

Ethiopia: Prospects for Peace in Ogaden

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Executive Summary

Nearly a year after the talks facilitated by Kenya between the Ethiopian government and Ogaden National Liberation Front (ONLF) rebels stalled in October 2012, there are signs that the process may restart. Ostensibly, it was the ONLF's refusal to recognise the Ethiopian constitution that halted the initial dialogue, but that issue covers more fundamental divides, and these remain. Nevertheless there are solid reasons why this is a promising time for both parties, as well as neighbouring countries and other international partners, to try to renew meaningful talks. Two decades of deadly conflict – especially an intense five-year, relatively successful government counter-insurgency campaign – have exhausted the local Ethiopian-Somali population sufficiently to push the ONLF back to the table. Likewise, Addis Ababa's determination to accelerate economic growth, especially by exploiting the resources of its lowland peripheries, not least hydrocarbons, also argues for sustainable peace.

Ethiopia's commitment to the talks is important but undermined by a parallel strategy of piecemeal deals with disgruntled ONLF members. Concessions to the rebels risk alienating the "loyalist" stronghold that the federal government has built up within the majority clan – the Ogaadeni – in the Ogaden region, formally called the Somali National Regional State (SNRS). These tactics have proved useful in the counter-insurgency campaign, but a meaningful peace process will have to address the clan tensions and exacerbated intra-communal violence they have also deepened.

The drive for peace has suffered from the death in August 2012 of longstanding Prime Minister Meles Zenawi, who took a strong personal interest in resolving the Ogaden conflict and had the power to negotiate a deal. Though his successor, Hailemariam Desalegn, is a potential dove, he lacks the political strength to challenge the military-security hawks who led the counter-insurgency operations and are, at best, sceptical of the need for a deal with the weakened ONLF.

The ONLF's leadership lacks a unified vision of the talks' outcome, shifting along a spectrum of options, between reconciliation with the state in return for significant autonomy and outright secession. Though the Ethiopian constitution formally allows for secession, it is not a real option for the government and is complicated by pan-Somali irredentist dreams, driven by the Ogaadeni clan's trans-national reach. In its attempts to guard against the subversion of its cause by wider Somali interests, the ONLF has been forced to look for allies further afield, especially Eritrea, whose invaluable tactical support has embroiled an internal Ethiopian issue in wider regional rivalries. Unless its regional relations, especially with Eritrea but also with Somalia, improve, Addis Ababa will continue to view the Ogaden issue through a national security lens.

Kenya's involvement in the peace talks is based on security cooperation with Ethiopia, especially over Somali issues, as well as growing aspiration to increase bilateral economic ties. Trans-national clan links also pushed it to take on facilitation, led by a team of Kenyan Ogaadenis, including a government minister, two parliamentarians and an ex-civil servant. However, Nairobi was distracted by its March 2013 election, which partly contributed to loss of momentum in the process. The team has now had its mandate renewed by President Uhuru Kenyatta's government, but its task is complicated by the growing instability in Kenya's Somali counties and the Kenyan

military intervention (under the African Union Mission in Somalia, AMISOM) in neighbouring southern Somalia – two regions dominated by the Ogaadeni clan.

Balancing Ogaadeni interests in the three neighbouring states would make it more possible in the longer term to build sustainable regional peace. The international community – traditional donors and new economic actors interested in Ethiopia's resource-rich peripheries alike – should give their attention to renewed talks. Development aid and economic partnerships could significantly improve prospects for Ethiopian-Somali communities exhausted by years of counter-insurgency, marginalisation and political violence. But the peace talks can only transform sub-regional economic integration if they address fundamental governance issues – especially resolution of historical Ethiopian-Somali grievances.

A meaningful peace process requires unprecedented concessions from both sides and, potentially, enhancement of Kenya's role from facilitator to guarantor, as well as the channelling of technical support through the regional peace and security organisation, the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD). To improve the prospects of a new round of talks, the parties could consider a number of options:

- ❑ a greater role for Kenya's good offices in light of its shared security concerns with Ethiopia and the shared stakes of its Ogaadeni facilitators for regional peace. IGAD could also conceivably play a role, especially through its Conflict Early Warning and Response Mechanism's (CEWARN) Rapid Response Fund designed to prevent and mitigate pastoralism-related conflict;
- ❑ shared acknowledgement of the post-1991 devolved administration's achievements, especially the investments of the last five years, and of the potential for further reforms in the regional government (in partnership with the existing SNRS administration), particularly if a balance is maintained between ensuring security and pursuing much needed development; again, IGAD's technical programs on pastoralism could be supportive;
- ❑ a potential role for both traditional clan- and state-based justice in accounting for crimes committed during the conflict and achieving reconciliation within Ogaadeni sub-clans and with other Somali clans, perhaps including a commission of inquiry, led by neutral Ethiopian and Kenyan elders, into the 50-year legacy of conflict in the region;
- ❑ commitment to greater transparency of the trade and customs regime in SNRS, including creative concessions, eg, incentives to pay duty on cross-border Somali trade with Kenya and Somaliland; and
- ❑ recognition of the federal government's authority over oil and natural gas concessions, but also shared commitment to public scrutiny of exploration's impact on pastoral livelihoods and consultation on regional social and economic development if commercial exploitation starts.

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I. Introduction

The five-decade-old Ogaden conflict – along with the Eritrean question – has been a perennial concern to Ethiopia. Control of the region has been a national security priority for successive governments in Addis Ababa: to contain Somali irredentist designs to incorporate Somali Galbeed (Western Somalia) into Somali Weyn (Greater Somalia); to deny a base for Islamist revival and resistance that could spread across the country; and to safeguard hydrocarbon reserves that, because of high costs and insecurity, have not yet been exploited. For generations of marginalised Ethiopian-Somalis – often led by the particular interest of the numerically dominant Ogaadeni clan – the demand for self-rule, including management of pastoral and, increasingly, mineral resources, has driven resistance against the highland state and encouraged previous rebel fronts to seek union with the neighbouring Republic of Somalia.¹

The political changes in 1991 – especially introduction of a radically devolved federal structure granting unprecedented rights and recognition to Ethiopia's diverse "nations, nationalities and peoples" – offered a new compact between the central state and its peripheral societies. However, implementation was challenging, especially in the Somali region; national security concerns inevitably conflicted with the at times naïve expectations of self-rule, reigniting historical patterns of local armed resistance and militaristic response.

This report examines the conflict's roots, the emergence of the armed Ogaden National Liberation Front (ONLF) and the state's response, including its increasing empowerment of loyalist Ogaadeni regional authorities, as well as past attempts at a negotiated solution. It takes a hard look at the issues, including recent radical shifts in how Ethiopia's Somali National Regional State (SNRS) is governed and new regional developments, in particular creation of an Ogaadeni-led Jubaland state in southern Somalia.

It could not be an in-depth assessment of conditions on the ground. Since 2007, both the federal government and the SNRS have discouraged politically sensitive field research.² Crisis Group made unsuccessful requests to the federal government for access throughout 2012. While some background interviews were conducted in Addis Ababa, the extensive, politically sensitive interviews with political actors were undertaken in Djibouti, Somalia (including Somaliland), Kenya, Dubai and Abu Dhabi. Interviewees were Ogaadeni and non-Ogaadeni Ethiopian Somalis, Ethiopians of other ethnicities, Somalis, Kenyans, Djiboutians and regional experts. Most requested anonymity due to security concerns.

¹ During the 1970s and 1980s the political connections with Somalia were so strong that a veteran observer of Somali politics noted the Ogaadeni clan was "once the tail that wagged the [Republic of Somalia] dog". Ioan M. Lewis, "The Ogaden and the Fragility of Somali Segmentary Nationalism", *African Affairs*, vol. 88, no. 353 (1989), p. 577.

² Thus, in 2011, a research team investigating the relationship between education and conflict reduction for projects implemented in partnership with the regional government was given only partial access to three (non-contentious) SNRS zones, Afdheer, Shinile and parts of Jijiga. Simon Richards and Gezu Bekele, "Conflict in the Somali Region of Ethiopia: Can Education Promote Peace-Building?", Tufts University, Feinstein International Center, 2011, pp. 13-15.

II. Ogaden: Ethiopia's Most Contested Territory

The Ogaden is the historical name for much of the current SNRS. Created in 1994,³ it has an official population of 4.5 million,⁴ predominantly ethnic Somalis, Ethiopia's third largest nationality (around 6.2 per cent), and "roughly one-third of the widely dispersed Somali nation in the Horn".⁵ Kinship ties, expressed through patrilineal clans, still define Somali social and political organisation. The Ogaadani are a major clan of the Darod and about half the SNRS population; other relevant groups include the Issa, Garre, Jidwak, Isaaq, Bantu and Sheikhal, none of which is numerically dominant over the other. Clan composition varies in the nine SNRS zones (*woredas*) and their sub-districts.⁶

The present conflict's roots are in the Ethiopian empire's expansion during the second half of the nineteenth century. The traditional Ethiopian state saw the Ogaden – and much of its other lowland peripheries – as a buffer against European imperialism and a resource, originally for livestock. In the twentieth century, it came to view it additionally as "empty land" for large agricultural schemes and mineral extraction. Most highlanders also viewed the region as a wilderness, lacking civilisation and populated by enemies of their Christian religion; over time this cultural divide became embedded in structural inequalities.⁷

For much of the first half of the twentieth century, the state was manifested through isolated military installations from where imperial soldiers exacted tax levies on livestock and undertook punitive expeditions against the local population.⁸ In 1936, Italy

³ The 1994 constitution, Article 47, designates SNRS as Ethiopia's fifth regional state; officials normally refer to it as kilil 5 (region in Amharic), but many inhabitants commonly call it Ogaden. In this report, Ogaden and SNRS are used interchangeably for the state; Ogaadani refers to the region and its inhabitants, Ogaadani to members of the dominant clan.

