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Understanding Conflicts in the Horn of Africa

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The Horn of Africa comprises the countries of Ethiopia, Eritrea, Sudan, Djibouti, and the former Republic of Somalia. For over five decades this region has been the site of intermittent domestic and sub-regional conflicts. In many ways the forms of conflict common in each country have their roots in the colonial past or, in the case of Ethiopia, in the legacy of imperial rule. During the Cold War period, the internal conflicts in the states of the region were largely contained, as superpower patrons ironically used their assistance to clients to enable them to maintain domestic control and to deter real and potential enemies in the region that were supported by contending superpower adversaries. Border tensions between countries in the Horn during this period were consequently not a major problem. However, beginning in the late 1970s, this began to change. The Soviet Union lost its grip over its clients in the region (Sudan and Somalia) and shifted its support to Ethiopia. The United States countered by attempting an encirclement strategy, shifting its patronage to Ethiopia’s neighbors.

Over the past decade or so, we have witnessed a growing incidence of internal conflicts that have spilled over borders in the Horn. This has forced the international community to seriously reconsider the notion of state sovereignty and the norms governing external involvement in domestic disputes. In the 1990s, the Organization of African Unity (OAU, now the African Union [AU]) established the Mechanism for Conflict Prevention and Resolution and charged it with developing a capacity for intervening in cases involving internal conflicts that threaten to become
not only regionalized but also even internationalized. Also, the countries of the Horn (in cooperation with Uganda and Kenya) transformed the Intergovernmental Agency for Drought and Development (IGADD) into the Intergovernmental Agency for Development (IGAD). It was created not only to be a subregional economic union, but also to engage in prevention and management of inter- and intrastate conflicts.

Although Cold War competition in the region between the superpowers served to constrain conflicts among the states in the Horn to some extent, with the end of the Cold War the field proved ripe not only for the escalation of conflicts between states, but also for the emergence of conflicts within them. The ready availability of arms in the formal as well as the informal international marketplace increased the potential for both interstate and intrastate conflict.²

This chapter critically examines the underlying as well as precipitating factors contributing to sociopolitical conflict in the Horn of Africa over the past half century and considers the various domestic, international, regional, and subregional approaches to managing conflict. The discussion is divided into three main sections. The first section considers the nature of the sociopolitical landscape of each country in the Horn, the processes of state and nation building, and the causes of internal conflict, particularly prior to the end of the Cold War. This includes a discussion of the shifting superpower alliances beginning in the late 1970s and the implications of this change for individual countries as well as for the region as a whole. The second section seeks to understand why such problems have forced the countries of the region, both individually and collectively, to attempt to find solutions to a whole host of conflicts. Although these conflicts are domestically based, they have regional implications. The discussion in this section centers on internal dynamics in present-day Ethiopia, Sudan, and the collapsed state of Somalia and then turns to efforts on the part of the AU and IGAD to deal with these problems. In the third section, I critically examine the only significant incident of interstate conflict in the Horn in recent history, the Eritrea-Ethiopia border dispute. I conclude with a brief discussion of the major findings of the chapter.

**State Building, Nation Building, and the Seeds of Conflict**

Although the countries of the Horn have a long history of interaction, they have never created a viable economic or political union. Each country—Sudan, Ethiopia, Eritrea, and Djibouti—has had its own history of attempting to consolidate the state and then to build a sense among its people of being a unified, multiethnic state. In the case of Somalia, the problem has historically been one of building a homogeneous nation into a viable state.³ Each of these countries has complex social networks that must be examined if we are to understand current conflicts and possible solutions to them. In this section I briefly consider the political history of each of the countries in an attempt to identify the seeds of domestic as well as regional conflict.

**Ethiopia**

The major conflicts within the modern Ethiopian state have centered on claims by major ethnic groups to the right of self-determination. Initially the elements from the former Italian colony of Eritrea offered the most vocal opposition to inclusion in a multiethnic Ethiopian state. However, by the post–World War II era, other ethnic groups such as the Somali and Oromo were also making demands for self-determination. They essentially claimed that rather than being a victim of the “European Scramble” for Africa, Ethiopia was in fact a willing participant, subjugating and incorporating their nationality groups and their homelands. In the 1960s, Eritrean nationalism led to the war of national liberation, which, as discussed later, lasted thirty years and claimed the lives of thousands of people.

Ethiopia, along with Liberia, is the only African country not to have experienced European colonization. The contours of the current state of Ethiopia were established beginning with the reign of Emperor Menelik II in the late 1800s. In the process of consolidating the Ethiopian imperial state, Menelik engaged in wars of conquest, incorporating various other nations (Oromo, Somali, Afar, Gurage, etc.) into what was the core of the Abyssinian (Ethiopian) state, comprising ethnic Amharas and Tigrayans.⁴

The last Ethiopian emperor was Haile Selassie I, who assumed the throne in 1930. During his reign he worked diligently to modernize royal absolutism and to strengthen the hand of the secular state at the expense of traditional civil and religious authorities. His efforts in this regard were interrupted by the Italian Fascist invasion of Ethiopia in 1935 and its brief occupation of the country. The emperor was driven into exile and on his return, with the assistance of British and Commonwealth forces, he was able to make major advances in strengthening
the hand of the Crown. He implemented a new fiscal system and modernized his military and the national bureaucracy. He sought to promote Ethiopia's image internationally as a viable and cohesive multiethnic nation-state. After World War II, Ethiopia was among the first states to join the United Nations. Addis Ababa subsequently became the headquarters of the OAU, and several other international and regional organizations established offices there.

In addition to making administrative reforms and diplomatic moves, Haile Selassie also attempted to modernize Ethiopia's economy, of which agriculture had historically been the backbone. The emperor initially sought to strengthen this industry in order to increase revenue. His approach to modernization promoted an educated elite—predominantly from the Amhara and Tigray ethnic groups—emphasizing education for these groups and largely ignoring the need to build a genuine sense of Ethiopian national identity among the poor and culturally subordinate ethnic groups. While some individuals from these groups were incorporated into the ruling class, and in the process acquired a sense of devotion to the ideal of "Greater Ethiopia," this practice was far from universal. Despite an endless stream of rhetoric from the emperor about the multiethnic, unified Ethiopia, there were few policies to promote it.

Ethiopia's first written constitution was completed in 1931. It enshrined royal absolutism and did not ensure representative democracy or an independent judiciary. In 1955, seeking to enhance his domestic authority and international reputation, the emperor encouraged a revision of the constitution: it provided for a popularly elected representative chamber of deputies but did not provide for political parties. It also gave the emperor the right to appoint and dismiss the prime minister.

The emperor would occasionally pay visits to dissident areas in order to give symbolic assurances to subordinate groups whose plight he was concerned with, but seldom were such visits followed by significant policy changes. Resentment of his regime and the ruling Amhara-Tigray culture was deeply seated in most of the periphery. The situation of Eritrea under imperial rule is illustrative. A 1952 UN mandate united Eritrea with Ethiopia in a federal arrangement. Ethiopia annexed Eritrea in 1962 despite widespread opposition among several segments of the Eritrean population, triggering armed struggle for Eritrean independence.

During the Italian Fascist occupation of the Horn during World War II, Somalis in Ethiopia's Ogaden region had briefly been united with other parts of the Somali nation. This continued under British tutelage from 1945 to 1948. The British had created hopes among Somalis that on their departure they would leave intact a united Somali nation-state. However, Italy attained trusteeship of its colony of Italian Somaliland; France maintained possession of its colony of Djibouti; Somalis in Kenya's Northeast Frontier District remained part of Kenya; and between 1954 and 1955, Ethiopia was granted the right to reoccupy the Ogaden. Between 1954 and 1960, Haile Selassie made sporadic attempts to "integrate" subject Somalis into the empire, but Somalis still sought to be a part of a Greater Somalia. In 1960, former British and Italian Somalilanders (discussed below) achieved their respective independence and moved quickly to merge into the "Somali Republic." In the Ogaden, the Somali Youth League (SYL), desiring to "reunite" all parts of the Somali nation, fueled the irredentist aspirations of the residents there. Although not an immediate threat, these aspirations triggered a major war with Ethiopia in the ensuing decades.

In addition to the Eritreans and Somalis, the Oromo population began to assert claims of historic social injustice perpetrated on them by the imperial regime. Oromo are predominately found in the southern parts of Ethiopia, in peripheral areas that were incorporated during the expansion and consolidation of the empire in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries. Prior to this, the Oromo people had existed in relative autonomy as a loose confederation of clans who shared a common language and culture. In the second half of the twentieth century, Oromo nationalists even proclaimed that the Oromo nation had been colonized by the imperial state and that they had the right to self-determination.

