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# **The Horn of Africa: Conflict, Demilitarization and Reconstruction**

by *Baffour Agyeman-Duah*

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## **INTRODUCTION**

Arguably, militarization in African states is primarily a post-colonial phenomenon and it crystallized as a consequence of the Cold War rivalry between the United States and the former Soviet Union, and the inordinate schemes developed by these powers to win friends and allies for their geopolitical strategies. Because militarization gained ascendancy among states with either disputed common borders or unsettled domestic politics, the phenomenon also could be said to have had demonstrable historic relationships with the European colonists' irresponsible demarcation of boundaries and management of political transitions to self-rule. Even Ethiopia which was never colonized is as much a product of the nineteenth-century European partition of Africa because of the historic intrigues and compromises on boundaries that divided and subjugated other ethnic groups. The growth and sustenance of military build-up could also be attributed to the insatiable desire of African ruling elites to maintain themselves in power through the threat or actual use of force. Regarding domestic politics, therefore, militarization is closely related to such factors as the problem of political legitimacy and the nature of relations between the state and civil society.

Nowhere in Africa were the manifestations of militarization more evident than in the subregion of the Horn, which is geographically delimited by the territories of Ethiopia, Somalia, and tiny Djibouti. These countries have expended much of their resources and engaged foreign powers in their efforts to militarize. In March 1953, the Ethiopian monarch, Haile Selassie, contracted a mutual defense agreement with the United States under which the latter assumed responsibility for developing and expanding the imperial armed forces. Gaining independence in 1962, the Somali ruling elite, supported by the Soviet Union, also embarked upon sustained efforts to expand and modernize its forces, ostensibly to pursue by force of arms a policy of "Greater Somalia"<sup>1</sup> which the elite had made a constitutional imperative. Djibouti, on the other hand, has been less prominent in the superpower rivalries in the subregion even though the Americans obtained access to air and naval facilities there. However, the French have maintained a strong military presence and acted as the main patron since independence in 1977.<sup>2</sup> The security of Djibouti has been problematic not only because of territorial threats from her immediate neighbors but more so the prevalence of highly contentious domestic politics and ethnic conflicts.<sup>3</sup>

One result of militarization in the Horn was the destructive war between Ethiopia and Somalia in 1977-78 over the disputed Ogaden region; but the ultimate outcome was the domestic conflagration that engulfed these two countries in subsequent years. Djibouti, on its part, has suffered security pressures with the upsurge of insurgency by the Front

pour le Restauration de l'Unité et la Démocratie (FRUD) in 1991 to overthrow the regime of President Hassan Gouled Aptidon. Unable or unwilling to address the debilitating economic and political contradictions, and reluctant to compromise to achieve political solutions, the ruling elites in Ethiopia and Somalia chose to confront rebellious factions militarily and plunged their countries into protracted strife. By the end of the eighties conditions in these countries had degenerated badly and, in the early 1990s, the embattled leaders fled their defunct states. Ethiopia has been reconstituted with the independence of Eritrea and the domestic strife appears muted; Somalia, however, remains bankrupt politically and Djibouti seems to be tottering on the brink of a civil war.

What domestic and external factors precipitated the destruction of the Ethiopian and Somali states and the unfolding catastrophe in Djibouti? What is the role of militarization in the labefaction of these states? Obviously, problems in the Horn are complex and cannot be explained unidimensionally; at play at any particular time are multiple forces. One important factor is the historic formation of states that included the subjugation of other groups in the region. This is the case with Ethiopia which originated coercively as an empire; unwilling subjects were forcibly incorporated, most often with the connivance of Europeans in the mid-to-late nineteenth-century, a period which coincided with the "scramble for Africa."<sup>4</sup> As explained by Edmond Keller, the "current boundaries of the Ethiopian state were given standing in international law through treaties with the European powers operating in the Horn region."<sup>5</sup> The main predicament in Ethiopia therefore has been the rise of nationalism subsequently among the subjugated groups and the determination by the ruling elites to suppress it. The empire's Achilles heel was Eritrea and Tigre whose incorporation in the 1950s was aided and abetted by the United States.<sup>6</sup>