⁴ "The 2007 Population and Housing Census of Ethiopia: National Statistical Summary Report", Office of Population Census Commission Central Statistical Agency, July 2010, p. 1. Other estimates claim a population of seven million or more.

⁵ John Markakis, *Ethiopia: The Last Two Frontiers* (Oxford, 2011), p. 55. This report draws extensively on Markakis's text since it is the most comprehensive study on relations between the centre and its periphery, the result of many years of field research since the 1970s, including work directly with the federal affairs ministry from 2005-2008.

⁶ SNRS is divided into nine zones (some recently renamed, but most maps use the old names): Liiban, Afdheer, Shinile (now Sitti), Jijiga (Faarfan), Degehabur (Jerer), Wardheer (Dolo), Korahe, Fik (Nogob), Gode (Shabelle). Liiban is a mixed district divided among Garre, Dagodia, Gurre, Gabre, Hawadle, Beyaisle (all Hawiye-related clans) and Rer-Hasan, a Darod-Marehan sub-sub-clan. In Afdheer, a significant majority is Ogaadani, but other clans include Gherire and Gurre. Sitti has mainly Issa and Gurgurra. Faarfan has mostly Jidwak-Absame (close to Ogaadani) but also Obo, Isaaq, Gadabursi and Ogaadani (each controlling a district). The majority in Jerer's nine districts is Ogaadani, except one largely Isaaq district. In Dolo, the majority is Ogaadani, with some Majerteen districts. Korahe and Nogob are largely Ogaadani, as is Shabelle, with the exceptions of Kalafo and West Imey districts, the latter with a sizeable Bantu presence, and Mustail and Fer Fer, inhabited by Sheikhal. This summary of clan presence is only a rough approximation to underline the diversity of clans in SNRS. See also Appendix C.

⁷ Tobias Hagmann and Benedikt Korf, "Agamben in the Ogaden: Violence and Sovereignty in the Ethiopian-Somali Frontier", *Political Geography*, vol. 31, no. 4 (2012), p. 2, 4; Markakis, *op. cit.*, p. 15; Tibete Eshete, "The Root Causes of Political Problems in the Ogaden, 1942-1960", *Northeast African Studies*, vol. 13, no. 1 (1991), p. 15.

⁸ Between 1899 and the early 1930s, thousands of Somalis died in low-intensity, anti-colonial resistance against the empire. Crisis Group interview, Ogaadani elder, Mogadishu, November 2012; see also Hagmann and Korf, *op. cit.*, p. 4.

invaded and incorporated Ethiopia with Eritrea and Italian Somalia; much of the Somali regions were integrated into its coastal Somali colony, creating a de facto “greater Somalia”. This temporary union had lasting effects on the political horizons of Ogadenis and the broader Somali nation.⁹

When the British defeated Italian colonial forces in 1941, they kept much of the Ethiopian empire under their military administration. At the end of World War II, Foreign Minister Ernest Bevin advocated a “Greater Somalia” – a single country incorporating all Somali-majority areas.¹⁰ This never materialised,¹¹ but prompted the explosion of pan-Somali sentiments. In 1948 the British returned the Ogaden to Ethiopia (with the exception of the “Haud”, an area in the north east returned in 1954); hopes for a Greater Somalia were dashed. Frustrated pan-Somali nationalism continued to feed local resistance in the Ogaden, fuelled by the Republic of Somalia’s diplomatic efforts to reunify “missing” Somali territories.¹² Mogadishu intensified support for separatist groups in neighbouring countries, including formation of the Western Somali Liberation Front (WSLF) and the Somali Abo Liberation Front (SALF) in Ethiopia;¹³ numerous students from Ogaden went to Somalia for military and political training.

The Derg, a revolutionary military junta that took power in Addis Ababa in 1974, faced insurgencies based in the peripheries, especially in Eritrea (annexed by Ethiopia in 1962) and the Ogaden.¹⁴ In 1977, taking advantage of Ethiopia’s internal turmoil, Somalia’s own revolutionary military regime, headed by Siad Barre, conquered most of the Ogaden, but then acted as an occupier, marginalising its Ethiopian-Somali rebel proxies.¹⁵ In 1978, Ethiopia – with heavy support from Cuban troops and Soviet military advisers – ousted Somalia’s army; Ogaadeni elites, humiliated by Mogadishu’s imperious attitude, retreated from the Greater Somalia idea and turned to the goal of an independent state.

⁹ Cedric Barnes, “The Somali Youth League, Ethiopian Somalis and the Greater Somalia Idea, c. 1946-48”, *Journal of Eastern African Studies*, vol. 1, no. 2 (2007), p. 278. The Italian Horn colonies were called “Africa Orientale Italiana” during the fascist regime. The region was officially named Ogaden under the colonial administration.

¹⁰ It would have included Ogaden, ex-Italian Somalia, French-controlled Djibouti and the British-administered Somali territories of northern Kenya and Somaliland.

¹¹ Mainly because of the strong opposition of the U.S., France and the Soviet Union.

¹² Barnes, op. cit., p. 278; Tibete Eshete, op. cit., p. 22. The Republic of Somalia comprised former Italian and British Somalilands. Although it joined only two Somali colonies, its national flag bore a five-pointed star, each point representing the five Somali inhabited regions. Markakis, op. cit., p. 144. The three missing Somali territories are Ogaden; the Northern Frontier District, incorporated into Kenya after independence in 1963; and French Somaliland (Djibouti), which remained under French control until 1977.

¹³ This included the “Shifta” insurgency in Kenya. The Northern Frontier District Commission, set up in 1962, found that over 85 per cent of Somali inhabitants wanted union with Somalia, while non-Somali inhabitants wished to remain in Kenya. The departing British administration opted for the status quo. Charles Hornsby, *Kenya: A History since Independence* (London, 2012), p. 78. The war between Somali guerrillas and Kenyan troops lasted until 1967. See Hannah Alice Whittaker, “The socioeconomic dynamics of the Shifta conflict in Kenya, c. 1963-8”, *Journal of African History*, no. 53 (2012); Crisis Group Africa Briefing N°85, *Kenyan Somali Islamist Radicalisation*, 25 January 2012, pp. 2-3.

¹⁴ Crisis Group Africa Report N°163, *Eritrea: The Siege State*, 21 September 2010, pp. 2-4.

¹⁵ Crisis Group interview, Ogaden elder, Hargeisa, December 2012. Markakis, op. cit., p. 212. By October, Somali fighters had captured all the Ogaden except the strategic towns of Harar and Direedawa. Around this time the Soviet Union shifted its support from Somalia to Ethiopia, where it hoped to establish an authentic Marxist-Leninist state. Gebre Tareke, “The Ethiopia-Somalia War of 1977 Revisited”, *International Journal of African Historical Studies*, vol. 33, no. 3 (200), pp. 635-667.

The war's aftermath was devastating:¹⁶ Addis Ababa conducted a "brutal yet effective" re-occupation; it turned the region "into a vast military zone"¹⁷ with ever greater oppression and moved highlanders into the Somali lowlands and Somali herders into regimented settlements. Meanwhile ethno-nationalist groups, the Eritrean People's Liberation Front (EPLF) and the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF), overthrew the military regime.¹⁸ Eritrea won independence in 1991. In Ethiopia, the TPLF, with its political base in Tigrayan nationalism, looked for allied ethnic-based fronts. It brought four together in the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF), which, with Meles Zenawi at its head, led the transitional government from 1991-1993.¹⁹

In Somalia, Siad Barre's regime imploded, the central and southern areas descending into civil war. Northern Somalia – former British Somaliland, whose majority population are Isaaq clan members – avoided lengthy conflict and proclaimed itself the Republic of Somaliland.²⁰

¹⁶ In the aftermath of the war, the Ogaden and north-western Somalia faced a huge refugee crisis, with Somalia hosting between 400,000-800,000 refugees, and a brain drain with emigration to Northern Europe, Saudi Arabia and the U.S. This elite diaspora subsequently became extremely important. Crisis Group interview, former Somali army general, Mogadishu, November 2012. See Lewis, *op. cit.*, pp. 573-579.

¹⁷ Hagmann and Korf, *op. cit.*, p. 5.

¹⁸ Initially aiming at establishing an independent Tigray state, the TPLF soon became a proponent of a united, but federal, Ethiopia. John Young, *Peasant Revolution in Ethiopia: The Tigray People's Liberation Front 1975-1991* (Cambridge, 1997).

¹⁹ Crisis Group Africa Briefing N°89, *Ethiopia after Meles*, 22 August 2012, pp. 3-4; Africa Report N°153, *Ethiopia: Ethnic Federalism and Its Discontents*, 4 September 2009, p. 6. The EPRDF included the TPLF, Oromo People's Democratic Organization (OPDO), Amhara National Democratic Movement (ANDM) and the Southern Ethiopian Peoples' Democratic Front (SEPDF). Meles Zenawi, the first president, took the prime minister post in 1995, after the new constitution made the presidency an honorary one, and retained it until his 2012 death.

²⁰ There have been tensions between Isaaqs and Ogaadenis since the 1930s, especially over the Haud region, a grazing area for different clans bordering British Somaliland. In the 1950s, the clans clashed over it, laying the ground for future enmity. When Somaliland proclaimed independence in 1991, Ogaadenis viewed it with scepticism and animosity, especially when it soon became an important EPRDF ally. Crisis Group interview, Hargeisa, December 2012.