Under the emperor's rule, the state sought to secure Oromo loyalty by developing alliances with certain Oromo leaders. The most favored among the Oromo were those who chose to become totally assimilated into the dominant culture of the Amhara, often adopting Christian names. Central bureaucrats, mostly from among the highland Amhara and Tigray people, represented the imperial state in the periphery and generally viewed the Oromo as mere subjects. The Oromo were regularly the victims of corrupt bureaucrats and judges. Their labor and agricultural output, particularly in coffee, became the backbone of Ethiopia's emerging capitalist economy, but northern settlers and bureaucrats generally owned or had use rights to the land occupied by Oromo and other minority groups in the south, and they and the state were the primary beneficiaries of the produce of the land.

Although most Oromo had not enjoyed full citizenship rights during the imperial era, a sense of Oromo national consciousness did not begin
to surface until the mid-1960s, when the Oromo self-help association Macha-Tulama was founded. Since political parties were not allowed, associations such as Macha-Tulama often took on political roles. At its height, Macha-Tulama claimed as many as 300,000 members. It was most successful in the south in Bale and Arussi, where Oromo had been relegated to the status of tenants on land that was once theirs. In late 1966, the regime, alarmed by the growth in Macha-Tulama’s popularity, arrested and banned the organization’s top leadership. This did not eliminate Oromo nationalism: more serious militancy surfaced less than a decade later with the founding of the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF).

By the early 1970s, Ethiopian society was characterized by widespread discontent. The regime appeared less and less capable of resolving the accumulating problems that confronted it. Previously the emperor had been able to rely on the support of the military, police, church, and bureaucracy to enable him to survive and pursue his development agenda. The contradictions, in large measure growing out of the process of modernization, underpinned the revolution that toppled the regime in 1974.

By 1973, two main precipitating causes had emerged. First, a catastrophic drought gripped large parts of the country. More than 100,000 people died of malnutrition, disease, and starvation, a tragedy the regime appeared to ignore. Second, urban centers suffered unemployment, inflation, gasoline shortages, and shortages of basic food commodities. Groups such as teachers, students, taxi drivers, and industrial workers pressed the government to respond, but it either ignored them or reacted irresponsibly. Perhaps the most serious threat to the regime surfaced in February 1974 with a series of military mutinies, which became a movement led by a committee of 128 junior officers and enlisted men known as the Derg (derg means “committee” in Amharic). Haile Selassie was deposed on September 12, 1974. Initially this appeared to be nothing more than a military coup, but it soon became clear that the new rulers had revolutionary intentions, and the Derg promptly developed a well-defined ideology and program.

The overthrow of the regime unleashed nationalist claims among subordinated groups. The military government initially believed it could find acceptable solutions to these claims, save for those of the Eritreans. Rather than seeking a political solution to their claims, the Derg attempted to crush the Eritrean nationalists using untrained militia. The militia, however, suffered high casualties and the war raged for another seventeen years. The Derg initially tried to win over other dissident nationalities through social and economic reforms, but this strategy failed.

Between 1976 and 1978, the country was nearly torn apart as serious challenges to the state arose not only in Eritrea but also in the Ogaden and at the center by groups opposed to the regime on ideological and political grounds. The Derg responded with violence and gross violations of human rights. In this social climate the United States, which had been Ethiopia’s superpower patron since 1952, attempted to force the country’s leaders to moderate their policies. On assuming the U.S. presidency in January 1977, Jimmy Carter announced suspension of military assistance to Ethiopia because of its poor human rights record. Relations between the two countries broke down in April of that year when the Derg expelled more than 2,000 U.S. military personnel and their dependents from the country. Facing escalating armed opposition to its rule, the Derg turned to the Soviet Union and Cuba for military assistance. This aid allowed the Derg to consolidate its power over the next decade.

The Derg regime implemented policies and created institutions that made it look and operate like an orthodox Afro-Marxist regime. The Derg waged war against what it termed “narrow nationalism” and promoted civil society organizations that cut across national identities. It nationalized urban and rural property; redistributed land to the poor; controlled the means of production, distribution, and exchange; and attempted to collectivize agricultural production. Seeking to consolidate its power and neutralize nationalist aspirations, it created the Workers Party of Ethiopia (WPE) in 1984 and adopted a Marxist-Leninist constitution in 1987, establishing the People’s Democratic Republic of Ethiopia (PDRE).

The regime made impressive gains in education, literacy, and health care, but patterns of inequality persisted. The new constitution was never successfully implemented, and armed opposition to the Marxist regime escalated after its promulgation. A demoralized military faced a better-organized opposition, and a coup attempt in 1989 seemed to signal the beginning of the end for the Derg regime. The regime attempted to quell opposition by pledging sweeping reforms and even announced in 1990 that it was turning away from its socialist development strategy. However, the regime fell on May 28, 1991.
Eritrea

Social conflict in Eritrea has been based upon various issues, depending on the period under consideration. During the nationalist period following World War II, nationalist parties split between those favoring union with Ethiopia and those favoring total independence. During the struggle for national liberation from Ethiopia, the fault lines were mostly between the Eritrean People’s Liberation Front (EPLF) with its explicit Marxist agenda, and the Eritrean Liberation Front, which supported close alliance with Muslim countries. Most recently, the People’s Front for Democracy and Justice (PFDJ), formerly the EPLF, is at odds with groups favoring radical religious (Islamic) nationalism and with others who are unhappy with the slow pace of the transition to multiparty democracy.

Eritrea has an estimated population of 3.5 million people, with nine significant ethnic groups. The largest among these are the Tigrinya- and Tigre-speakers, who make up about 80 percent of the population. The remainder of the population consists of the Afar, Bilein, Hedareb, Kunama, Nara, Rashaida, and Saho, all of whom have their own languages. There are two working languages, Tigrinya and Arabic, while English is used for international communication. The two predominant religions are Coptic Christianity and Islam, which have roughly the same number of followers. Eritrea also has some Catholic and Christian Protestant adherents. Eritrean nationalists built and consolidated a multiethnic identity through the struggle for independence, rather than from a sense of a common national culture that can be traced to antiquity.

Italy established a colony in Eritrea in 1896 and remained until it was ousted by British and Commonwealth forces in 1941. From 1941 until 1952, Eritrea was a trusteeship of the UN governed by the British. In 1948, the UN set up a commission, composed of representatives from Burma, Guatemala, Norway, Pakistan, and South Africa, to recommend a plan for the trusteeship. In 1949, the commission submitted its findings. The majority (Burma, Norway, and South Africa) supported a union between Eritrea and Ethiopia. Guatemala and Pakistan favored complete independence for Eritrea. The UN chose federation, and the terms were laid out in a UN resolution passed in December 1950.

An imperial council composed of equal numbers of Ethiopian and Eritrean representatives was responsible for drawing up a constitution during a transitional period of approximately two years. Eritrean political organizations supporting either unification or independence emerged during the years 1941–1946. The Unionist Party (UP), claiming that Eritrea had been stolen by the Italians from Ethiopia, favored unconditional reunification with Ethiopia. The Muslim League and several smaller parties favored independence; these were joined in 1947 by the Liberal Progressive Party (LPP), a predominantly Christian group. The parties favoring independence united to form the independence bloc. In the years leading up to the actual consummation of the federation, Eritrean political parties vigorously competed with each other to dominate the politics of independent Eritrea. Haile Selassie sought to ensure the UP’s emergence as the dominant player. Eritrea was united with Ethiopia in 1952, and the emperor worked to undermine Eritrean autonomy and to strengthen the center.

In 1960, the Eritrean Liberation Front (ELF), comprising mainly but not exclusively Muslim Eritreans from the rural western lowland border areas of Eritrea, was founded in Cairo as an exile army of national liberation. By 1967, the ELF had gained considerable support among peasants, particularly in the northern and western parts of the territory and around the port city of Massawa. The ELF divided the country into five military regions, giving regional commanders wide latitude in their respective zones. Eventually disputes within the organization over strategy and tactics led to its fragmentation and the creation in 1971 of another independence movement, the Eritrean People’s Liberation Front.

