia. A peace deal would make good press and demonstrate the government's stated willingness to address the grievances of its 'nations and nationalities' in the periphery.

Fifthly, a peace agreement would give Ethiopia a stronger hand in reshuffling the political cards in south-central Somalia, as well as in dealing with a potentially resurgent Federal Somali Government.

Finally, a peace deal with the ONLF would also allow parts of the Ethiopian federal government to rein in the influence of Abdi Mohamed in the SRS and balance the region's competing interest groups.

According to one source, 'Ethiopia's understanding is that the ONLF wants to come in; they are tired and they cannot win.' The Ethiopian offer to the ONLF has not yet gone beyond an amnesty and reintegration into regional politics. It has also so far excluded international guarantees. This is in keeping with the EPRDF's history of dealing with domestic opposition groups internally. It also reflects the immense power imbalance between the government and the ONLF.

In essence, it appears that Ethiopia is willing to give the ONLF a similar deal to the one it granted to the UWSLF, plus some minor concessions in view of a future process that might improve regional autonomy.<sup>102</sup> The expected outcome of future talks are that the ONLF gives up the armed struggle in exchange for being allowed to legally return to the region, and run for office shielded from persecution and harassment.

Ethiopian interest in peace talks with the ONLF is also motivated by other factors. If prominent Kenyan Ogaadeenis on the facilitation team pursue their political goals within the framework of a united Kenya,

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102 There is a historic parallel with the Derg, which in 1987 created the Autonomous Ogaden Province, consisting of the former *awrajas* Qabridehar, Wardheer, K'elafo and El-Kere.

ONLF negotiators may opt to do the same within a united Ethiopia. Ethiopia may now be open to a change of tack in the SRS, willing to adopt Kenya's approach of using a mix of political and economic incentives to undermine secessionism and incentivize greater integration. It may have no choice but to accept that powerful members of the Ogaadeeni clan will continue to influence Kenya's policy towards Somalia. The victory of Ahmed Madobe in the leadership race in Somalia's Jubba region is viewed as a welcome development in Addis Ababa. His rival, Mohammed Abdi Gandhi, a defence minister in the former Transitional Government of Ethiopia, was suspected by the Ethiopians of sympathising with the ONLF and its secessionist goals. Kenya's decision to ditch Mohammed Abdi Gandhi in favour of Ahmed Madobe in south-central Somalia improved its bilateral relations with Ethiopia.

Ethiopian policy in the SRS is not free from internal contradictions. While the government maintains it has successfully decimated the ONLF, military and security officials still have an interest in perpetuating insecurity of some sort. The SRS is said to enjoy extensive and lucrative trans-boundary links, including contraband trade. This is important in relation to the expanded federal presence in the region: officials seconded by federal institutions to the region do not view it as a hardship posting, but as a potentially lucrative, financial opportunity.

The government in Addis Ababa has responded to this by expanding its federal police presence and launching a scheme whereby anyone who provides information about contraband is given 25 per cent of the value of the goods confiscated. These initiatives have substantially reduced the scale of the contraband trade over the past two years. Allegations persist, however, that this illegal trade involves top army officers in the Eastern Command.

## Kenya

Kenya's overall strategic interest in the talks appears unchanged. The resolution of the Ogaden problem in neighbouring Ethiopia would help Kenya mend a frayed alliance with Ethiopia and re-align policies and interests in Somalia. It would also undermine pan-Somali nationalism

among Kenya's own ethnic Somali population, ease friction over the stabilization of the Jubba region, and produce economic spin-offs, such as the ambitious LAPSET project.<sup>103</sup> The severity of the terrorist attack on the Westgate mall in Nairobi in September 2013, however, has thrown the Kenyan establishment into disarray, and Kenya risks being diverted from the Ogaden peace process by its need to focus on counter-terrorism and its own military involvement in Somalia.

Kenya and Ethiopia share a mutual defence pact dating back to 1964. Ever since Kenya's strategy of creating Jubbaland in early 2009 became known, though, relations between Kenya and Ethiopia have been tense, characterised by suspicion and mistrust. A thaw in relations between Kenya and Ethiopia in the last two years, has broadened the Jubbaland process, with the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) consulting Ethiopia more often and seeking to accommodate the concerns of non-Ogaadeeni clans in Somalia's Jubba and Gedo regions, principally the Marehan.

Kenya and Ethiopia share a common anxiety over the growing influence of non-traditional actors in southern Somalia such as Uganda, Turkey and the United Kingdom. This geopolitical anxiety has fostered a common desire to forge stronger ties to avoid losing out in the competition for influence in Somalia. Each also wants to protect its own perceived national security interests.