III. The ONLF and Federal Ethiopia

A. *The ONLF and the EPRDF*

When the EPRDF entered the Ogaden, there was no overall control in the territory, and power had devolved to a mosaic of militias and political factions.²¹ Looking for regional allies, it chose the ONLF. The front, without a strong military wing, was just one of several contenders.²² Unlike other Ogadeni insurgent groups – principally the WSLF²³ – its founders had no immediate links with previous Somali governments. In the early 1990s, it had faced hostility both in Somalia and from other armed groups in the Ogaden; until 1991, it was primarily diaspora-based, with little reach beyond certain Ogaadani sub-clans.²⁴

However, once incorporated into the EPRDF-led transitional government, the ONLF gained greater local standing.²⁵ Its leadership returned to Ethiopia and worked to establish the new, Ogaadani-led, Somali Regional State.²⁶ The accommodation of “nations and nationalities” in post-Derg Ethiopia created high expectations, especially after Eritrea’s independence was formally recognised in 1993.²⁷ The Transitional Period Charter promised devolution to regions along ethnic lines and the right to self-determination, including secession.²⁸ While rudimentary federalism was established, and regional administrations were created, a national assembly drafted a new constitution. The ONLF, with the Eritrean precedent in mind, imagined it could similarly pursue an independent Ogadenia.

The initial implementation of federalism during the transitional period met expectations. A Somali regional state was created that incorporated all Somali-speaking areas of Ogaden, parts of East Hararghe and Bale. Ethiopian-Somalis could elect regional and local leaders and use the Somali language in school, courts and government institutions.²⁹ The 1994 constitution created “a federation of nine ethnic-based regional

²¹ Crisis Group interview, Ogadeni elder, Dubai, March 2013.

²² The ONLF was founded in 1984 by six people: Abdirahman Mahdi, chairman of the Western Somali Liberation Movement Youth Union; and former WSLF members Mohamed Ismail Omar, Sheikh Ibrahim Abdallah Mohamed, Abdi Ibrahim Ghehleh, Abdirahman Yusuf Magan and Abdulahi Muhammed Saadi. It was then led by Sheikh Ibrahim Abdallah Mohammed.

²³ Markakis, *op. cit.*, pp. 210-214.

²⁴ Crisis Group interview, Dubai, October 2012.

²⁵ Individuals involved in and who have written about the transition period differ in recollection and record of 1991-1993 events. Some say the ONLF had a strong ground presence, others that it was almost absent in the Ogaden at the Derg collapse. How it allied with the EPRDF is highly contested, but by the time the SNRS was created and elections held, it dominated the region. Crisis Group interviews, Dubai, October 2012, March 2013; Djibouti, November 2012; Mogadishu, November 2012; Nairobi, December 2012; Hargeisa, December 2012.

²⁶ In some cases, they went to Ethiopia for the first time.

²⁷ Eritreans held a self-determination referendum 23-25 April 1993. The turnout was 93.9 per cent, with a reported 99.83 per cent for independence. David Pool, *From Guerillas to Government: The Eritrean People's Liberation Front* (Oxford, 2001), p. 162.

²⁸ The empire and the Derg both created highly centralised models with no recognition for ethnic rights. Crisis Group Briefing, *Ethiopia after Meles*, *op. cit.*, p. 3. On the Transitional Period Charter, see Kjetil Tronvoll and Tobias Hagmann, “Introduction: Traditional Authorities and Multi-Party Elections in Ethiopia”, in Tronvoll and Hagmann (eds.), *Contested Power in Ethiopia: Traditional Authorities and Multi-Party Elections* (Leiden, 2012), pp. 13-19.

²⁹ Tobias Hagmann and Mohamud H. Khalif, “State and Politics in Ethiopia’s Somali Region since 1991”, *Bildhaan: An International Journal of Somali Studies*, vol. 6 (2006), p. 25.

states (*kilil*) that promised to recognise existing differences, allow their articulation at the central level and thereby limit ethnic discontent”; it also pledged far-reaching self-governance and acknowledged aspirations of “nationalities”, including the right to self-determination (Article 39).³⁰

Though highly controversial, Article 39 was taken at face value. “Some ethnic elites, including us [the ONLF], believed the TPLF was genuine about it”,³¹ but soon discovered their faith was misplaced.³² The TPLF “had won the war, [and] they were not ready to make real concessions”, despite initial reliance on non-EPRDF groups to govern during the transition.³³ Once the country was stabilised, co-opted ethnic elites were either too dependent on the centre to mount a challenge or, if recalcitrant, were replaced by more submissive local politicians.³⁴

The ONLF either misunderstood or underestimated the political reality.³⁵ By the time the constitution was passed, the SNRS was already on a collision course with the centre, which postponed local elections three times before they were finally held in January 1993.³⁶ The ONLF won a 70 per cent majority, and its candidate, Abdillahi Mohammed Sadi, became the first Somali regional president.³⁷ However, a combination of inexperienced émigré leadership, gross mismanagement of public funds and a lack of resources – still allocated from Addis Ababa – resulted in failure to deliver on the initial promise of devolution.³⁸

³⁰ See Crisis Group Briefing, *Ethiopia after Meles*, op. cit., p. 4; Report, *Ethnic Federalism*, op. cit., p. 6. Article 39, “The Right of Nations, Nationalities and Peoples”, of the Ethiopian constitution reads: “1. Every nation, nationality or people in Ethiopia shall have the unrestricted right to self-determination up to secession. 2. Every nation, nationality and people shall have the right to speak, write and develop its language and to promote its culture, help it grow and flourish, and preserve its historical heritage. 3. Every nation, nationality or people in Ethiopia shall have the unrestricted right to administer itself; and this shall include the right to establish government institutions within the territory it inhabits and the right to fair representation in the federal and state governments. 4. The right to self-determination up to secession of nation, nationality and peoples may be exercised: (a) where the demand for secession is approved by a two thirds (2/3rds) majority of the legislature of the nation, nationality or people concerned. (b) where the Federal Government within three years upon receipt of the decision of the legislature of the nation, nationality or people demanding secession, organises a referendum for the nation, nationality or people demanding secession. (c) where the demand for secession is supported by a simple majority vote in the referendum. (d) where the Federal Government transfers power to the parliament of the nation, nationality or people which has opted for secession. (e) where property is partitioned in accordance with the law”.

³¹ Crisis Group interview, Ogaadeni elder, Mogadishu, November 2012.

³² Crisis Group interview, former ONLF leader and former member of the first SNRS administration, Dubai, October 2012.

³³ Crisis Group interview, Ogaadeni elder, Mogadishu, November 2012. Tigrayans are around 6 per cent of Ethiopia’s population. Partner parties were: the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF) in Oromia; ONLF, WSLF and SALF in Ogaden; the Sidama Liberation Movement (SLM) in Sidama; the National Hadiya Democratic Organisation (NHDO) in the Southern Region; and the Afar Liberation Front (ALF) in Afar. All abandoned the EPRDF by the end of 1994. Markakis, op. cit., pp. 279-308.

³⁴ Crisis Group interview, Dubai, May 2013.

³⁵ Crisis Group interview, former ONLF central committee member, Nairobi, March 2013.

³⁶ Oromia had a similar problem between the TPLF and OLF, an EPRDF ally until 1992.

³⁷ The regional state was founded on 24 January 1993. The capital, originally Gode, was moved in February 1994 to Jijiga. The ONLF had to dispute other clans and WSLF’s Ogaadeni opposition, and frictions arose.

³⁸ Crisis Group interview, June 2013, Nairobi; Hagmann and Mohamud H. Khalif, op. cit., p. 29. “As a regional state we were allocated no budget; there were no health facilities, no schools, not even employees”. Crisis Group interview, former ONLF member and SNRS administrator, Dubai, 17 October 2012.

In August 1993, only seven months after his election, Addis Ababa sacked Sadi, setting “a pattern that has been followed faithfully ever since”, with the EPRDF government enacting top-down changes in SNRS leadership and perpetuating, according to an Ogaadeni elder, “a continuous political vacuum in an already fragile and contested political environment”.³⁹

B. *Article 39*

During 1993-1994, tension continued to mount between the ONLF and EPRDF.⁴⁰ In March 1994, the SNRS assembly set up a committee to negotiate with the federal government on self-determination, including a secession referendum.⁴¹ The TPLF promptly stated that ratification of the constitution and a transition had to precede any possible talk of self-determination. It dismissed the regional government, arrested the president and promoted creation of a new party, the Ethiopian Somali Democratic League (ESDL), an umbrella group of eleven non-Ogaadeni elites. In co-opting smaller clans against the ONLF’s remaining Ogaadeni support, the EPRDF used the tried and tested methods of Ethiopia’s rule of its Somali periphery.⁴² By the time the constitution took effect in December 1994, ONLF militias – developed since 1991 – and the army had clashed at Wardheer, and the EPRDF-ONLF relationship had broken down.

In the meantime, the ONLF split between a moderate “legal” accommodationist wing that was to cooperate with the ESDL,⁴³ and a radical “illegal” secessionist wing led by Sheikh Ibrahim that proclaimed armed resistance against the government.⁴⁴ Attempts to negotiate with the rebels failed.⁴⁵ Ironically, Article 39, the innovation of devolved power that was supposed to limit ethnic discontent, acted as a midwife to the ONLF’s armed insurgency.

C. *Amateur Insurgents*

The ONLF’s armed struggle from 1994 to the mid-2000s was easily contained by the government, which was far more concerned with the rise of Islamist groups in Somalia.⁴⁶ Al-Ittihaad al-Islami (AIAI), in particular, established bases near the border and supported a purely Ethiopia-focused branch responsible for attacks inside the country;⁴⁷ Addis Ababa responded with a full military intervention inside Somalia that

³⁹ Markakis, *op. cit.*, p. 310. Sadi was replaced by Hassan Jire Qalinle, an ex-Somali policeman and WSLF member who switched to the ONLF. This pattern has been interrupted only with the current SNRS president, who has lasted longer than any of his predecessors. Crisis Group interview, Hargeisa, December 2012.

⁴⁰ Crisis Group interview, Dubai, March 2013.