Like the ELF, the EPLF was left-leaning but it included more members from the urban centers of the highlands. By the time that Haile Selassie was deposed, the Eritrean guerrillas had become a formidable threat to Ethiopia. However, when Ethiopia began to receive Soviet and Cuban military assistance in 1977, it was able to force the EPLF into liberated zones along the border with Sudan. In 1981, the ELF was ousted from Eritrean territory by a combined force of the EPLF and its Ethiopian ally, the Tigray People’s Liberation Front (TPLF). Between 1978 and 1987, the EPLF waged an escalating war against Ethiopian forces and forged alliances with Ethiopian opposition groups seeking to depose the Derg. The EPLF’s closest ally was the TPLF, with which it coordinated its attacks on the Derg’s military garrisons. Following the withdrawal of Soviet military and economic assistance in 1989, the two fronts intensified their campaigns against the Derg regime. In the spring of 1991, the Ethiopian People’s Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF), an umbrella group of organizations, managed to topple the Derg regime. During the last days of its struggle, the EPRDF had agreed that it would not oppose a referendum on independence for Eritrea, for which Eritreans voted almost unanimously in 1993.
Eritrea’s liberation and vote for independence generated great euphoria. The EPLF soon set about preparing the country to govern its own affairs. In February 1994, the EPLF dissolved itself and reformed as the People’s Front for Democracy and Justice, which constituted the only legal political movement during the first decade of independence. In April of the same year, the Constitutional Commission of Eritrea (CCE) was established to orchestrate democratization. It took more than three years to draft the Eritrean constitution, which commits the country to political pluralism but does not specifically call for multiparty democracy. The constitution remains unimplemented despite its ratification in May 1997.

Initially, the relationship between Eritrea and Ethiopia, at least at the leadership level, was amicable. There was even some discussion of eventually creating a confederation of the two states. However, in 1998, a border war erupted, the details of which are discussed later. Shortly after the cessation of hostilities between the two countries in 2000, troubles emerged within the PFDJ itself. This was due in part to the slow pace of political liberalization. The ruling party, the EPLF, deeply split when, in May 2001, fifteen leading members of the PFDJ’s seventy-five-member Central Council published an open letter denouncing the autocratic rule of President Issayas Afwerki. This group, popularly referred to as “G-15,” accused Issayas of violating the PFDJ constitution and went on to call for the full implementation of the constitution with multiparty elections. In September of that year, Issayas arrested eleven reformers over a two-day period.

The PFDJ continues to face opposition from groups such as the Eritrean Islamic Jihad Movement and the Eritrean Islamic Salvation, which it accuses of ethnically cleansing Eritrea of its Muslim population. The military wing of the Eritrean National Alliance, an umbrella organization made up of eleven organizations that was formed in Khartoum in 2003 and has a significant presence in Addis Ababa, also poses a threat. The National Alliance claims to train troops inside Eritrea and pledges soon to begin military operations inside the country. Another opposition group is the Eritrean People’s Liberation Front–Democratic Party, which was established by former members of the PFDJ in exile. The leadership of the PFDJ is under serious threat from these movements, but it remains fearful that Ethiopia will work through them to destabilize Eritrea and even topple the regime of Issayas Afwerki. Consequently, the mood in the country will continue to be precarious for the foreseeable future.

Sudan

Throughout its independent history, Sudan has been characterized by multiple levels of conflict: tensions between the mostly Arab and Islamic northern part of the country and the non-Arab and non-Muslim southern part of the country, between secular nationalists and religious nationalists, and between various strands of the Muslim community over the kind of Islamic society Sudan should be.

Modern-day Sudan can trace its history back almost 200 years. The state was constructed during the expansion of the Ottoman Empire, which was centered in Turkey. The Turks gained control of present-day Egypt at the turn of the nineteenth century and moved south from their stronghold in Cairo. When the Ottoman Empire collapsed in the late 1880s, the British government moved into Egypt, coveting the newly opened Suez Canal. Seizing control of Egypt and the canal thus enabled Britain to control the sea route from the Mediterranean to the Red Sea.

The British became involved in Sudan on the pretext of stopping the slave trade there. The British were ousted from Sudan by the Mahdists for a decade (1888–1898). When they returned, they chose to rule Sudan through Egyptian administrators in what came to be known as “condominium rule.” When Egypt gained its independence in 1922, Britain, wanting to control the strategically important Nile River Valley, became more involved in Sudan.

Sudan has a population of about 36 million people comprising more than 140 different ethnolinguistic groups. Some estimates suggest that at least 400 different languages are spoken in Sudan. Black Africans make up more than 52 percent of the country’s population and include the Azande, Dinka, Nuer, and Shiluk peoples. Arabized Sudanese account for almost 40 percent of the total population. While African Sudanese comprise the majority of the population, they are mostly concentrated in the southern fifth of the country. By far the majority of the population adheres to some form of Islam. Most of the southern Sudanese adhere to either traditional beliefs or some form of Christianity. Arabic is the official language. While spoken by about 51 percent of the population as a first language, it is used as a second language by many more people. English is also widely spoken. The Sudanese population is extremely diverse not only in its ethnic characteristics but also in its religion and way of life.

Historically, the social elite were Sudanese Arabs who could claim some connection to the great families of Arabia, with presumed ties to
the prophet Muhammad. While the British allowed these northern Islamic elites to flourish, after 1922 they sought to keep Islam from spreading south, where they envisioned the development of a local administration under the control of southern bureaucrats. In 1930, they introduced what they termed the “Southern Policy,” aimed at erecting and enforcing barriers to penetration of the south by northerners and at stopping the spread of not only Islam but also trade. In place for twenty years, the policy did little to move the south forward in terms of development or self-rule. In retrospect, it perpetuated the inequality and had devastating consequences for the south when it was incorporated into an independent Sudan. When nationalist politics began to accelerate in the 1950s, there was also no attempt to develop a sense of Sudanese national consciousness in the south. After the unification of the north and the south in 1947, the move toward independence occurred rapidly, despite the fact that the nationalist movement was rather disorganized, with most groups agreeing only that the British should leave. There was no clear vision about what the future of Sudan should be.

The main beneficiaries of the British exit strategy for Sudan were the northern sectarian leaders who sought to protect their own class and group interests. The Mahdist and the Khatmiyya sect had built vast business and agricultural empires during the colonial period. There were some secular nationalists in the north, but they did not seriously challenge the power of the religious groups. They generally saw the move to independence only in terms of what came to be known as “Sudanization”—the process of replacing colonial administrators with nationals. As independence approached, gross inequalities between the north and the south remained, and political developments were too fast-paced for southerners to organize and become effectively involved.

Northern Islamic Arabs had a vision of Sudan that was driven by their religious convictions more than anything else and did not attend to the need to allay the fears of many southerners. Many southerners came to feel that a benevolent, if negligent, British colonial rule was being replaced by a tyrannical Arab and Muslim postcolonial government bent on Islamicizing the entire country. Consequently, they felt they had to find an exit strategy for their group or to engage in preemptive attacks against the northerners. While Muslim politicians publicly claimed their respect for the equality of all Sudanese citizens, for many southerners this commitment was not credible. Some explained their mistrust of the northerners as stemming from memories of the slave trade. Such mistrust led to a mutiny by southern Sudanese soldiers at the Torit Barracks in Equatoria province in August 1955. Widespread killing of northerners in the south followed. The new interim government of the National Unionist Party retaliated, but Sudan nonetheless achieved independence on January 1, 1956. Independence was achieved in Sudan at the same time that southerners were mobilizing for civil war, a conflict that has continued to the present with only an eleven-year respite between 1972 and 1983.

A military coup in 1958 brought civilian rule to an abrupt end. This military regime was itself deposed in 1964 by a popular uprising known as the “October Revolution.” The newly elected government of Muhammad Ahmed Mahjoub was ousted in 1969 by a military coup headed by Ga’afar al-Numeiri, with the support of the Sudan Communist Party. In 1971, there was a failed coup attempt against Numeiri that was thought to be a communist plot. Subsequently the coup plotters were executed and Numeiri moved away from his superpower patron, the Soviets, and toward the United States. Numeiri also moved quickly to find a political solution with southern rebels, which was reached with the signing in 1972 of the Addis Ababa Agreement. Numeiri attempted to build trust among the southerners, granting them a measure of regional autonomy. However, in 1977 hard-line Islamists began to demand a revision of the Addis Ababa Agreement and the implementation of *sharia* (Islamic law). By the early 1980s, Numeiri had begun to capitulate to the demands of the fundamentalists, distancing himself from the south. On June 5, 1983, he issued “Republican Order Number One,” abrogating the Addis Ababa Agreement and returning regional powers to the central government; he later declared Sudan an Islamic state. These acts triggered Sudan’s second civil war and the mobilization of southerners by the Sudan People’s Liberation Army (SPLA). In contrast to the south’s first resistance movement, the SPLA did not prioritize regional autonomy, calling instead for Sudan to be transformed into a multi-racial, multi-religious, and multi-ethnic democratic state.