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 103 ICG, 'Ethiopia: Prospects for Peace'.

## 9. Conclusions and policy considerations

A peace accord between the Ethiopian government and the ONLF is critical for peace in the SRS and the wider region. The rounds of peace talks facilitated by Kenya represent the first concerted effort at resolving an insurgency that has, for 20 years, exacted a heavy toll on a civilian population.

Scepticism over whether talks could deliver a substantial change is based partly on a culture of power in Ethiopia in which compromise is equated with weakness, and by an imbalance of power between the two parties to the conflict, as well as the absence of international pressure on Ethiopia.<sup>104</sup> As a result, Ethiopia is unlikely to grant the ONLF a referendum on self-determination. The fragmentation of power at the top of the Ethiopian state following Meles's death adds uncertainty. On top of this, the limited approach adopted by the Kenyan team overseeing the talks may serve a purpose now but risks casting the process adrift in the longer term.

### Possible outcomes

In spite of these concerns, and despite the January abductions, the two parties appear to be committed to continuing the talks. The ONLF hopes that successful dialogue will increase its influence as well as offer relief to local populations and ultimately sideline Abdi Mohamed. The Ogaadeeni rebels might stand to obtain a part, or even the whole, of the SRS administration if they decide to renounce the armed struggle. The Ethiopian government is betting on a peace deal that involves minimal concessions in return for big dividends, such as regional stability with real economic, political and geopolitical gains.

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<sup>104</sup> Sarah Vaughan and Kjetil Tronvoll, *The Culture of Power in Contemporary Ethiopian Political Life* (Stockholm: Sida, 2003), pp. 32–5.

While a breakthrough in the negotiations is unlikely to occur in the next round of talks, in the end an agreement might have the following consequences: within the SRS, it could lead to the dismissal of Abdi Mohamed and a realignment of Ogaadeeni interests behind the ONLF. A peace deal would have other effects too, increasing resentment by non-Ogaadeeni who may feel left out of regional politics. Since the ONLF has been unwilling to include significant non-Ogaadeeni representation in their armed struggle, it is hardly likely that they would do so once in power.

Though an end to hostilities would increase security and accessibility in the SRS, it is therefore unlikely to improve political governance. The patron-client relations that have characterized politics in the region would probably continue. Whether the *liyu* police would be demobilized as part of a peace agreement, and what their future role in the region would be, is a matter of speculation. Within Ethiopia, a peace agreement with the ONLF would send a discouraging signal to armed opposition groups active in other parts of the country. In Somalia, such a peace deal would be perceived as favouring Ogaadeeni unity and influence. It would also spill over into national Somali politics where Darood representation is dominated by Harti and Marehan.

Finally, Eritrea would lose one of its most effective armed proxies in Ethiopia if a substantive peace deal were reached.

## Dangers of a quick fix solution

While the potential benefits of a peace agreement are obvious, so are the risks of a hasty solution that fails to address the underlying causes of the Ogaden conflict. These centre on the region's longstanding legacy of state-sponsored violence, its deficits in terms of civil and political rights and the delivery of public services, the absence of genuine political participation, and the contested ownership of its natural resources. A peace agreement between the Ethiopian government and the ONLF can only be deemed substantive if it addresses at least some of these challenges.

Ethiopia might be motivated to agree to a deal with the ONLF that entails no substantial concessions or political reform inside the SRS, but offers opportunities for select ONLF figureheads. Such a 'retirement package' would fragment and weaken the ONLF and delegitimize it. If the ONLF leadership were to agree to an agreement that a part of its constituency considers flawed, it might eventually split. A break-up of the ONLF in the case of a quick-fix peace agreement would leave behind a rump of hardline Ogaadeeni rebels who refused to sign up to any agreement at all. In a worst case scenario, they might be tempted to form an alliance with radical Islamists groups opposed to Ethiopia such as al-Shabaab.

Observers have been quick to note the parallel with 2005, when the Ethiopian military requested the opposition Coalition for Unity and Democracy (CUD) to accept the Ethiopian constitution. The result was a split in the CUD, with a small faction joining the parliament, where they were endlessly frustrated, and a larger faction opting out of institutional politics.

Alternatively, the Ethiopian government might be pursuing a strategy that will undermine the ONLF's credibility by forcing it to change direction constantly in its effort to adapt to new demands.