⁴¹ Markakis, *op. cit.*, p. 311.

⁴² Crisis Group interview, Addis Ababa, January 2013.

⁴³ Crisis Group interview, Dubai, March 2013. The ESDL received the most votes in the 1995 local elections, and its leader, Dr Abdi Majid, an Isaaq who was planning and foreign cooperation minister during the transition, became regional chairman. The ONLF’s legal wing was reduced to a fifth of the regional assembly seats.

⁴⁴ Crisis Group interview, former ONLF leader, Djibouti, November 2012.

⁴⁵ Crisis Group interviews, Dubai, March 2013.

⁴⁶ Islamists took advantage of the chaos to recruit youths and form their own militias.

⁴⁷ AIAI-related attacks occurred in Ethiopia in 1995 and 1996. “The Ethiopian army was fighting inside Somalia against AIAI and inside Ethiopia against the Islamic Union of the Ogaden Region, a branch of AIAI in Ogaden. In fact, the ONLF had no popular support and was limited to ambushes”. Crisis Group interview, Dubai, October 2012.

decimated AIAI's military capacity.⁴⁸ The second half of the 1990s saw little improvements in the SNRS, especially in development and services, but there was much politicking. In July 1998, the EPRDF helped engineer merger of the ONLF's legal wing with the ESDL into a preferred single dominant "partner", the Somali Peoples' Democratic Party (SPDP). It quickly descended into factionalism, and the regional administration collapsed.⁴⁹ The practice of sending Tigrayan advisers to supervise activities in the SNRS began in 1998, and though officially reversed in 2001, it remained common until 2010.⁵⁰

The ONLF in the field struggled to take advantage of the regional government's weaknesses; its structures were rudimentary, with only sporadic support from young Ogaadani pastoralists, who fought as a part-time activity.⁵¹ The organisation bordered on the amateur until 1998, when "Admiral" Mohamed Omar Osman replaced Sheikh Ibrahim as chairman and began to reform its internal structures.⁵² The political leadership, however, largely remained in the diaspora, in part to raise its international profile. It also tried to separate its struggle "from parallel rebellions with overlapping constituencies in the region", past and present, such as pan-Somalism and Somali Islamism.⁵³ But the accusation that the ONLF only represented the Ogaadani clan was the most difficult to refute, though the group claimed the Ogaden in its name referred only to the historical territory.⁵⁴ Refusal to drop the term alienated

⁴⁸ "On 9 August 1996, it launched the first of two raids on AIAI bases across the border in Somalia – Luuq and Buulo Haawa.... In January 1997, Ethiopian forces returned, apparently determined to finish the job. Many of the Islamists were killed.... Officially, Al-Ittihad Al-Islami, both in Ethiopia and in Somalia, had ceased to exist". Crisis Group Africa Report N°100, *Somalia's Islamists*, 12 December 2005, p. 9. Markakis, op. cit., p. 314.

⁴⁹ The SPDP was "wracked by in-fighting and political disputes". "Ethiopia: Somali regional state president removed", IRIN, 23 July 2003. The EPRDF capitalised on Ogaadenis' marginalisation of other elites under its brief administration, and on the front's indecision over whether it wanted autonomy, secession or unification with Somalia. Crisis Group interviews, Dubai, Hargeisa, Mogadishu, Djibouti, November 2012, March 2013. Tobias Hagmann, "Beyond Clannishness and Colonialism: Understanding Political Disorder in Ethiopia's Somali Region, 1991-2004", *Journal of Modern African Studies*, vol. 43, no. 4 (2005), p. 514, 519; Markakis, op. cit., p. 315.

⁵⁰ Hagmann and Mohamud H. Khalif, op. cit., p. 36.

⁵¹ Markakis, op. cit., p. 321. "What contact [the locals] had with the dispersed ONLF leadership abroad was tenuous", *ibid.*

⁵² Omar was the former head of the Somali navy and a former member of the central committee of Siad Barre's Somali Nationalist Party.

⁵³ Markakis, op. cit., p. 321. Many in the international community still consider the Ogaden "a disputed territory between Somalia and Ethiopia". ONLF Position Paper, 9 June 1995. Abdi M. Abdullahi, "The Ogaden National Liberation Front: The Dilemma of its Struggle in Ethiopia", *Review of African Political Economy*, vol. 34, no. 113 (2007), p. 113. Ethiopia tried to link the front to Islamist terrorist groups. The ONLF insisted it is a "national secular organisation", detached from any Islamist view of politics. "ONLF has no link to al-Qaeda, nor does it intend to establish any because it is not fighting a religious war". ONLF Position Paper, 29 April 2007. "Addis Ababa deliberately confused the ONLF with AIAI in order to include it in the wider context of the Islamist threat to Ethiopia". Markakis, op. cit., p. 321.

⁵⁴ "Clannish forms of organisation ... are not in the interest of Ogaden Somalis". ONLF document given to the European Union, 15 December 2007, reported in Markakis, op. cit., p. 321. "The name of the territory is present in international treaties, so it is an issue from the colonial era as per international laws". Crisis Group interview, Abdirahman Mahdi, ONLF head of foreign affairs, Nairobi, October 2012.

non-Ogaadeni clans and “made it practically impossible for the ONLF to shed its clan image”, a perception that Addis Ababa has continually exploited.⁵⁵

1998 also saw another federal government effort to reconcile with the ONLF, but the initiative failed because, according to the rebels, “the EPRDF killed the leader of our negotiating team” and destroyed any vestige of trust.⁵⁶

D. *Local Governance Issues*

By the end of the 1990s, the results of ethnic federalism were mixed. For some it was an abject failure. Above all, and especially in the SNRS, there was deep scepticism that federalism had reduced the central state’s grip, that the regions really had greater control of their natural resources or that, at least, it provided a way out of religious and communal conflicts.⁵⁷ Certainly, clan rivalry did not diminish; greater political representation at the centre depended on the ability to control local administrative units. Power was a zero-sum game in which “the control of administrative units depended on the EPRDF’s favour, so clan elites struggled to gain that political connection”.⁵⁸ The empowerment of certain clan elites created new minorities and grievances. Moreover, conflicts over land and water once solved by inter-clan agreements were increasingly adjudicated by regional and federal leaders, altering the balance of power and deepening grievances.⁵⁹

⁵⁵ Crisis Group interview, Abdirahman Mahdi, ONLF head of foreign affairs, Nairobi, October 2012. Non-Ogaadeni groups in the Ogaden never really engaged with the ONLF. Its very name, in their eyes, exemplified the hegemonic Ogaadeni nature of the party. Moreover, the ONLF had still failed to explain the final goal of the struggle, and its leaders were (and are) almost entirely Ogaadeni. Crisis Group interviews, Djibouti, November 2012; Hargeisa, December 2012; elders from Ogaden region, Mogadishu, Djibouti, Hargeisa, Addis Ababa, October 2012-March 2013.

⁵⁶ Crisis Group interview, Dubai, October 2012. The emissary allegedly killed was not named. Another Ogaadeni source named him as Dek Abdi Rasin. Crisis Group email correspondence, 22 July 2013.

⁵⁷ Crisis Group interview, Dubai, March 2013. Crisis Group Briefing, *Ethiopia after Meles*, op. cit., p. 6; Report, *Ethiopia: Ethnic Federalism*, op. cit., pp. 24-25.

⁵⁸ Crisis Group interview, Dubai, March 2013.

⁵⁹ Crisis Group Report, *Ethiopia: Ethnic Federalism*, op. cit., p. 24; interview, Dubai, October 2012.

IV. Externalisation of the Conflict

The early 2000s saw reversion to older patterns of externalisation of the conflict.

A. *The Eritrean Factor*

In 1998, economic disagreements and a border dispute turned into open war between Ethiopia and Eritrea. The 2000 internationally-mediated Algiers Agreement produced neither an agreed demarcation of the disputed border nor a sustainable peace.⁶⁰ Diplomatic relations remained frozen, and Asmara and Addis Ababa began to support each other's internal opponents, continuing the war by proxy.⁶¹ Eritrean actions were more immediate and direct: military and financial aid to the ONLF (among others) increasing its political relevance and fighting capacity. ONLF fighters, mostly recruited among Ogaadeni pastoralist youth, received training in Eritrea or camps in areas of Somalia controlled by opportunistic warlords.⁶²

Beginning in 2002, Eritrea-trained ONLF militias stepped up attacks in the five Ogaadeni-majority *woredas* of the regional state.⁶³ But the alliance with Eritrea reportedly provoked division within the group in 2006. The main faction, led by Admiral Omar, was based in London and Asmara and allied with Eritrea; the other, led by Dr Mohamed Sirad Dolal, operated mainly from Europe and disliked Eritrea's heavy patronage.⁶⁴

B. *The Somali Factor*

Faced with a resurgent ONLF, developments in Somalia added to Ethiopia's security concerns. In 2006, the Union of Islamic Courts (UIC) – a loose alliance of Islamist groups and businessmen – overcame a coalition of warlords sponsored by the U.S. and Ethiopia that controlled fiefs in southern and central Somalia. For the first time since 1991, south-central Somalia was notionally unified, raising the prospect of an

⁶⁰ Crisis Group Africa Report N°68, *Ethiopia and Eritrea, War or Peace?*, 24 September 2003.

⁶¹ Crisis Group Report, *Eritrea: Scenarios for Future Transition*, op. cit., p. 17.

⁶² The ONLF also used cross-border routes through south-central Somalia, Somaliland, Puntland and Djibouti to infiltrate its militias. In response, Addis Ababa and the SNRS government strengthened their intelligence links with Bosaso and Hargeisa, as well as their efforts to mobilise local clan militias opposed to the ONLF and Al-Ittihaad by giving them weapons and training. Traditional clan enmities like those between Issa (predominant in the region of Adigala in Ogaden and in Djibouti), Isaaq (predominant in the Haud and Somaliland) and Ogaadeni were drawn into the political conflict between the central government and insurgents. Crisis Group interviews, Ogaadeni, Issa, Isaaq elders and community leaders, Dubai, Hargeisa, Djibouti, Mogadishu, October-December 2012.