Unlike Ethiopia, which was able to withstand the European colonial assault, Somalia was divided into colonial territories claimed by the British, French, Italians, and Ethiopians. The problem in post-colonial Somalia emanates from the dispersement of the people among Ethiopia, Djibouti, and northeastern Kenya and the nomadic lifestyle that makes them migrate across borders. The notion of Greater Somalia therefore expressed the new nationalism to re-unify the people. However, as Christopher Clapham observes, the difficulty had been "more a dispute about definitions of nationhood: a Somali definition based on ethnic common feeling to which land is irrelevant . . . , and an Ethio-Kenyan definition based on territory, to which ethnicity is a mere divisive tribalism which stands in the way of nation-building."<sup>7</sup>

In the Cold War era the Horn attracted much attention in global politics when the superpowers scrambled for strategic advantage and elevated military assistance as the prime instrument for achieving these ends. One immediate impact of the bipolar competition on inter-state relations "was to increase divisiveness among the countries"<sup>8</sup> as ruling elites cashed in for their self-aggrandizement. This condition facilitated the selling of themselves to "global competitors for armament . . . [and] support to carry on their conflict," as I. William Zartman explains.<sup>9</sup> This point is crucial because the globalization of conflicts in the Horn led directly to militarization and its attendant consequences. Arguably, governance and ethnic relations, as bad as they have been in the

region, were seriously jaundiced by the alacrity with which the global contestants were prepared to be dragged into the conflicts. Conceivably, historic opponents in the area would have pursued their objectives by other means, but the scope and intensity of conflict would have been restrained without the external intrusions.

The central thesis in this article is that the disintegration of the Ethiopian and Somali states in the early 1990s was caused largely by militarization which was aided and abetted essentially by the cold warriors. While Djibouti is yet to suffer the fate of its neighbors, the unfolding ethnic conflict, intensifying tension and declining legitimacy of the Gouled regime indicate that the metaphor as a 'boiling cauldron'<sup>10</sup> could become a reality, barring a reversal of current postures and policies. While militarization cannot be the sole explanatory variable of the crisis, I argue that the dramatic development of the military forces inspired the persistence and prolongation of both the domestic and inter-state conflicts. A focus on the military aspects, subsequently, would highlight what, in my opinion, is the most dynamic factor in conflicts. Because militarization was externally inspired, it will also demonstrate the linkage between domestic and international politics during the Cold War and the ability of local ruling elites to manipulate the linkage for self-aggrandizement, two variables that have been pivotal in the conflicts.

The objective, therefore, is to trace the origins and dynamics of militarization in the Horn in order to establish its consequences. This will be done against the backdrop of mutating world politics which have prejudiced decisively the politics of African states since the late 1980s. A major question to be explored is whether the demise of the Cold War provides opportunities for the former client states to demilitarize and reconstruct their political space. If so, what conditions, both internal and external, should prevail to ensure the success of reconstruction? The discussion of the prospects for demilitarization and reconstruction will necessarily be normative and policy-oriented.

## **HISTORICAL CONTEXT**

Militarization is the process and condition within a state where heightened security consciousness leads to "a steady growth in the military potential . . . usually accompanied by an increasing role for military institutions both in national affairs, including the economic, social and political spheres, and in international affairs."<sup>11</sup> This process, according to Nicole Ball, creates conditions where the "security forces play an active role in politics; a large share of government resources is devoted to the security sector; [and] the government seeks military, rather than political, solutions to domestic and inter-state disputes."<sup>12</sup> Such conditions become possible because the ruling class determines to strengthen and deploy the forces for state security, which often translates into the preservation of elite control and dominance. Empirical evidence will show that Ethiopia and Somalia have manifested the general characterization of militarization. Potentially, Djibouti could as well become militarized, albeit under different circumstances and with different possible outcomes in the post-Cold War period.

### **Ethiopia**

Militarization in contemporary Ethiopia began with the Mutual Defense Assistance Agreement (MDAA) between Haile Selassie and the United States government in 1953. Under the MDAA, the latter assumed near total liability for the modernization of the former's armed forces and, in return, was granted unlimited access to the Kagnew transmitter station for military and diplomatic communication purposes.<sup>13</sup> The agreement was the culmination of three years of prodding for assistance by Selassie after his initial rebuff in 1950 by the Joint Strategic Plans Committee (JSPC) of the US Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS), which was responsible for determining foreign military assistance.<sup>14</sup> The committee considered Ethiopia to be inconsequential to American interests; the dissent of the Air Force chief of staff, however, was perspicacious. He had argued that American presence in Ethiopia "would strengthen the US position in future negotiations and in the retention and safeguarding of installations held or desired."<sup>15</sup> Prophetically, this argument became the *raison d'être* for Ethio-American relations in coming decades.