Negative consequences of a possible quick fix peace deal also stem from the ONLF's priorities and negotiation strategy. While the ONLF is the only significant organized political group in the SRS outside the EPRDF-led state, it represents only a fraction of the Somalis living in Ethiopia. Apart from pushing for a regional referendum on self-determination to be voted on by Ethiopian Somalis, the ONLF has not so far come up with any viable political strategy that might embrace the region's non-Ogaadeeni population. The ONLF might pursue peace talks simply to hold its eroding constituency together, signalling to its supporters that it is not a spent force.

## The role of the international community

The Ogaden conflict is one of the world's forgotten conflicts; outsiders have rarely acknowledged the suffering of Ethiopian Somalis. The

EPRDF's official narrative suggests that ethnic federalism has addressed and effectively overcome the historical marginalization of Ethiopia's many peripheral groups, including Somalis. Despite improvements since the days of the Derg, however, this is not the case.<sup>105</sup>

Western donors have generously funded the Ethiopian government since 1991, despite continuing concerns about the curtailment of political freedoms and of human rights and political pluralism in the country.<sup>106</sup> To safeguard bilateral relations with Ethiopia, donors have tacitly accepted the normalization of state-sponsored violence in the SRS. Shared security interests, diplomatic inertia, the need to implement important aid programmes in collaboration with the government, but also the received wisdom that criticizing Ethiopia is counterproductive, all help explain why the Ogaden conflict ranks low on the donor agenda.<sup>107</sup>

Foreign governments have so far declined to support the Ogaden peace talks in any proactive way. The ONLF has requested a number of countries—including Germany, Denmark, the Netherlands, Sweden, Switzerland, the US, South Africa as well as neighbouring countries in the Horn of Africa—to back the peace talks. With the exception of discreet technical assistance by the United Kingdom and Swiss governments, the international community has so far chosen a hands-off approach.

The Ogaden peace talks represent a small but real opportunity to address some of the many political problems that have plagued Ethiopia's SRS. The wait-and-see approach adopted by foreign ministries is inappropriate. Given the stark power imbalance between the Ethiopian government and the ONLF, international encouragement, pressure and follow-up to the talks is crucial to enhance the chances of a sustained

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105 Markakis, *Ethiopia*, p. 328

106 Helen Epstein, 'Why Are We Funding Abuse in Ethiopia?' *New York Review of Books*, 14 March 2013; Tobias Hagmann, 'Supporting Stability, Abetting Repression', *International Herald Tribune*, 12 July 2012; HRW, 'Development without Freedom: How Aid Underwrites Repression in Ethiopia', New York, October 2010.

107 Dereje Feyissa, 'Aid Negotiation: The Uneasy 'Partnership' between EPRDF and the Donors', *Journal of Eastern African Studies* 5/4 (2011), pp. 788–817.

peace process. International silence over the abduction of the two ONLF delegates in early 2014—a clear violation of diplomatic protocol—illustrates a lack of interest in doing this.

The assumption that no international encouragement is needed because Ethiopia initiated the talks in the first place is convenient for donors but misguided. Donors can support the peace talks in a number of ways: by encouraging the parties to the conflict and the Kenyan government to continue the talks; by supporting demands for greater humanitarian access; by offering to be guarantors in case of a cessation of hostilities; and by providing assistance for a parallel demobilization of the ONLF and the *liyu* police if an agreement materializes.

External actors should draw attention to the role of human rights and accountability for past abuses against civilians by both parties to the conflict, as well as the need to include other stakeholders, chiefly the region's non-Ogaadeeni clans, in discussions about political reforms in the SRS. The international community should also advise companies from their countries not to engage in exploration or exploitation of the Ogaden's mineral resources until there is a political agreement. Instead, they could offer to support environmental and social impact assessments if and when a peace deal is struck.

One challenge for international engagement is the role of the Ethiopian military in the talks, as they are less accessible to donors than civilian officials in the Ethiopian government. Donors could encourage Ethiopia to seize the moment for real political reform in the SRS by pushing for a peace agreement with the ONLF that will both safeguard development investments and regional stability.