Despite having capitulated to the fundamentalists, Numeiri, his regime, and his military were widely viewed by the population at large as weak and too closely tied to the United States. The regime was overthrown in a popular uprising supported by the military in the spring of 1985. National elections followed, and Sadiq al-Mahdi came to head up a coalition civilian government. This regime, however, lasted only four years; it was deposed by General Omar Hassan Ahmad al-Bashir in a military coup d’état on June 30, 1989. Bashir immediately canceled all prior agreements and acted quickly to eliminate opponents and consolidate his
power. He revoked the constitution of 1985, abolished parliament, banned political parties and detained their leaders, closed all newspapers, and, most important, intensified the war in the south.  

The political opposition went underground, into the bush and into exile. The National Democratic Alliance (NDA), an umbrella organization that comprised a number of political opposition groups (including the SPLA) as well as armed and unarmed northern and southern organizations, professional associations, and trade unions, was founded in 1989. However, the NDA has yet to emerge as a coherent military force comparable to the SPLA. Southern leaders who had served in the Sudanese national military now command the SPLA. They have liberated significant areas of the south and have maintained ready access to arms and equipment to provide effective opposition to the Sudanese army and their brutal regional militia supporters. The war has been costly, claiming more than 2 million people, with many more dislocated and injured.

Somalia

The territory we normally associate with modern Somalia is to a large extent ethnically homogeneous and Muslim. Social conflicts have historically been largely parochial and based upon clan interests and clan identities.

In order to understand why the Republic of Somalia collapsed and why the region continues to be troubled, one must understand the processes of nation and state building in the area. The Somali nation is divided into six clan families (the Dir, the Hawiye, the Darood, the Isaaq, the Rahanwayn, and the Digal), which are organized around the principles of a lineage system. The Somali people see themselves as being the descendants of a single founding father, Samaale, and therefore related by blood and culture. The clan families are divided into sub-clans, sub-sub-clans, and so forth. Although the larger clan families are an important part of individual identity, until recently clan families were not significant political forces. Sometimes alliances that cut across clan lines were constructed for political purposes. Somalia’s descent into chaos can largely be attributed, however, to conflicts that ranged from the sub-sub-clan level up to the clan family level, depending on the circumstances and the elites involved.

What is now referred to as “the collapsed state of Somalia” or “the former Republic of Somalia” owes its origins to the period of European colonialism. In the late 1800s, the British had colonized the northern third of the territory and the Italians the remainder. On securing their separate independence, Somali elites in the northern and southern regions agreed to come together as the Republic of Somalia.

Approximately 8 million people inhabit the territory that until 1991 was known as Somalia. Eighty-five percent of the population is Somali; they speak the national language, Somali, and adhere to some form of Islam. The remainder of the population, classified as Bantu-speakers, is settled in the south along the Wabi Shebell River. There now exist two self-described independent Somali states (without international recognition): the Republic of Somaliland and Puntland. The remainder of the country remains a collapsed state attempting to reconsolidate itself.

During the colonial period, the British in the north and the Italians in the south layered their respective colonial administrations on top of the traditional forms of Somali social organization. In 1940, the British were driven out and replaced temporarily by the Italian Fascists, who were themselves driven out of the entire Horn region in 1941 and replaced by a British military administration. Subsequently, the former Italian Somaliland became a UN-mandated trust territory under Italian rule until the UN commission recommended independence.

Under UN trusteeship the south was prepared for independence, and party politics were allowed to emerge. In the north, political development was much less advanced. Whereas independence in the south, which came in late June 1960, followed a systematic timetable, the British decision to grant its Somali colony independence was almost a spur-of-the-moment decision. When the leaders of the two independent Somali states entered into negotiations on how to form a union of the two, northern elites were at a clear disadvantage. They had not had as much experience with Western-style governance or institution building as their counterparts in the south.

As a result of elite bargaining preceding the formation of the Republic of Somalia, the national assemblies of the north and south elected as president a member of a subclan of the Hawiye family. There was a systematic effort to ensure a balanced representation of all clan families in the government. For a time this limited ethnic tensions, although southerners came to resent the fact that both the president and the prime minister were from the north.

From the beginning, the challenges of state building were enormous. Even though the existence of a Somali nation was readily accepted, there
had previously been no unified Somali nation-state. Somalia developed a liberal multiparty democracy, but given traditional patterns of clan politics and the newfound significance of the national political system, this led to divisive party politics and the seeds of state collapse. In the first year of independence, northerners attempted a military coup.34

North-south tensions were strong from the start. Even though the capital of the new republic was in the south and most southerners were not proficient in English, English became the working language of government.35 Northerners tended to come to Mogadishu to take up positions in the national bureaucracy and to become involved in commerce. They became important players in national politics. The return of the Somali diaspora also posed a challenge. Somali irredentism occurred in Kenya and Ethiopia almost immediately after the formation of the Republic of Somalia. In 1964, the Somali army engaged in open conflict with Ethiopian forces in the Ogaden. The attempt to wrest the Ogaden from Ethiopia failed, however, because of the poor organization and weak capacity of the Somali force.

Democratic politics have tended to compound the problems of state and nation building. By March 1969, there were sixty-four political parties in Somalia, most based upon clan affiliations. In national elections that year, these parties competed for 123 seats in the National Assembly, resulting in chaos. The run-up to the election was characterized by fraud, intimidation, bribery, and violence. Six months after assuming office, President Abdirashid Ali Shermarke was assassinated. The military, under the leadership of General Mohammed Siad Barre, took political control.36 The main objective of the coup-makers was said to have been the elimination of corruption in the country. Shortly after taking power, Siad Barre created the Supreme Revolutionary Council (SRC) and announced a new objective, that of engaging in a socialist revolution. He abolished all political parties and charged students to deliver the message of the revolution to the countryside and to help in community development projects.

Despite his rhetoric, there is reason to question Siad Barre’s commitment to socialism. He seems to have used the “revolution” as a convenient instrument of rule. A key concern was the language problem: he declared Somali the national language and ordered that it be written down for the first time in history.37 This had the immediate effect of lessening a great deal of tension throughout the country. He also engaged in a national literacy campaign: by 1975 about half the country’s population could read and write in Somali. Prior to the revolution, only 5 percent of the population could read and write in any language.38 Ironically, however, rather than reducing ethnoregional perceptions of inequality and injustice, the language policy accentuated other forms of inequality that existed between classes and between urban and rural residents.

Even though he ran Somalia with an iron fist, Siad Barre publicly claimed to be committed to democracy. In 1976, the SRC was dissolved and replaced by the Socialist Revolutionary Party, leading to greater government repression. At the same time, Siad Barre seemed to have become obsessed with the idea of liberating the Ogaden and making it a part of Somalia. The Soviet Union, Somalia’s traditional superpower patron, tried to discourage him from doing this, but he would not be deterred. In the summer of 1977, when the Ethiopian state appeared on the verge of collapse, regular Somali troops entered the battle for the Ogaden in support of the Western Somali Liberation Front (WSLF).39 Siad Barre appears to have been encouraged by the decision of the United States to sever ties with Ethiopia and court Somalia.40 Over the next seven months, the Somalis came to control most of the Ogaden, with the exception of the towns.

The Ethiopians responded by securing military aid from the Soviet Union and some of their Eastern Bloc allies, including Cuba. By February 1978, the Somalis were in retreat. Ogadenis fled into Somalia in fear of Ethiopian reprisals, creating a serious strain on the Somali economy. In the end the Ogaden campaign failed, creating a widespread sense of shame and discontent among Somalis. Many Somalis came to blame Siad Barre, claiming that he was more interested in pursuing the acquisition of the Ogaden to bolster his standing among clan-based allies than in ensuring national interests.

Siad Barre came from the Darood clan family and the Mareehean clan. His mother was from the Ogaden subclan. Siad Barre was also closely associated with the family of his son-in-law, General Mohammed Siad Hersi “Morgan,” who came from the Doldolhante clan. Thus his alliance came to be known as “MOD”: Mareehean, Ogaden, Dolbalhante.41 As the revolution founders, Siad Barre became more and more paranoid and isolated. He came to see his most serious enemies as coming from among the Majeerteen clan family. He also feared the Hawiye and Isaaq clan families, which had become the most politically important groups during the postindependence period.