Haile Selassie persisted and the Department of State encouraged the JCS to reconsider the request for assistance. In response, the secretary of the Army designated Lt. Gen. Charles L. Bolte to visit Ethiopia as a presidential representative to explain why the US government could not furnish arms or a military mission. Reporting to the JSPC on 6 July 1951, Bolte reiterated the purposelessness of a US mission but recommended the approval of the modest request for weapons and communication equipment used by the Ethiopian Expeditionary Force in Korea to be used in training replacements.<sup>16</sup> Negotiations continued between Washington and Addis Ababa, and in early 1952 the JCS finally ruled that Ethiopia was qualified for reimbursable military aid. Eligibility notes were exchanged that year in June and, later that month, the imperial officials presented their first formal petition for arms under Section 408(e) of the Mutual Security Act involving an estimated expenditure of some \$5 million.<sup>17</sup>

Despite initial difficulties over agreement interpretation and implementation, the United States proceeded to become the patron of Ethiopian forces' development. However, a host of other countries assisted this development, particularly in navy, air force, and police training. Norway, West Germany, and Yugoslavia, for instance, provided material and training for the navy. Israel collaborated with the US to provide counterinsurgency assistance; Indian officers staffed the military academies; Sweden assisted the air force; and West Germany provided equipment for para-military forces for internal security. In spite of these other sources of assistance, the United States remained the main prop of the imperial regime and provided the bulk of the military hardware and training.

American patronage continued until the overthrow of Selassie in 1974 by a radical group of military officers who initiated a scientific socialist revolution. The new Armed Forces Coordinating Committee, which formed in April that year, itself underwent several bloody changes until the emergence of Lt. Col. Mengistu Haile Mariam as leader in February 1977. Despite the radicalism of the military regime, which included the nationalization of American properties without compensation in 1975 and the refusal to sign the fiscal year 1977 Foreign Military Sales credit agreement, the United States continued the assistance program at accelerated levels in 1976. For instance, over \$100 million cash sales were effected, some \$22 million worth of replacement parts and

ammunition were projected, and \$6.6 million in grant military assistance, \$5.3 million in grant economic aid, \$6.6 million in Public Law 480 food sales and grants were given in 1976.<sup>18</sup> These were granted after Mengistu had indicated the determination to shift security and ideological alliance away from the United States. Not until the regime had unilaterally abrogated the MDAA in May 1977 did the US Congress terminate all forms of aid, with the alibi of opposition to human rights abuses in Ethiopia.

The termination of relations was followed almost instantaneously by a new accord between Ethiopia and the Soviet Union. This dramatic reversal of alliances in the Horn was influenced by the Soviet perception of Ethiopia as an important beachhead for strategic advantage over the United States; it also demonstrated a strong ideological stake because Mengistu showed greater promise for socialist development. As noted by David and Marina Ottaway, the Soviets "saw in Ethiopia with its class conflicts a much greater revolutionary potential than in any other African country, even shades of their own revolution."<sup>19</sup> Consequently, the Soviets moved aggressively to establish themselves by massively arming Ethiopia because of escalating tension with Somalia. According to one source, by 1980 in the short span of three years, the Soviets equipped Ethiopia with over \$2 billion worth of arms and other military supplies. In addition, over 1,300 Soviet military advisers, supplemented by 250 East Germans and 17,000 Cuban troops were sent to support the war effort against Somalia.<sup>20</sup> According to the US Arms Control and Disarmament Agency, between 1985 and 1989 a total of \$3.805 billion worth of arms were transferred to Ethiopia with the bulk (about 85 percent) coming from the Soviet Union and its allies in the Warsaw Pact; China and other East Asian countries, and a few European countries also sent arms.<sup>21</sup> Thus, just as the militarization of Ethiopia under Haile Selassie was sustained essentially by the United States, under Mengistu it was assisted primarily by the Soviet Union.