⁶³ The *woredas* are Degehabur, Fiq, Shabelle, Kebridehar and Wardheer. Crisis Group interview, Ogaadeni community leaders, Djibouti, November 2012; Hargeisa, December 2012. See Appendix B. ONLF militias are organised in four territorial divisions: the "Gorgon" north of Fiq, the "Dufan" south of Degehabur, the "Danab" between Warder and Chilabo and the "Hangan" in the south west. Crisis Group interview, ONLF military wing, Nairobi, November 2012.

⁶⁴ Crisis Group interview, Ogaden elders, Dubai, October 2012 and Nairobi, May 2013. Dolal and fifteen ONLF central committee members were dismissed. Dolal was active in Europe, responsible for the radio, Horiyo. After the split, he returned to Ogaden and was killed. There are different versions of his death: some accuse the regional administration and Ethiopian intelligence, others the admiral's ONLF faction or the WSLF. Crisis Group interviews, Mogadishu, Dubai, Hargeisa, Addis Ababa, Nairobi, October 2012-May 2013.

Islamic state on the ruins of the failed republic.⁶⁵ This was intolerable for Ethiopia, not least since it detected the presence of former AIAI members in the UIC leadership and also saw Eritrea's hand.⁶⁶ When the UIC threatened jihad against Ethiopia to re-conquer Ogaden, the combination of Eritrea, the UIC and the ONLF was too much to bear. The ensuing military intervention rapidly defeated the UIC and brought the UN-backed Transitional Federal Government (TFG) into Mogadishu.⁶⁷ Ethiopian troops stayed for two years, widely perceived as an occupation force and reigniting pan-Somali resentment.⁶⁸

C. Counter-Insurgency in Ogaden?

In the aftermath of the contested 2005 general elections,⁶⁹ with a steadily increasing insurgency in Ogaden and an enemy at the gate in Somalia, the EPRDF felt vulnerable and moved decisively against those it termed "anti-peace-elements".⁷⁰ Prime Minister Meles granted sweeping powers to the federal police and army and increased military and intelligence presence nationwide.⁷¹ A loose Alliance for Freedom and Democracy was created between the armed and banned ONLF and Oromo Liberation Front (OLF) and political opposition groups from the centre.⁷² This did not last long but was enough of a provocation and threat to Meles that he accused it of terrorism and

⁶⁵ Outlawed gangs were tamed, roads were cleared of bandits and self-appointed tax collectors, and a degree of security was brought to the country. Crisis Group analyst's observation in another capacity, Mogadishu, October-November 2006. Markakis, op. cit., p. 269.

⁶⁶ Crisis Group Africa Briefing N°74, *Somalia's Divided Islamists*, 18 May 2010, p. 5. Eritrea then supported both the UIC and the ONLF. According to different sources, the UIC also established training camps for ONLF fighters in southern Somalia, not far from Kismayo. Crisis Group interviews, former UIC members, Mogadishu, November 2012. See Crisis Group Briefing, *Eritrea: Scenarios for Future Transition*, op. cit., p. 18; Africa Briefing N°45, *Somalia: The Tough Part Is Ahead*, 26 January 2007, p. 5.

⁶⁷ The Ethiopian army entered Somalia on 24 December 2006, on a request from Somalia's TFG President Abdullahi Yusuf. The TFG was seen as Ethiopia's creation. Prime Minister Meles stated that his country reacted to a direct threat to its border. Eritrea blamed the U.S. and Ethiopia for "irresponsible" interference in Somali affairs. Crisis Group Report, *Eritrea: Scenarios for Future Transition*, op. cit., p. 17; "Eritrea suspends its membership in IGAD over Somalia", Reuters, 22 April 2007.

⁶⁸ Resentment towards the highlander invaders grew both in Somalia and Ogaden, where tens of thousands of new refugees of all clans arrived from Somalia. Crisis Group analyst's observation in another capacity, Mogadishu, Baidoa, Beletweine, Guriel, 2007-2009. Some Islamic leaders went into hiding, others to Eritrea; radical UIC factions, particularly Al-Shabaab, stayed to lead the resistance, with clan-based militias, against the Ethiopians. Crisis Group analyst's observations and interviews in another capacity, Mogadishu, 2007-2009. See also Crisis Group Briefing, *Somalia's Divided Islamists*, op. cit.

⁶⁹ By the 2005 elections, discontent, especially in urban areas, had mounted against the EPRDF; it won, but its confidence was dented. The opposition claimed "the EPRDF had cheated it of a national victory", and urban demonstrations turned violent. The government cracked down: 193 protesters were killed; leading opposition leaders, human rights activists and journalists sentenced to life in prison for treason were pardoned a year and half later. Crisis Group Briefing, *Ethiopia after Meles*, pp. 4-5; Report, *Ethiopia: Ethnic Federalism*, op. cit., pp. 8-10.

⁷⁰ "Meles touts 'great victory' in Somalia, concedes forex [foreign exchange] pressures", U.S. embassy Addis Ababa cable, 24 March 2009, as made public by WikiLeaks.

⁷¹ Hagmann and Korf, op. cit., p. 5. Crisis Group analyst's observations in another capacity, Godey, November 2006.

⁷² "Ethiopian oppositions form Alliance for Freedom and Democracy (AFD)", press statement, Alliance for Freedom and Democracy, 22 May 2006. The OLF is another ethnic front that participated in the transitional government but parted with the EPRDF after 1992 and was subsequently declared illegal.

attempting to overthrow the regime under Eritrean auspices.⁷³ Since then, any political dissent has been treated as an “issue of national interest” and “potential terrorism” under laws so broad and severe they have been questioned by Ethiopia’s most loyal Western allies.⁷⁴

The EPRDF leadership was quick to exploit Western anxiety over the threat of radical Islam in Somalia, a shared concern that helped rehabilitate its international reputation after the disputed 2005 elections. When the SNRS, seen as an especially vulnerable flank, became the rear base for the intervention in Somalia, it was transformed into a militarised zone. To the security forces, any ethnic Somali was suspect, irrespective of civilian status, especially in Ogaadeni areas.⁷⁵

Despite the tight security measures, the situation deteriorated further when, on 24 April 2007, an ONLF commando unit attacked a Chinese-run oil exploration site in Obole, killing 65 Ethiopians and nine Chinese workers.⁷⁶ This brought the ONLF unprecedented international publicity but hardened the counter-insurgency campaign. The army and police mounted a massive operation, closed off most areas south of Jijiga, halted transport, trade and communications and ordered out all foreign organisations and personnel.⁷⁷ Coinciding with a devastating drought, it was widely reported that access to food and water was denied to areas suspected of supporting the insurgents.⁷⁸ Addis Ababa also mounted large military and intelligence operations in neighbouring south-central Somalia, Somaliland, Puntland and Djibouti to eliminate insurgent cells and deny supplies and support from Eritrea and other Somali groups.⁷⁹

⁷³ Crisis Group analyst’s interviews in another capacity, Ethiopia, 2005-2012.

⁷⁴ “New Ethiopian press law draws criticism”, Reuters, 2 July 2008; “Ethiopian parliament adopts repressive new NGO law”, Amnesty International, 8 January 2009; “Ethiopia: Stop using anti-terror law to stifle peaceful dissent”, Human Rights Watch, 21 November 2011. Crisis Group Briefing, *Ethiopia after Meles*, op. cit., p. 5; interviews, Addis Ababa, December 2012.

⁷⁵ Crisis Group analyst’s interviews and observations in another capacity, Addis Ababa, May-November 2005; observations in another capacity, Ogaden, January-March 2007.

⁷⁶ Obole is in Degehabur district. “Ethiopia opens search for abducted Chinese workers”, *The New York Times*, 25 April 2007. Crisis Group analyst’s observations in another capacity, Addis Ababa, 25 April 2007; “ONLF statement on military operation against illegal oil facility in Ogaden”, press release, 24 April 2007. Plans to drill for fuel in the Ogaden date to 1945, when gas and oil concessions were granted in the Ogaden Basin. Exploration took place between the 1950s and 1980s, but due to technology constraints and costs, international companies held back. Concrete exploitation plans did not resume until the late 1990s, when the EPRDF government signed agreements with foreign investors. When international companies started exploratory drilling in the early 2000s, the ONLF claimed the federal government had no right to issue concessions, arguing resources belonged to local communities, and demanded companies withdraw. When the constitution was drafted, Ogaadenis and other ethnic minorities were focused mainly on Article 39 and self-determination; little attention was paid to Article 89 (Economic Objectives): “The State shall have the responsibility to control land and natural resources in the name of the people and utilise them for their common good and development”. Crisis Group interviews, Abdirahman Mahdi, ONLF head of foreign affairs, October 2012; and Ogaadeni community leader, Nairobi, May 2013.

⁷⁷ Markakis, op. cit., p. 322; Crisis Group analyst’s observations in another capacity, Addis Ababa, April-May 2007.

⁷⁸ A September 2007 UN report described the SNRS as severely undersupplied with food, water and medical facilities and lacking important infrastructure. The population was reported to suffer from landmines, blocked trade routes and escalating food prices, adding up to an overall perception of pervasive insecurity. “Report on the Findings from the UN Humanitarian Assessment Mission to the Somali Region”, September 2007.

⁷⁹ Crisis Group interviews, Dubai, March 2013, Mogadishu, Djibouti, November 2012, Hargeisa, December 2012 and December 2013; and Berbera, December 2012.