Following the defeat of Somali forces in the Ogaden, some Majeerteen officers criticized Siad Barre; he had them executed, heightening
tensions. Civil war broke out and a Majeerteen-based opposition movement called the Somali Salvation Democratic Front (SSDF), composed mostly of Majeerteen clan family members who were in opposition to Siad Barre, set up its headquarters in Ethiopia. The Somali National Movement (SNM) was created in April 1981. A year later an uneasy alliance was formed between the two groups with the sole purpose of overthrowing Siad Barre. Subsequently, other groups opposed to the Siad Barre regime emerged, including the Hawiye-based United Somali Congress (USC), which was instrumental in orchestrating his overthrow on January 27, 1991.

The collapse of the Siad Barre regime was followed by anarchy. Armed opposition groups attempted to gain control of the areas where they operated. In the central and northeastern parts of the country, the SSDF had great support and little competition and was able to achieve some stability and to deliver some social services to the inhabitants of those regions. In the northwest, the SNM gained control and declared an independent Republic of Somaliland. In a large area of the south, anarchy reigned. The violence mostly involved clans and subclans fighting against each other for the control of territory and resources. In the capital, Mogadishu, there emerged a power struggle within the USC. Ali Mahdi Mohamed, the leader of one faction of the USC, proclaimed himself interim president, but a USC rival, General Mohamed Farah Aideed, opposed him. Apart from this being a personality struggle, it was a struggle between two Hawiye subclans. Armed battles fueled by clan and subclan competition raged not only within Mogadishu but also throughout southern Somalia. In the process, the agriculturally based economy of the south collapsed, exacerbating the effects of drought and famine. Thousands of innocent Somalis faced the twin threats of war and starvation until the international community, led by the UN, decided to intervene for humanitarian reasons in the spring of 1992.

Within a year the humanitarian situation in Somalia had been brought under control, and UN peacekeepers were withdrawn. However, anarchy continued in many parts of the country.

Djibouti

Social conflict in independent Djibouti has largely been along ethnic lines. It is a small country with a population of about 500,000. There are two major ethnic groups: Somalis, who make up 60 percent of the population and are mainly from the Issa clan, and the Afar, who make up 35 percent of the population. Djibouti’s primary asset is its strategic location at the foot of the Bab el Mandeb Strait, a narrow part of the Red Sea close to the Middle East and the Persian Gulf. The country achieved its independence from France in 1977, but there is still a significant French presence in Djibouti. The French retain a garrison of 4,000 troops and naval and air facilities in the country. Historically, Djibouti had been an important outlet to the sea for Ethiopia, particularly during the period of Italian colonialism in Eritrea. However, after World War II and the establishment of Ethiopia’s claim to Eritrea, Ethiopia developed its own ports.

Since its independence, Djibouti has been ruled by the People’s Rally for Progress (PRP), composed mainly of Somalis. The main opposition party is the Afar-based Front for the Restoration of Unity and Democracy (FRUD). Despite its political dominance, the PRP sought to create an ethnically balanced government. However, at independence the PRP refused to allow the Afar to form their own party, and in 1981 Djibouti officially became a one-party state. Feeling increasingly marginalized as a group, the Afar began to organize for armed opposition to the government of Hassan Gouled. In 1991, FRUD, an umbrella organization of three Afar opposition groups, was born. Within months, FRUD controlled much of the northern part of Djibouti occupied by the Afar. Hassan Gouled appealed to France for military assistance in putting down the uprising. However, France, like most Western countries, was promoting an end to authoritarian and one-party rule in the early 1990s and refused to provide support. By refusing to come to Hassan Gouled’s aid, France was sending a signal that he should moderate his policies and open up the political system.

In addition to the pressures being placed on the PRP by France, and the intensifying struggle being waged by FRUD, Hassan Gouled agreed to constitutional reform in 1992 allowing for a multiparty system. The 1992 constitution allowed for four legal parties to compete in the elections later that year, but only two fielded candidates. In the most recent elections for the National Assembly, there were no limits on the number of parties allowed to compete. Under Djibouti’s electoral system, all of the seats in the country’s sixty-five constituencies go to the winning party. The opposition has long opposed the winner-take-all practice. Thus, although the Union for a Democratic Alternative won 37 percent of the vote, it received no parliamentary seats.
Managing Conflict: Internal and External Approaches

The conflicts that have occurred in the Horn since the 1960s have largely been internal. Border conflicts have been rare. In either case, the countries of the Horn have recently turned their attention to the creation of institutions that address both domestic and regional conflicts. Some efforts to deal with domestic conflicts have been “homegrown,” internal to the individual country; however, when conflicts have spread across borders, external actors have become more directly involved. Domestically, leaders might engage in policies of hegemonic control or alternatively attempt to create an enabling environment for transparent state-society relations. The objective of the second approach is to build trust among aggrieved groups. The specific characteristics of a conflict will determine the most effective approaches to conflict mediation. Strong states might for a time rely upon hegemonic control, but states that are somewhat weak or are led by leaders with the political will to build legitimacy based upon trust might more effectively engage in transparent policymaking with a commitment to equal citizenship rights.

There are four main, sometimes overlapping, trust-building options commonly available to national leaders. The first is to demonstrate respect for all groups and cultures in the public policies of the regime. The second is to establish formal and informal power-sharing arrangements between groups. The third is to conduct elections according to rules that ensure either power sharing or the minimal representation of all ethnic groups in national politics. And finally, the decision can be taken to establish a federal system or grant regional autonomy.46

The current government in Ethiopia has set up a system that is a quasi-power-sharing arrangement at the center, with all major ethnic/nationality groups represented in the national government. It has constructed what it claims is a democratic national political system based upon “ethnic federalism.” On assuming power in Sudan, the Bashir regime attempted hegemonic control but later engaged in a mix of regional autonomy and power sharing. The collapsed state of Somalia remains in search of its way. In the north, the Republic of Somaliland has declared its autonomy: Puniland is contested by factions for and against a reunification of the Republic of Somalia; and in the south, a transitional government is attempting to come up with a pact to gain international recognition as the reconstituted national government of Somalia. In Eritrea, the government promulgated a democratic constitution but continued to rule in an autocratic fashion. In Djibouti, the regime practices a form of “ethnic arithmetic” in filling top posts in the national government, but it maintains tight reigns on political power. The degree to which these countries have sought external assistance in solving their internal conflicts varies. Ethiopia and Djibouti have attempted to find internal solutions involving federalism and limited power sharing, respectively; in Eritrea, the government has attempted in a hegemonic manner to deal with its problems internally; and Sudan, and at least part of Somalia, have turned to external mediators to help them solve their internal problems.

How successful have conflict management efforts been in each situation? What conditions seem to have led to a selection of one approach as opposed to others in particular situations? This section of the chapter highlights Ethiopia, Sudan, and the former Somalia. The case of Ethiopia demonstrates how a country in the Horn has attempted to address internal sources of conflict through its own institution building. The cases of Sudan and Somalia focus on attempts by the subregional organization IGAD to manage an internal conflict: in the case of Sudan, IGAD was invited by the warring parties to mediate; in Somalia, IGAD sought to create an enabling environment for the reconstitution of a collapsed state. In Africa, in particular, subregional organizations such as IGAD have, over the past decade, come to assume a larger role in mediating internal conflicts that spill over borders or threaten to do so. This has been necessitated by the reluctance of the regional organization, the OAU, as well as the UN, to become directly involved in such situations.

Ethnic Federalism in Ethiopia

On assuming power in 1991, the transitional government of Ethiopia saw dealing with the grievances of various ethnic groups and their demands for self-determination as one of its primary challenges. The EPRDF-dominated government first sought to demonstrate its intent to address in an effective manner many of Ethiopia’s past problems, including the grievances of ethnic and religious groups who claimed to have been historically oppressed. Within a few weeks of taking power, it convened a national conference. Thirty-one political movements were represented, and a transitional charter was agreed to in July 1991. The transitional government that was finally agreed to had broad ethnic representation. The transitional period lasted two years, and the constitution of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia (FDRE) was put in place in 1994.47
The EPRDF sought to convey its intent to create a federal system of government with ethnic self-determination through the transitional and selected proclamations. Nationality groups were guaranteed the right to self-determination, including secession. States in the federal system would be based on ethnic identity. These provisions represented a dramatic departure from the policies of previous regimes. The new policy prompted protests among Ethiopian nationalists both at home and abroad who violently opposed what they saw as the "balkanization" of Ethiopia. Despite this, the regime demonstrated that it was determined to create an ethnically based federal state.