## Glossary of acronyms, words and phrases

|   |   |
|---|---|
| ANDM                                    | Amhara National Democratic Movement   |
| <i>awraja</i>                           | ( <i>Amharic</i> ) district or sub-provincial administrative unit under the imperial period and the Derg (q.v.)                       |
| CUD                                     | Coalition for Unity and Democracy   |
| <i>Derg</i>                             | ( <i>Amharic</i> ) committee; commonly used to refer to the Marxist-Leninist military regime led by Mengistu Haile Mariam (1974–1991) |
| <i>dervish</i>                          | ( <i>Somali/Arabic</i> ) fighters loyal to Sayyid Mahammad Abdille Hassan (1856–1920)   |
| DFID                                    | Department for International Development  |
| ENDF                                    | Ethiopian National Defense Forces   |
| ESDL                                    | Ethiopian Somali Democratic League  |
| EPRDF                                   | Ethiopian Peoples' Revolutionary Democratic Front   |
| <i>fāt'no dārash</i>                    | ( <i>Amharic</i> ) Federal Police Rapid Deployment Force  |
| FDRE                                    | Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia   |
| <i>gem gema</i>                         | ( <i>Tigrean</i> ) critique and self-critique; politico-administrative evaluation practised by Ethiopian government and ruling party  |
| <i>gesh</i>                             | ( <i>Somali</i> ) armed force   |
| <i>habe</i>                             | ( <i>Ge'ez</i> ) peoples of the Ethiopian highlands such as Amharas, Tigreans, and Gurages  |
| <i>Harakat al-Shabaab al Muja'eddin</i> | ( <i>Arabic</i> ) Mujahideen Youth Movement; abbreviated to al-Shabaab  |
| ICU                                     | Islamic Courts Union  |
| IGAD                                    | Intergovernmental Authority on Development  |
| IHASA                                   | Institute of Horn of Africa Studies and Affairs   |
| <i>al-Ittihad al-Islamiya</i>           | ( <i>Arabic</i> ) The Islamic Union   |
| <i>jabhada</i>                          | ( <i>Somali</i> ) front   |
| JWXX                                    | ( <i>Somali</i> ) <i>Jabhada Wadaniga Xoreynta Ogadeenya</i> / Ogaden National Liberation Front                                       |
| <i>kätäma</i>                           | ( <i>Amharic</i> ) fortified garrison towns of the imperial period  |

|                         |   |
|-------------------------|---|
| <i>kifletor</i>         | ( <i>Amharic</i> ) infantry division  |
| <i>kilil</i>            | ( <i>Amharic</i> ) ethnically defined regional state (and its government) in post-1991 Ethiopia |
| LAPSSET Corridor        | Lamu Port–South Sudan–Ethiopia Transport Corridor   |
| <i>liyu</i>             | ( <i>Amharic</i> ) special police; militia of the SRS of Ethiopia                               |
| MFA                     | Ministry of Federal Affairs   |
| <i>Nasr Allah</i>       | ( <i>Arabic</i> ) Victory of God, clandestine Ogaadeen resistance group                         |
| NISS                    | National Intelligence and Security Service  |
| NSC                     | National Security Council   |
| OCTI                    | Ogaden Company for Trade and Industry   |
| OLF                     | Ogaden Liberation Front   |
| ONLF                    | Ogaden National Liberation Front  |
| OPDO                    | Oromo People's Democratic Organization  |
| PIASF                   | Puntland Intelligence Agency-Security Force   |
| SALF                    | Somali Abo Liberation Front   |
| Al-Shabaab              | See <i>Harakat al-Shabaab al Muja'eddin</i>   |
| SEPDM                   | Southern Ethiopian Peoples' Democratic Movement   |
| <i>shalleka</i>         | ( <i>Amharic</i> ) military unit comprising some 400 soldiers                                   |
| SPDP                    | Somali People's Democratic Party  |
| SRS                     | Somali Regional State (Ethiopia)  |
| <i>Soomaali Galbeed</i> | ( <i>Somali</i> ) Western Somalia; Somali inhabited parts of Ethiopia                           |
| TDA                     | Tigray Development Association  |
| TGE                     | Transitional Government of Ethiopia, 1991–1995  |
| TPLF                    | Tigray People's Liberation Front  |
| UWSLF                   | United Western Somali Liberation Front  |
| WSLF                    | Western Somali Liberation Front   |
| <i>zāmācha</i>          | ( <i>Amharic</i> ) military and/or government campaigns   |

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# ***‘Objective, analytical and balanced’***

—*Ibrahim Farah, University of Nairobi*

Since the 1990s, war in the Ogaden region of Ethiopia has claimed thousands of lives. The conflict between the Government of Ethiopia and the insurgent Ogaden National Liberation Front has impoverished the communities of Ethiopia’s Somali Regional State, swollen the refugee population in Kenya, and added to insecurity in the Somali territories of the Horn of Africa. *Talking Peace in the Ogaden* is the outcome of extensive research in Ethiopia, East Africa and the global Ogaadeeni diaspora. It analyses the evolution of the conflict, the changing balance of forces, and the current prospects for peace.



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