V. The “Clanisation” of Counter-Insurgency

At the same time, the SNRS presidency of Daud Mohammed (2007-2009), an Ogaadeni, marked the rise of a new generation of Ethiopian-Somali elites who took on a greater level of responsibilities for the region’s administration and security.⁸⁰ A more competent and empowered Somali-led administration brought benefits, but a “loyalist”, primarily Ogaadeni militia, the Special Police Force (*liyu*, “special” in Amharic), was created under the direct command of the head of the regional bureau of justice and security, Abdi Mohammed Omar (Abdi Iley).⁸¹ This was a classic counter-insurgency technique: empowering units from the same population as the insurgents, combined with a lower profile for external (highland-Ethiopian) political and military authorities.⁸²

In 2009, Abdi Iley became SNRS president, and *liyu* police replaced federal army and police in the front line against the ONLF. Since Abdi Iley and the majority of the *liyu* force were from the same Ogaadeni sub-clans as the ONLF rank and file, the conflict rapidly became intra-clan.⁸³ To an extent unprecedented in the history of the SNRS and its provincial forerunners, an ethnic (Ogaadeni) Somali became a key actor in the conflict’s military and economic dynamics.⁸⁴

This “clanisation” of the counter-insurgency altered the conflict’s traditional dynamics as one of Christian highlander-Ethiopians versus Muslim lowlander-Somalis. It also exacerbated violence within Ogaadeni communities, reducing support for the ONLF’s military activities that seemed only to engender greater misery and pushing the organisation toward a negotiated settlement on Addis Ababa’s terms. A peace deal would have been a major defeat for Eritrea, allowed the military to concentrate on operations and interests inside Somalia, enabled the government to restart oil and gas exploration and brought good publicity for the federal government on the eve of the 2010 elections.⁸⁵ In 2009, therefore, Meles requested a group of Ogaadeni and highlander elders to promote direct negotiations with the ONLF.⁸⁶ The attempt failed, but the process of recruiting Somali – mostly Ogaadeni – elites continued.

⁸⁰ Many were Ogaadeni and educated in Ethiopian universities after 1991.

⁸¹ Abdi Iley is an Ogaadeni-Mohammed Zubeyr-Rer Abdallah.

⁸² Tigrayan military intelligence officers were mostly shadow powers behind the local administration units until 2009. Crisis Group interview, Dubai, March 2013.

⁸³ Often the same sub-clans provided leaders and militants to the ONLF. Crisis Group interviews, Ogaadeni elder, Abu Dhabi, March 2013; Crisis Group interview, Dubai, March 2013.

⁸⁴ Former SNRS President Daud Mohamed, Abdi Iley and their entourages are possibly the first Ethiopian Somalis allowed by the EPRDF to acquire truly relevant personal and economical positions in the region. Crisis Group interview, Nairobi, June 2013. Abdi Iley had close links with senior federal government officials, notably the late Prime Minister Meles, his wife Azeb Mesfin (a member of the TPLF executive committee, a wealthy businesswoman and parliamentarian), Abay Tsehaye, Meles’s security adviser, and high-ranking military officers, including the south-eastern commander, General Abraha, and his four immediate military aids. All these are Tigrayans and TPLF members. Crisis Group interviews, Ogaden elders, Djibouti, November 2012, Mogadishu, November 2012, Hargeisa, December 2012.

⁸⁵ Crisis Group interviews, Dubai, March 2013; Nairobi, May 2013.

⁸⁶ After the killing of 1998, and until now, regular contacts happened between the TPLF and the ONLF. In 2009, Prime Minister Meles asked Professor Ephrem Isaac and Ibrahim Dolal to attempt to revive negotiations. “It was one year before the 2010 Ethiopian general elections, and Meles wanted to at least settle the problem of Ogaden. Meles was ready to sit with the ONLF, but he had some internal problems with other relevant members of the TPLF who opposed the talks for personal reasons, including Abay Tsehaye and leaders of the Amhara National Democratic Movement (ANDM)”. Crisis Group interview, Ibrahim Dolal, Dubai, October 2012.

In August 2010, a peace agreement was signed with the United Western Somali Liberation Front (UWSLF), a little-known radical Islamist organisation composed of ex-AIAI members and with significant links to Al-Shabaab, the al-Qaeda-linked Salafi-jihadi forces in Somalia.⁸⁷ It was followed in October by a similar agreement with an ONLF faction led by Germany-based Salahadin Maow.⁸⁸ Addis Ababa heralded these as ending the conflict, but they had limited impact in the SNRS.⁸⁹ ONLF capacity weakened due to unrelated factors, including Eritrea's reduced technical aid, Abdi Iley's co-option of Ogaadeni communities, ruthless *liyu* police operations and Ogaadenis' general fatigue with the conflict and concomitant decline in diaspora help.⁹⁰

⁸⁷ The agreement was signed two months after the May 2010 general elections, won by the EPRDF with a landslide 99.6 per cent. Crisis Group Briefing, *Ethiopia after Meles*, op. cit., p. 5. The UWSLF was led by Islamist cleric Sheikh Ibrahim Dheere. Its political and military strength has always been geographically limited, though its armed wing was feared due to its association with Al-Shabaab. When it entered negotiations, it most probably had no options but to sign or disappear, since it had lost all its territory after battles with ONLF militias in 2008-2009. It was also under attack by Al-Shabaab, with whom relations had deteriorated the year before. In exchange for signing and facilitating talks between Addis Ababa and Qatar on renewing their bilateral relations, its leaders obtained business concessions in the SNRS and Addis Ababa (in the NGO, educational, religious and security sectors), properties and economic revenues. "All in all, the UWSLF leadership got a nice retirement package and Addis Ababa a nice photo opportunity". Crisis Group interviews, Dubai, Addis Ababa, Nairobi, October 2012-May 2013.

⁸⁸ Maow is a longstanding ONLF central committee member who supported Dolal when the ONLF split over the alliance with Asmara. He gained some publicity in 2008, when he accused Admiral Omar of having a personal financial interest in the ONLF struggle. After Dolal was killed in 2009, Maow became the leader of the anti-Eritrea faction and continued peace negotiations that started before his predecessor's death. Crisis Group interview, Dubai, March 2013.

⁸⁹ Enmity between Maow and Abdi Iley surfaced, and the ONLF-Maow faction soon vanished from Ethiopia. Abdi Iley co-opted some members; others, including Maow, left the country. While there are probably no more than 100 UWSLF fighters, the ONLF-Maow faction had none. Crisis Group interview, Dubai, March 2013.

⁹⁰ Eritrea, facing its own internal economic and political problems, especially after initial UN sanctions in 2010, scaled down connections to most Somali insurgent factions. Crisis Group Report, *Eritrea: Scenarios for Future Transition*, op. cit., pp. 18-19. Ogaadeni elites in the diaspora and elders were divided by Abdi Iley's very presence.

VI. Peace Talks

Meles confidentially encouraged resumption of ONLF-government talks in 2011. The pro-ONLF diaspora supported peace talks, and war-weary Ogaadeni elders in the SNRS demanded the rebel leadership abroad make a genuine effort.⁹¹ Addis Ababa also sought the support of Kenyan Ogaadenis, including Defence Minister Mohammed Yusuf Haji – tantamount to inviting international third-party facilitation, something the ONLF had often requested due to the mistrust generated by the killing of its negotiator in 1998. Kenya’s semi-official role had its roots in well-established bilateral security cooperation since independence, especially over the threat of Somalia-based insecurity, as most recently seen in southern Somalia.⁹² Growing economic ties, including the joint LAPSETT venture, also made Nairobi a reliable partner for facilitating the peace talks.⁹³

A. Talks Stall

A first official round was agreed for August 2012, but Meles fell ill (his death was announced on 20 August). When it was held on 6-7 September in Nairobi, the atmosphere had drastically changed. Ethiopia was in a delicate transition. “The main concern for the Kenyan facilitators was the absence of any effective leadership in Ethiopia”.⁹⁴ A close Ethiopian observer noted that Addis Ababa’s delegates “had no power of negotiation, but rather the sole aim was to show that everything was business as usual”.⁹⁵ Nonetheless, the parties agreed “on the modalities of the negotiation process, the general principles that would be the basis for resolving the conflict and the initial agenda” and to resume the next month.⁹⁶

⁹¹ Crisis Group interviews, Dubai, October 2012; Nairobi, September-October 2012; Djibouti, November 2013.

⁹² See Charles Hornsby, *Kenya: A History since Independence* (London, 2012), p. 179; Siegbert Uhlig (ed.), *Encyclopedia Aethiopica*, vol. 3 (Wiesbaden, 2007), p. 388. “Memorandum of Understanding between the IGAD Joint Committee for the Grand Stabilization of South Central Somalia”, 9 December 2012; “Ethio-Kenya relation has grown to a matured and strategic partnership”, Ambassador Monica K Juma”, *Ethiopian Herald*, 6 July 2013.

⁹³ The Lamu Port and South Sudan Ethiopia Transport (LAPSSET) project, including construction of a container port at Lamu, 1,720km of railway lines and 1,300km of oil pipelines, is designed to handle oil exports from Kenya, Uganda, South Sudan and Ethiopia. It is expected to propel economic growth (up to 3 per cent of GDP) for all countries involved. Silvester Kasuku, “Lamu Port – South Sudan – Ethiopia Transport (LAPSSET) Corridor Project”, Corridor Project Coordination Secretariat, Kenyan prime minister’s office (no date). “Ethiopia to now open up for Kenyan investors”, *The East Africa*, 12 November 2012; “Enhance trade between Ethiopia and Kenya”, office of the Kenyan president of Kenya, press release, 21 November 2012.

⁹⁴ Crisis Group Briefing, *Ethiopia after Meles*, op. cit., and interview, close Kenyan observer of the talks, March 2013. Defence Minister Siraj Fegessa led the Ethiopian delegation; Abdirahman Mahdi, the foreign affairs head, led the ONLF team.