The stated purpose of the EPRDF was to reduce ethnic tensions and conflicts that had dominated modern Ethiopia, to directly address social and economic problems in such a way that all ethnic groups were treated as equals, to build a democratic society, and to construct effective, efficient, and uncorrupt systems of government. In order to do this, there would have to be a new social compact for the polity. Such a compact was not negotiated among elites representing the major groups in society. Rather it was imposed from the top. What at least initially evolved, then, was an asymmetrical form of federalism that was overly centralized and operated almost like a unitary, centralized state.

This happened in part because the EPRDF seems to have become alarmed about the possibility of ethnic war. In 1992, the government organized the first multiethnic elections in Ethiopia's history, for local and regional offices. In the days leading up to the elections in June, ethnic tensions ran high. Although ethnic parties had been included in the broad-based governing coalition, there were fears among groups such as the Oromo, the Amhara, and Somalis that these elections would not be free and fair and that the elections would simply provide a cover for the TPLF-dominated EPRDF. Days before the elections, major parties, including the Oromo Liberation Front, the Islamic Front for the Liberation of Oromia, and the All-Amhara People's Organization, announced that they would not participate in the process. At the same time, the armed wing of the OLF left the camps to which it had been confined in the lead-up to the elections and engaged in low-intensity warfare against the forces of the EPRDF. The election resulted in a landslide for the EPRDF and parties that it supported. In the following months, the government banned all political parties that attempted to pursue their objectives through force of arms, as well as the former Marxist ruling party, the WPE.

By the end of 1993, the governing coalition had narrowed considerably. Groups were removed from representation in the government for a variety of reasons. Consequently, the membership of the Transitional Council was reduced to the representatives of the EPRDF and ethnically based parties that it had created. Organized opposition inside the country was repressed and largely went underground. At this time, however, groups such as the OLF and Al-Itahad al-Islamia continued to pose threats to Ethiopia's stability.

The war with Eritrea (discussed below) had the unexpected consequence of creating disagreements within the TPLF and at the same time recasting Prime Minister Meles Zenawi as a champion of Ethiopian national unity. Twelve high-ranking officials in the TPLF's Central Committee attempted to move against Meles, charging that he had made a mistake by not completely destroying Eritrea's army before going to the peace table. The Ethiopian nation rallied behind the prime minister during the war, although many still disagree with Article 39 of the constitution, which declares the right of nationality groups to set up their own states and recognizes the right to self-determination. Following the signing of the Algiers Peace Accord in December 2000, Meles acted quickly through the Ethiopian practice of gimgema (reassessments) to purge the TPLF, other parties affiliated with the EPRDF, and even regional state governments. Publicly Meles declared that the war with Eritrea was unnecessary and should not be repeated.

Ethnic federalism in Ethiopia has not yet borne any measurable fruit. This is due to the limited human and material resources available for it, and to continuing poverty and underdevelopment. The war did much to set development plans back, costing Ethiopia more than U.S.$2.9 billion (50 percent of the annual national budget). The EPRDF has continued to be unable to establish legitimacy or win widespread trust among the people. What is important here, however, is that Ethiopia has attempted to deal with its ethnic and religious problems on its own; the government has remained intact and so has the state, and therefore outsiders have not been invited as mediators.

Conflict Mediation by Invitation in Sudan

In Sudan, the trend toward the establishment of an Islamic state began in the Numeiri years, was temporarily interrupted during the interlude of civilian rule between 1985 and 1989, and was revived by the military coup that brought General Omar Hassan Ahmad al-Bashir to power in 1989. Between 1989 and 1992, Bashir crushed both the National Democratic Alliance and civil society in general. Whereas prior to this Sudan
appeared well on the road to peace, the new government sought to impose sharia throughout the country. Bashir had the backing of the influential National Islamic Front. While talking peace, Bashir intensified the civil war. Opposition forces then stepped up their own military efforts and forged alliances against the regime.

With the support of Ethiopia, the Sudan People’s Liberation Army was able to fight off the Sudanese national army as well as the militias that supported it. When the Mengistu Haile Mariam regime fell in 1991, the SPLA was forced out of southern Ethiopia and back into southern Sudan. The government bombed the south indiscriminately from the air and supported militia on the ground. Some of the atrocities committed by the militia included rape, pillage, and human trafficking. Bolstered by new and more sophisticated weapons, the Bashir government was able to keep the SPLA and its various factions on the defensive throughout the mid-1990s.

Between 1995 and 1997, the SPLA won significant battles in the south. Along with international pressure, this forced the Bashir government to finally agree to third-party intervention in hopes of finding a solution to the civil war. The Intergovernmental Agency for Development put forth a declaration of principles as the basis for negotiations. It is significant that this subregional organization accepted a role in attempting to resolve what was essentially a domestic conflict. The conflict had, however, developed into a threat to regional security. Historically the African Union, as well as subregional organizations, had refrained from involvement in domestic disputes, citing the principle of state sovereignty. The IGAD principles called for the right to self-determination for all Sudanese people, including the right to secession, and the separation of religion and state. These principles initially resulted in a stalemate in the mediation process, and Sudan’s relations with most of its neighbors continued to deteriorate.

The UN has chosen not to become directly involved in what is seen as a domestic problem but supports the actions of the AU, which in turn supports IGAD’s initiative. Other mediators, including Eritrea, the United States, Libya-Egypt, Nigeria, and the European Union, have occasionally attempted to aid the settlement of the civil war. However, it is IGAD that has had the most success in moving the peace process along. This is in part because of the fallout from the Al-Qaida terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001. The IGAD process was in place when the United States and its allies declared war on international terrorism. The regime was thus anxious to demonstrate that it did not belong to the group of pariah states that were deemed to be harboring terrorists, has shown a willingness to cooperate with IGAD, which has intensified efforts to find a solution.

The negotiations began to bear fruit in September 2002, when the government and the SPLA agreed to what has come to be known as the Machakos Protocol. The protocol lays out the principles agreed to and a framework for a transitional process. It further elaborates on two contentious issues in the negotiations: the separation of religion and state and the right of self-determination for the peoples of southern Sudan. The protocol states that, given the fact that Sudan is a multiethnic, multiracial, and multireligious society, there should be freedom of religious expression and practice. The agreement also calls for a six-year period of autonomy for the south, leading up to a referendum on the region’s political future. Power sharing and revenue sharing are the most contentious issues.

A cease-fire has been agreed between the SPLA and the forces of the Sudanese military, but sporadic hostilities continue particularly in the contested areas of Abyei, the Southern Blue Nile, and the Nuba mountains. Moreover, the Sudanese government has accused both the SPLA and Eritrea of sponsoring a new armed uprising in the western province of Darfur, involving the Sudan Liberation Movement. It has also accused Eritrea of sponsoring the NDA’s armed incursions into Sudan and amassing Eritrean troops along its border. This situation and others mentioned above have resulted in a stalemate in the peace process.

Although the talks over the next several months were off and on, significant breakthrough was reached on September 25, 2003. At the time there was an agreement reached on what had proven to be the single toughest issue, security. Under the agreement, the SPLA/M will retain their forces in the south and the government has agreed to pull back some of its forces in the region. In addition, rebel forces will be gradually integrated into the national army. Significantly, the U.S. secretary of state, Colin Powell, made a trip to Kenya on October 21 to push for a final conclusion of the peace talks and the full implementation of the agreement. At a press conference, Powell declared that I expected that a full agreement on Sudan’s future would be in effect by the end of the year.

The IGAD Initiative in the Somali Crisis

Both the Sudanese peace process and the reconciliation conferences in Somalia highlight the viability of subregional mediation to address
intractable domestic conflicts where dialogue offers the only way out from stalemates. For confidence-building measures to work, all relevant actors must accept the role of the mediating organization. The experience of IGAD in southern Somalia illustrates the challenges of mediation. The declaration of “independence” by the Republic of Somaliland in May 1991 presents mediators with the delicate challenge of addressing governance issues in a territory that has not yet attained international recognition. One observer described this situation as an unwelcome embarrassment. On May 31, 2001, the Republic of Somaliland held a constitutional referendum, which turned out to be akin to a formal plebiscite for independence. At one point, the government in Hargeisa, the republic’s capital city, made it clear that recognition of its independence was a sine qua non for entering into serious negotiations about reconstituting a united Somalia. Resolving the Somali challenge has domestic, regional, and international implications, and although IGAD seeks to operate as the primary mediating organization, its success will depend greatly on the role of the countries in the region and the commitment of its international partners.

One of the most active external mediators in the Somalia crisis has been Djibouti. In 1985, Djibouti, under the leadership of President Hassan Gouled Aptidon, played a leading role in the establishment of IGAD (now IGAD). The first summit of this organization, in 1988, offered an opportunity to bring together the presidents of Ethiopia and Somalia and led to an agreement between them to cease supporting various opposition groups engaged in military operations against the governments of each country. In 1999, Gouled’s successor, Ismail Omar Guelleh, formally took the lead in organizing a new Somali reconciliation conference. Thus began the “Arta process,” which was the outcome of a Somali national peace conference held in Arta, Djibouti, from May 2 to August 26, 2000. Some 2,500 delegates, broadly representative of the Somali people (excluding the Republic of Somaliland and Puntland), agreed to a transitional charter or provisional constitution. A 225-member transitional assembly was elected and a transitional national government (TNG) was created. These developments were greeted with approval by the international community, although the process fell short of “making Somalia whole again.” At the same time, the TNG acquired substantial public support, thus undercutting the support for factional leaders despite the TNG’s inability to extend its authority beyond Mogadishu.

Despite its potential for a successful reconciliation, the Arta process failed to restore a functional government throughout Somalia. Events such as the terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center and Pentagon in the United States and the descent of Afghanistan into a war of global proportions placed Somalia on the margins of the international agenda. Given the growing regional concerns about the possibility that the Somali crisis could come to engulf the whole Horn region as well as its environs, IGAD, at its summit in Khartoum in 2002, called for a new peace conference to begin in March of that year. However, actual talks did not begin until September 2002.

Ethiopia and Djibouti backed different Somali factions, thus preventing them from taking a credible lead in a Somali peace process. Kenya, which held the presidency of IGAD at the time, took the lead in mediating the conflict. The Somali national reconciliation process was organized as a three-phase operation. In the first phase, 300 Somali political, military, traditional, and civil society notables were to take part, come to an agreement on the objectives of the peace process, identify the core issues, and establish the terms of a memorandum of agreement leading up to a cessation of hostilities. From the first phase, seventy-five delegates were supposed to be chosen to constitute working groups called Reconciliation Committees, which would be responsible for drawing up the technical details of a new constitution, a demobilization process, modalities for revenue sharing, and the resolution of land and property disputes. An overarching Technical Committee from the so-called IGAD Frontline States (Djibouti, Ethiopia, and Kenya) was tasked with management of the process.

The conference was finally convened on October 15, 2000, in the western Kenyan town of Eldoret. In short order, an agreement on the cessation of hostilities was agreed upon, and the broad outlines of the structures and principles of the Somali national reconciliation process were laid out. However, within weeks it was clear that chaos and confusion had taken over the process. Instead of 300 Somali delegates turning up at Eldoret, more than 1,000 arrived. In the end, it was agreed that some 800 delegates would take part. There was also confusion as to how seats would be allocated, whether on the basis of clan membership, faction membership, or some other criterion. To add to the confusion, Djibouti and Ethiopia, members of the Technical Committee, strategized against one another in favor of the “Somali” interests that they supported. What was finally agreed to was what has come to be known as the “4.5 formula,” which calls for clan representation and envisions 400 seats divided evenly between the four major clan groups, with minority groups collectively receiving half as many seats as a major clan.
Actual deliberations in Phase Two did not begin until December 3, 2002. Phase Two resulted in the adoption of an interim constitution or transitional federal charter in early September 2003. The agreement was meant to pave the way for a transitional parliament that would last for four years. Members of the parliament are to be selected by traditional leaders and politicians officially invited to the talks in Kenya by the IGAD Technical Committee. When this agreement was announced, however, the president of the transitional national government, Abdiqasim Salad Hassan, and a number of faction leaders rejected it, accusing Kenya and Ethiopia of derailing the peace process.

Nevertheless, the talks moved to the third and final phase in early fall 2003. This is the phase to determine the distribution of future parliamentary seats. Despite this, for all intents and purposes, the talks have reached a stalemate and various factions opposing the constitutions have either taken up arms or are poised to do so.

**Mediating a Border Dispute in the Post–Cold War Era: The Eritrea-Ethiopia War**

Over the past five decades, border disputes have not been a major problem for the countries of the Horn. The most important such incidents have been the Ogaden War, fought between Ethiopia and Somalia from 1977 to 1978, and the border dispute between Eritrea and Ethiopia, which raged from 1998 to 2000. These cases contrast sharply with the domestic conflicts just discussed in that they required external mediation on the part of either the OAU (now the AU) or the OAU and the United Nations. This section focuses on the latter dispute.

Hope for a bright future in the relations between Ethiopia and Eritrea was shattered when a border dispute broke out between the two countries in May 1998. The questions that demand answers are: why did the good relations between Ethiopia and Eritrea sour so quickly, and what efforts have been made to resolve the situation? The popular media have described the conflict as a senseless war over some barren territory. On the surface it was just that. As the leaders of Ethiopia and Eritrea both now acknowledge, the war did not have to happen, but it did.

Historically, when border disputes have occurred between member states, the OAU could only offer good offices. For the foreseeable future, subregional organizations like IGAD are likely to be able to meet the need for mediation in such conflicts but only when the conflicts can be reasonably contained. From its inception the border dispute between Ethiopia and Eritrea proved a poor candidate for successful independent mediation by either the OAU or IGAD: what was needed was UN action through a peacekeeping force and technical and legal support for the development of a lasting peace agreement that would involve national and subregional actors.

Having cooperated in ousting the regime of Ethiopia's Mengistu Haile Mariam in 1991, the leaders of the governments of Eritrea and Ethiopia appeared to be on the way to establishing good relations between a democratizing Ethiopia and a newly independent Eritrea. Early on there had been discussion of a possible confederation of the two countries. Initially there was a free flow of people and trade across the borders of the two countries, and Ethiopia seemed at least officially committed to helping Eritrea recover from the ravages of a thirty-year war of national liberation. However, beneath the surface there were festering problems, not the least of which were the different economic development strategies pursued by the leaders of the two countries.

Eritrea pursued a top-down development strategy in which the government had a great deal of control over the pace and pattern of economic development. After 1991, Ethiopia adopted a free-market approach to development. Over the years resentment grew as some Ethiopians perceived that Eritrea was flooding the Ethiopian market while making it very difficult for Ethiopians to do business in Eritrea. There were some claims that Eritrean traders were smuggling coffee across the border and exporting it. In 1997, Ethiopia began to complain about what it felt were exorbitant fees imposed by Eritrea for the use of its port at Assab. Economic tensions reached their apogee when in that same year Eritrea introduced its new currency, the nakfa, and pegged it on a one-to-one basis to the stable Ethiopian birr. At the same time, the Eritreans expected the Ethiopians to pay for the use of Assab in hard currency. In reaction, Ethiopia strongly refused to accept the nakfa as equivalent to the birr.

Eritrea claimed that the conflict could be traced to 1992, following the drawing of boundaries for Ethiopia's Tigrayans. The Tigray Regional Administration moved into the area known as Badme and began to impose fines on those Eritreans who they claimed were violating Tigray space. Several joint commissions were subsequently established at the subregional level to attempt to mediate territorial disputes, but negotiations were consistently difficult and inconclusive.

During the struggle against the Mengistu regime, the TPLF and the EPLF signed an agreement on border claims that would remain in effect
until the two governments came to a later agreement on the final disposition of their common border. Eventually, a joint committee of eight was created in 1997, and it was scheduled to meet on July 30 of that year in Badme. However, before the meeting took place, a map that had been commissioned by the Tigray administration surfaced. Although the Badme area had historically never been mapped out on the ground, the new map showed it to be clearly inside Ethiopian territory. The Tigray authorities in the region sought to establish effective control over the area. In November 1997, there was an urgent meeting of the Joint Border Commission at Asmara. The joint commission recognized that the risk of conflict arising from the tensions around Badme was very real.