⁹⁵ Crisis Group interview, Ethiopian commentator, September 2012.

⁹⁶ “The general principles agreed upon that would be the basis for resolving the conflict [were]: formal negotiations between the Ethiopian government and [the ONLF] shall be held to resolve the conflict; the common goal... shall be the attainment of a just and lasting peace; such negotiations shall be comprehensive and address the substantive issues that are the root causes of the conflict; the ... negotiations must be in accordance with mutually acceptable principles and no preconditions shall be made to negate the[ir] inherent character and purpose; the substantive agenda... shall include issues that will facilitate the implementation of any peace agreement; both parties shall agree to specific measures of goodwill and confidence building in order to create a favourable climate for

As parties gathered for the second round, 15-17 October 2012, hopes were high that peace was close, but despite confirmation of Hailemariam Desalegn, the former deputy prime minister, as Meles's successor, his authority was not felt.⁹⁷ Moreover, the Ethiopian delegation – mainly senior military and intelligence officers – “didn't show a productive attitude” from the start.⁹⁸ The Kenyan facilitators, however, discussed the political agenda.⁹⁹ The constitutional question was an immediate stumbling block, recalling the disputes of the early 1990s.¹⁰⁰ Ethiopia demanded the ONLF's immediate, unreserved acceptance of the 1994 constitution;¹⁰¹ the ONLF pushed back on the right to self-determination, the principle of “no preconditions” for the talks and proposed “confidence-building measures” before proceeding.¹⁰² The round ended in acrimony and frustration such that a close Kenyan observer of the talks concluded: “The peace talks died with Meles”.¹⁰³

B. Outstanding Issues and New Developments

The 2012 peace talks were the most credible – and in some ways promising – attempt since 1994 to reconcile the ONLF and the EPRDF for three reasons: the desire of Meles to pacify the main faction of the ONLF; the unprecedented semi-official involvement

the negotiations”. ONLF press release, 8 September 2012. “We agreed to discuss first the political issues, then the human rights/humanitarian issues, then the security issues and finally the issues related to economic and natural resources. That, we thought, would have produced a peaceful settlement The only issues we did not discuss were the human rights abuses and the humanitarian situation, to avoid a negative outcome”. Crisis Group interview, Abdirahman Mahdi, ONLF foreign affairs head, Nairobi, 19 October 2012.

⁹⁷ Crisis Group interview, international observer to the talks, Nairobi, October 2012. “Ethiopia's acting PM to remain at helm until 2015”, Reuters, 22 August 2012. The talks received support from the UK and Swiss governments. Crisis Group interview, European diplomat, Nairobi, September 2012.

⁹⁸ “The Ethiopians were only military officers; they were not in a discussion mood and eventually kept on disagreeing among each other”. Crisis Group interview, close Kenyan observer of the talks, Nairobi, March 2013. The Ethiopians included the head of the south-eastern command, General Abraha Wolde Gabriel; intelligence chief Getachew Assefa; and military intelligence chief Brigadier General Gebre Dela. “My feeling was that the Ethiopian delegation was divided in three groups: the federal government was represented by [Defence Minister] Siraj, [the formal leader]; the Tigrayans led by Gebre, who remained silent...; and then Abraha, who was taking care of his own interests. Crisis Group interview, ONLF delegation member, Nairobi, October 2012.

⁹⁹ The Kenyans were led by then-Defence Minister Yusuf Haji and included two parliamentarians, Mohammed Abdi Afey and Yusuf Hassan, as well as Ali Qorane, Garissa county gubernatorial candidate and one additional member each from the national security, foreign affairs and defence ministries.

¹⁰⁰ An early problem was the presence of an SNRS representative in the Ethiopian team. According to the preliminary agreements, no one from the regional administration should have been present, and the ONLF asked him to leave, saying the negotiations were not intra-Somali but an internationally-mediated peace process. Ethiopia eventually went along. Crisis Group interviews, ONLF central committee member, Nairobi, October 2012; Abdirahman Mahdi and close Kenyan observer of the talks, October 2012.

¹⁰¹ Crisis Group interview, close Kenyan observer of the talks, Nairobi, October 2012.

¹⁰² Led by Abdirahman Mahdi, the ONLF team included Abdi Yassin, Ahmed Guraad, Sulub Abdi, Hassan Ali, Mahmoud Ugas and Ahmed Yassin. The ONLF said the constitution had never been approved by the Ethiopian people, and it could not trust a self-determination referendum if held under government control. It also raised Article 89 and federal control of resources. Crisis Group interview, Abdirahman Mahdi, Nairobi, October 2012.

¹⁰³ Crisis Group interview, close Kenyan observer of the talks, Nairobi, May 2013. “The peace talks between the ONLF and the Ethiopian government stall”, press release, ONLF, 17 October 2012; “The peace talks between the Ethiopian government and the ONLF faction failed”, press release, Ethiopian embassy in Kenya, 17 October 2012.

of an external party as facilitator (plus the discreet support of Western governments and conflict mediation NGOs); and the increasing convergence of Ethiopian and Kenyan security and economic interests.¹⁰⁴ Nevertheless, the causes of the impasse still pose serious obstacles for renewed talks.

1. Ethiopian hawks

The dominance of especially Tigrayan military and security officials in the Ethiopian delegation inhibited the political track, conflicting with the ONLF's desire to negotiate peace directly with the central government, at least without involvement of the current SNRS administration.¹⁰⁵ While the SNRS official initially included in the Ethiopian delegation was removed, SNRS President Abdi Iley is by all accounts a strong ally of the army, especially the south-eastern commander, General Abraha.¹⁰⁶ Combined with the absence of a strong prime minister, this diminishes prospects for a substantive deal. If reports of the talks' dynamics are accurate, the TPLF still thinks of itself as the vanguard party within the EPRDF, and still seeks to co-opt regional elites to whom economic and political concessions can be made only if they accept its continued dominance.¹⁰⁷ This approach also poses a challenge for any external facilitator, such as Kenya.¹⁰⁸

2. The ONLF as a viable partner for peace and development?

If the government's approach was found wanting, the ONLF too has yet to find a creative route around political obstacles, such as the constitutional issue. It needs to develop and articulate a constructive alternative to the current arrangements.¹⁰⁹ Moreover, if its objective is merely to replace the current SNRS leadership, new conflicts will quick-

¹⁰⁴ The EPRDF had never accepted any foreign hand in domestic disputes.

¹⁰⁵ Crisis Group interview, Addis Ababa, June 2013. Prime Minister Hailemariam is not a Tigrayan and comes from the Southern Peoples, Nations and Nationalities Region. He is a Pentecostal (not an Orthodox Christian), not a former fighter and has not achieved undisputed authority to take executive – especially national security – decisions. Divisions on major issues are not only evident within the EPRDF but also, and most importantly, within the TPLF. “This internal situation cannot be conducive for any real give-and-take political process”. Crisis Group interview, Addis Ababa, March 2013.

¹⁰⁶ Sources report, for example, that the prime minister had summoned Abdi Iley to dismiss him, but the army weighed in, and he returned to Jijiga even stronger politically. Crisis Group interviews, Dubai, October 2012; Djibouti, November 2012; Hargeisa, December 2012; Nairobi, February 2013; and Addis Ababa, May 2013.

¹⁰⁷ The bottom line of this approach is to attract some local ethnic elites into its sphere of influence, “buy off and convince [some local ethnic elites] to work for [the TPLF]”. Crisis Group interview, Addis Ababa, May 2013. Typically, after the October talks failed, Ethiopia invited a few ONLF members to Addis Ababa, presented them as a faction and signed a quick peace agreement in exchange for material benefits. The signatories are members of the SNRS president's sub-sub-clan (Ali Yusuf). There are reports the EPRDF is trying to attract other ONLF members to the capital to sign an agreement and further weaken the ONLF leadership. In the eyes of many Ogadenis, this is evidence of its insincere intentions. Crisis Group telephone interview, Ogaadeni elder, May 2013; Crisis Group interview, ONLF member, Nairobi, June 2013.

¹⁰⁸ According to a close Kenyan observer of the talks the Kenyan team, “tried to convince Ethiopian delegates to continue the talks. They refused and left, demonstrating their ambivalence towards [the Kenyan] presence and role”. Crisis Group interview, March 2013.

¹⁰⁹ Crisis Group interviews, Dubai, October 2012; Mogadishu and Djibouti, November 2012; Hargeisa, December 2012.

ly develop.¹¹⁰ Its hand is weak, due to diminished economic, political and military support from Asmara and the Ogaadeni diaspora.¹¹¹ Backing within the SNRS is even less certain, since it struggles to outline positive “development” alternatives. The ONLF will need to give substantial incentives if the current SNRS president and leadership are to make room for its largely émigré leadership. In the current context, peace in the region would reduce the utility to Addis Ababa of ONLF leaders, including the widely rumoured mutually beneficial arrangements of those leaders with its military establishment.

3. Accountability and transparency

Accountability is critical, especially given *liyu* police excesses and the retribution meted out by ONLF forces against those working with the SNRS. Renewed talks might consider mechanisms, using both Somali customary law and the Ethiopian judicial system, to address equally crimes committed during the counter-insurgency by those directly linked to the regional presidency and the federal political and military chains of command, and those committed or instigated by the ONLF leadership. This would help avoid future intra-clan resentments and revenge. At least, a non-partisan committee might investigate the five decades of conflict to learn lessons. To support justice and reconciliation, Kenya’s good offices might be extended to direct engagement with conflict-affected Ogaadeni communities on the ground, and conflict resolution and mitigation mechanisms established by IGAD might be used.¹¹² This would encourage greater trust and openness and the gradual reopening of civilian space in the SNRS needed to implement a viable peace.

4. Regional political dynamics and the Jubaland initiative

All sides, including interested international parties, need to consider how wider regional dynamics affect the relevance of the peace process to the greater (non-Ethiopian) Ogaadeni community in north-eastern Kenya and especially the Juba Valley of southern Somalia. This is particularly pertinent since the Jubaland initiative – after years of gestation and Kenya’s military intervention – has advanced with international support.¹¹³ Ethiopia had previously opposed creation of a regional – de facto independent – Somali Jubaland state, worried that the ONLF could use Ogaadeni clan links there to intervene in the Ogaden.¹¹⁴ After the May 2013 Jubaland Conference selected Sheikh

¹¹⁰ “A void agreement to get personal benefit and declare the fight over will immediately produce another fight. We fought all our lives against fake leaders; we will fight against them too”. Crisis Group interview, Nairobi, March 2013.

¹¹¹ See Crisis Group Report, *Eritrea: Scenarios for Future Transition*, op. cit.

¹¹² “IGAD’s role in stability and diplomacy in the Horn of Africa”, summary of an address by Mahboub Maalim, IGAD executive secretary, Chatham House, 9 May 2013.

¹¹³ Crisis Group interviews, Nairobi, May-June 2013. The “Jubaland initiative” was a Kenyan plan, originally conceived in 2009 and with cautious support from the then Transitional Federal Government, to train anti-Shabaab militias drawn from the Jubaland – including Ogaadeni – clans to help remove Shabaab from Kismayo and establish a regional administration in the Somalia provinces bordering Kenya. Nairobi’s unilateral intervention in October 2011 was subsequently rehatted under AMISOM, and IGAD undertook “stabilisation” assistance to the new Jubaland State of Somalia. Crisis Group Africa Report N°184, *The Kenyan Military Intervention in Somalia*, 15 February 2012; Crisis Group Blog, “Jubaland in Jeopardy: the Uneasy Path to State-building in Somalia”, www.crisisgroupblogs.org/africanpeacebuilding, 21 May 2013.

¹¹⁴ Crisis Group interview, Mogadishu, November 2012.

Ahmed Madobe – a former Islamist leader now allied to Addis Ababa and Nairobi – as Jubaland president, its fears appear assuaged, and it seems fully supportive of the process.¹¹⁵

Moreover, parties could consider observer status for IGAD in future negotiations, given the Ogaden conflict's cross-border and transnational dimensions and the investment member states, especially Ethiopia and Kenya, have made to enhance that organisation's conflict-resolution capacity.¹¹⁶

5. Regional economic dynamics

Ethiopia and Kenya's growing economic and security ties, including ambitious projects like LAPSETT, and their prospects as hydrocarbon exporters require peace in their respective Somali peripheries.¹¹⁷ There is also need for parallel investment and improvement in the regional Somali pastoral and trading economy, if projects such as LAPSETT and oil and gas production are not to become targets for political grievances of marginalised Somali communities.

Most recent investments in the SNRS seem designed to bypass non-Ethiopian, including other Ogaadeni, Somali third parties.¹¹⁸ Welcome as they are, especially for reliable local revenue, they exclude regional investors and the potential benefits of cross-border trade with the greater Ogaadeni and Somali markets.¹¹⁹ The choice of the Kenyan Ogaadeni facilitation recognises the constructive role external Somali stakeholders can play – a significant departure from previous attitudes. Indeed, the federal and regional governments have done much to encourage SNRS-specific diaspora investment, but extension of opportunities to other Somali investors might bind neighbouring economies to the peace process.

¹¹⁵ The current SNRS leaders appear to favour Jubaland's creation and have good relations with Ahmed Madobe, who has never been close to the ONLF.

¹¹⁶ See IGAD's Conflict Early Warning and Response Mechanism programs, www.cewarn.org.

¹¹⁷ The Ogaden Basin in SNRS has 21 blocks available for oil and gas exploration, with approximately 30 companies licensed to explore. One, South West Energy, estimated in April 2013 that the Jijiga Basins in SNRS (when combined with the Gambella basins in the far west of the country) contain approximately 1.56 to 2.9 billion barrels of viable oil. The Hilala and Calub natural gas fields contain approximately 4 trillion cubic feet of gas and 13.6 million barrels of associated liquids. Kenya's north east, including majority Somali-speaking counties, also attract oil exploration. "Ethiopia's South West Energy releases competent persons report – net oil potential – 1.56 billion barrels to 2.90 billion barrels", media release, 8 April 2013; "Ministry responds to PetroTrans's complaints on terminated gas project", *The Reporter* (Ethiopia), 1 June 2013; "Kenya: Company suspends Garissa oil search", *The Star*, 15 July 2013.

¹¹⁸ Addis Ababa and the SNRS have built a new huge abattoir, a regional airport, roads linking Jijiga to the highlands (not to neighbouring Somali ports), and an aggressive custom regime to protect these investments. Crisis Group interview, Ogaadeni elder, Nairobi, June 2013.

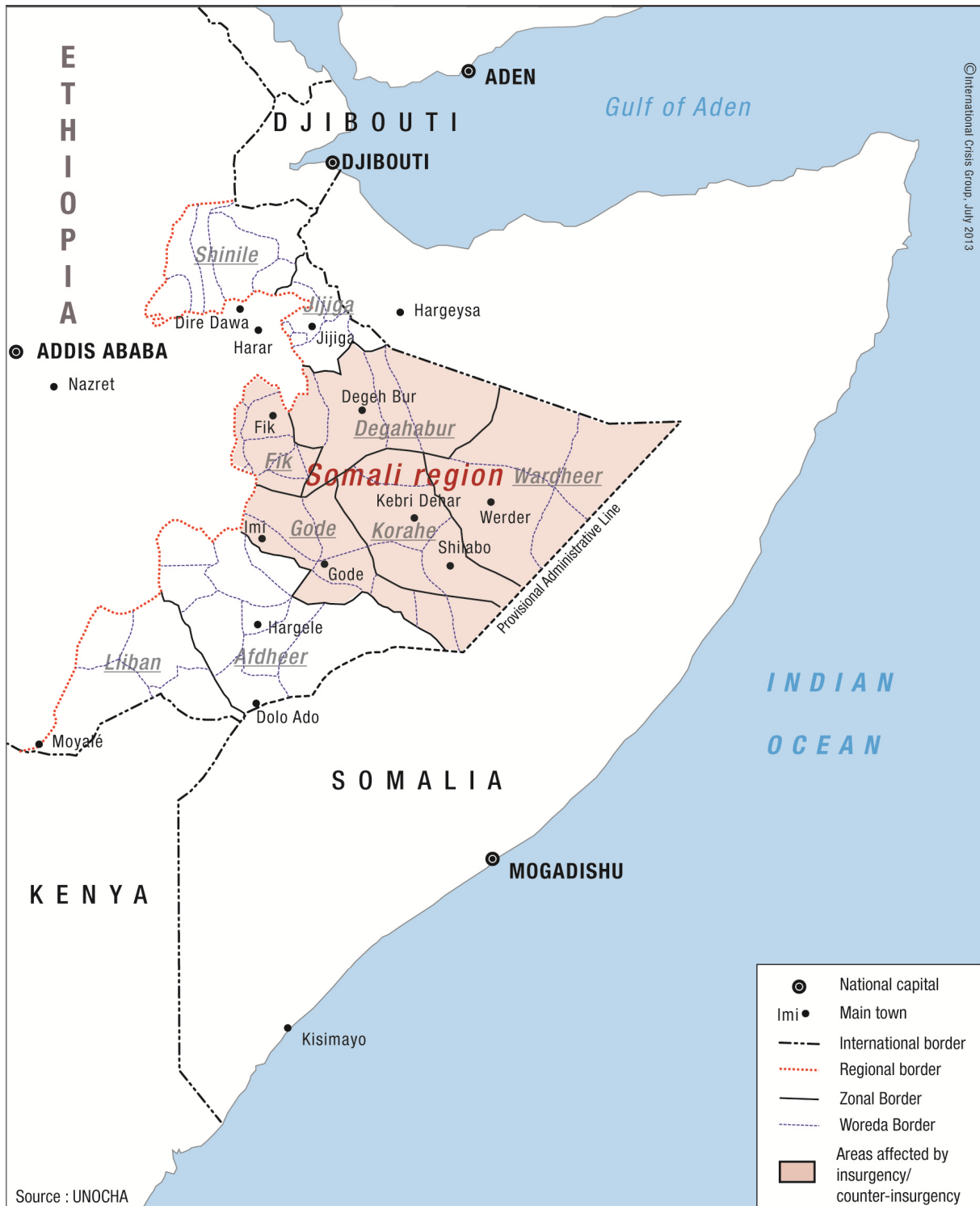
¹¹⁹ Crisis Group interviews, Nairobi, May 2013. See also Hussein A. Mahmoud, "Livestock Trade in the Kenyan, Somali and Ethiopian Borderlands"; Nisar Majid, "Livestock Trade in the Djibouti, Somali and Ethiopian Borderlands", Chatham House Briefing Papers, September 2010.

VII. Conclusion

Any renewed peace talks in the fast evolving regional landscape will face considerable challenges. Despite the gloom surrounding the October 2012 impasse, however, the opportunity to transcend decades of conflict – and especially the extreme internal Ogaadeni polarisation of the last five years – should not be missed. The continued suffering of civilians caught between warring parties and denied the security and development that Ethiopia's constitution promised in 1994 demands this. Moreover, a peace deal in the Ogaden could have effects beyond the SNRS, in Kenya and Somalia. The Horn of Africa's local, apparently contained conflicts, often in peripheries such as the Ogaden, need to be addressed if the benefits of regional economic integration and security cooperation are to be fully realised.

Nairobi/Brussels, 6 August 2013

Appendix A: Map of Somali National Regional State (SNRS), Ethiopia



Appendix B: Ogaadeni Clans