As late as May 1998, the Tigray authorities continued to attempt to establish the border around Badme, increasing tensions. War was precipitated when a contingent of Eritrean troops patrolling the border with Tigray questioned the legitimacy of the Tigray administration. A gun battle ensued and four Eritrean soldiers were killed. Eritrea, apparently feeling that it had no recourse but to retaliate, struck back militarily. A month of fighting was followed by a lull that lasted until February 1999. Rather than using the respite to negotiate, the two sides prepared for an escalation of a war of unusual risk in Africa because both possessed sophisticated weaponry.64

The two sides increased their troop numbers and defense spending. It has been estimated that at the height of the fighting Ethiopia’s army expanded to 450,000 troops, while Eritrean forces grew to 350,000.65 In the course of two years of fighting, it is estimated that 70,000–100,000 lives were lost. Many more were either wounded or displaced. Weapons were readily bought on the open market from private arms traders. In addition, foreign technicians, pilots, and mercenaries, mainly from former Soviet Bloc countries, became involved in the war. The direct cost of the war has been estimated at U.S.$350 million, but indirect costs push that figure up to U.S.$2.9–3.1 billion.66 The human cost of the war includes up to 1 million people driven into exile or internally displaced from contested areas, as well as the forced deportation of Eritreans from Ethiopia and Ethiopians from Eritrea. The government of Eritrea estimated in 1999 that at least 67,000 Eritreans, many claiming Ethiopian citizenship, had been deported from Ethiopia. The Ethiopian government claimed that 39,000 Ethiopians in Eritrea had met the same fate.67

When the border dispute first emerged, Ethiopia and Eritrea both sought the aid of third parties in an effort to avert war. They approached the United States and Rwanda to serve as a mediation team. By early June the mediation team had developed recommendations that essentially called for the unilateral withdrawal of Eritrea from the disputed territory and the return of Badme to Ethiopian administration. Ethiopia immediately accepted the plan, but Eritrea balked. Eritrea wanted demarcation of the border zone by independent and unbiased agents according to colonial maps. Moreover, the Eritreans felt that they were being treated as aggressors in the recommendations.

The OAU, at its 1998 summit, was consumed with trying to work out a plan to get the two sides to at least begin talking. However, by the end of the year the OAU, even with broad international support, including sanctions from the UN, was unable to formulate a plan acceptable to both sides. The OAU proposed that a military monitoring group form a buffer along the border, but this failed because of Eritrea’s discomfort with military monitors and because the OAU plan called for a return of Badme to Ethiopia.

Toward the end of 1998, the United States again tried to broker a peace plan, but nothing significant materialized. By February 1999, all third-party mediation efforts had failed and full-scale war began. For two weeks Ethiopian forces unleashed a massive assault on Eritrean positions, by air and by land, sometimes in waves of troops. The situation dominated the 1999 OAU summit in Algiers. Algerian president Abdelaziz Bouteflika, then OAU president, sought to implement the OAU Framework Agreement. The agreement called for the two parties to reaffirm their commitment to the peaceful settlement of their dispute and to commit themselves to good faith negotiations. The Eritreans were required to redeploy their forces outside the territories they had occupied after May 6, 1998, and the Ethiopians were also not to occupy the contested terrain.

In May 2000, following intense diplomatic shuttling by special envoys from the UN Security Council, the OAU, and the United States, Eritrea accepted the OAU Framework Agreement. On June 18, 2000, the Algiers Agreement was provisionally agreed to by the warring parties. The parties also agreed to accept as binding the findings of an independent boundary commission. The war officially ended on December 12, 2000.

The UN Mission in Ethiopia and Eritrea (UNMEE)68 was established to separate the armies of the two sides along the border and sought to provide conditions conducive to a cartographic study of the disputed territory by the Eritrea-Ethiopia Boundary Commission (EEBC), an independent body. In April 2002, the EEBC issued its long-awaited report, but demarcation was to continue until November of the following year.
After initially accepting the EEBC report, Ethiopia expressed concern that Badme was said to be on the Eritrean side of the border and that errors had been made by the commission in both the western and central sectors of the disputed territory. The commission could change its decision only if both sides agreed, and Eritrea would not agree. Physical demarcation of the border was to begin in July 2003. However, as of October 2003 this had not occurred, and there were clear signs that there would be a further delay. Ethiopia continued to call upon the UN Security Council to intervene and change certain aspects of the decision. The Security Council, however, refused. Despite the fact that neither side in the dispute seems to want yet another war, this remains an ever-present possibility as long as Ethiopia does not have at least some of its demands met or otherwise accepts the mandate of the UN. A crucial point that must be made is that Ethiopia has both troops and a governmental administration in the disputed region and is not prepared to leave the area until changes are at least discussed.

Because of its scale and intensity, as well as its threat to regional security, the Eritrea-Ethiopia conflict dictated that the UN, along with the OAU, become directly involved as never before in sub-Saharan Africa. Such operations are extremely costly and require the support of the five permanent members of the UN Security Council and other wealthy countries. Neither the AU nor IGAD possesses the human, technical, or material capacity to sustain involvement in such difficult conflicts as represented in the Eritrea-Ethiopia border dispute. This is particularly the case for cross-border strife or domestic conflicts that threaten to become internationalized.

Conclusion

The Horn of Africa continues to be an area with significant conflicts. Although wars over state boundary disputes have been rare in the past five decades, when they have occurred, they have been extremely devastating to the countries involved. Much more common are internal disputes that have their roots in the colonial past (e.g., Djibouti, Sudan, and Somalia) or, as in the case of Ethiopia, the legacy of imperial rule. Modernization as well as the Cold War and its aftermath have served to exacerbate real and potential internal as well as border conflicts. Cultural pluralism represented by ethnicity, religion, and competing visions for the future on the part of those arrayed in tension will make the permanent resolution of such conflicts extremely difficult to achieve. In the short term, a better objective for domestic as well as regional and international actors is amelioration of whatever conflicts might emerge.

Given changes in the thinking of the international community regarding state sovereignty and the norms of external intervention, it will become increasingly likely that external actors from the regional and subregional community will be invited to (or unilaterally choose to) intercede as mediators or peacekeepers in either domestic or regional conflict situations. In fact, it seems reasonable to expect that IGAD will assume a much larger role in attempting to settle domestic disputes as well as interstate conflicts when a mutually hurting stalemate has been reached and the feuding parties invite or are persuaded to accept some outside mediation. When conflicts between states involve extremely high costs in terms of military expenditures, mass mobilization of armed combatants, and massive loss of life and social displacement, it is incumbent upon the AU and the UN, as they did recently in the Eritrea-Ethiopia border dispute, to become involved in a robust manner to achieve a cessation of hostilities and to find a political solution to the dispute. In rare cases, the international community might become involved, mostly for humanitarian reasons, and enter into a conflict situation even without direct invitation. There is a growing expectation in some circles of the international community today that in order to have their state sovereignty honored, the leaders of particular states must behave in a responsible manner and not threaten the well-being of their citizens to the point of committing crimes against humanity. Should they violate this code, international, regional, or subregional actors might feel that intervention is justified even without the invitation or consent of the state.

A final important point is that the international community should support the willingness of regional organizations like the AU and subregional organizations like IGAD to engage in peacekeeping and conflict mediation, but it must recognize that they will require resources from the international community. Steady but slow progress is being made in this direction, but much more needs to be done.

Notes

1. See Edmond J. Keller and Donald Rothchild, eds., *Africa and the New International Order: Rethinking State Sovereignty and Regional Security*


15. See Pateman, Eritrea, p. 5.

16. See UN Resolution 390(A), December 2, 1950.


18. In 1952, the Eritrean constitution was suspended; a year later all trade unions were banned, and four years later political parties were banned and the National Assembly was temporarily suspended. There were many other examples of the undermining of the federal arrangement, but the final and most important act was the de facto dissolution of the federation in 1960 when the assembly voted to change the name of the government from the “Eritrean Government” to the “Eritrean Administration.” By this act, the final annexation of Eritrea by Ethiopia in 1962 was merely a formality. See Edmond J. Keller, Revolutionary Ethiopia: From Empire to People’s Republic. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1988, p. 153.


30. ICG, God, Oil, and Country, pp. 48–68.

31. Ibid.

32. The Dir, Hawiye, Darood, and Isaq were historically pastoralists, and the Rahanwayn and Digal were sedentary agriculturalists.

33. See Laitin and Samataar, Somalia, pp. 31–32.

35. At the time, there was no written Somali language, hence the choice of English.
37. Ibid., pp. 82–84.
38. Ibid., pp. 84–85.
39. This was at the height of the Red Terror Campaign in the Ethiopian Revolution.
42. Ibid., pp. 21–24.