The Soviets backed Mengistu until the politics of *glasnost* and *perestroika*, introduced by President Mikhail Gorbachev in the mid-1980s, injected radical changes in Soviet domestic and foreign orientation to undermine the Cold War. Although the Soviets scaled down their support dramatically and encouraged Mengistu to seek political solutions to his war against the rebellious Eritreans, Tigreans and other minorities, they maintained their presence in Ethiopia to the very end of his rule. As reported by the International Institute for Strategic Studies, 550 Soviet advisers and technicians together with 25 Cubans, 200 North Koreans and 125 Israelis struggled in vain to save his regime in 1990.<sup>22</sup>

## **Somalia**

Militarization in Somalia was motivated primarily by the desire to fulfill the ambition of creating a Greater Somalia by coercive means. Following independence in 1960, the elite had regarded all "territories inhabited by Somalis" to be historically part of the nation and therefore was determined to reincorporate them.<sup>23</sup> While these areas were of no particular economic importance to all contestants, they occupied a special place in the Somali sense of nationhood, which is uniquely strong in Africa.<sup>24</sup> Thus the nation emerged with a strong notion of irredentism that inspired militarism. Elite instability between 1960 and



1969, however, impeded a strategy to obtain sustained external support for the irredentist ambition until General Mohammed Siad Barre seized power in a military coup on 21 October 1969.<sup>25</sup> As later events were to show, the military build-up became a means for Barre to maintain his hold on power and, ultimately, to plunge the country into a political abyss. Through the years he engaged his country in a low level war in the so-called "Somali territories" as part of the irredentist policy; in 1977-78, however, he threw his military weight behind the ethnic Somalis in the Ogaden in their war against Ethiopia.

At the time Americans were flooding Ethiopia with arms, the Soviets were anxious to counter their influence in the Horn. Siad Barre provided the opportunity when he proclaimed a "scientific socialist" policy in 1972 and courted the Soviets who immediately began to supply arms. The friendship was sealed in July 1974 when Soviet President Nikolai Podgorny visited Mogadishu and signed a Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation with Barre. The Soviets improved the port of Berbera to serve as handling, refuelling and storage facilities for their surface-to-surface missiles and provisioned Somalia with advanced weaponry and military training.

Strengthened by the arms, Somalia intensified its support for dissidents in the Ogaden. The failure of the Soviets to convince Siad Barre to form a partnership with the new socialist state of Ethiopia resulted in the war that began in mid-1977. Perhaps misreading American statements, Barre interpreted Washington's assurances not to oppose "further guerrilla pressure in the Ogaden" and to "consider sympathetically Somali's legitimate defense needs"<sup>26</sup> to be approval for a military campaign. Feeling encouraged, he launched the Ogaden attack but hopes for Western assistance proved deceptive. As described by Zartman, after some initial losses, Ethiopia managed to court the Soviets and their allies, particularly the Cubans who sent thousands of military advisers and \$1 billion worth of arms to eventually turn the tide against Somalia.<sup>27</sup>

In a surprise move in November 1977, Somalia terminated the 1974 treaty with the Soviets and expelled their advisers and broke relations with Cuba. These actions were in response to the Soviet decision to embrace the Mengistu regime. Welcoming the new twist in Soviet-Somali relations, the United States moved steadily to become the new patron of Somalia. With their loss of Ethiopia, the Americans were anxious to gain a new foothold in the Horn, particularly following the Soviet intervention in Afghanistan in December 1979; they needed access for a new Rapid Deployment Force which had been formed to counteract the perceived Soviet threat in the Gulf region. The March 1980 Facility Access Agreement gave the US access to air and naval bases in Berbera, Mogadishu and Kismayo. In return, Somalia was furnished with military aid during the 1980s but not on levels often sought by the Barre government. He, however, succeeded in getting additional supplies from countries such as Libya, Italy, Germany, France, South Africa, China and other countries in Europe, Asia, and the Middle East. Between 1985 and 1989 about \$160 million worth of arms were delivered to Somalia from these various sources.<sup>28</sup>

## **Djibouti**

In ethnic terms the political landscape of Djibouti resembles that of Ethiopia even though their historic formations are quite different. Whereas the latter was founded as an empire, the former emerged as a result of European colonialism; nonetheless, they share common problems of ethnic nationalism. With a population of less than one million, Djibouti is comprised of two dominant groups, the Afar and Issa, which together constitute about 53 percent of the population and five other groups, namely, the Gadabouris (15 percent), Issaks (13.3 percent), Arabs mostly Yemenis (6 percent), French and other European nationals (4 percent), and a final group of economic migrants.<sup>29</sup> Djiboutian politics have been strained by the fact that the two dominant groups share affinity with the two warring neighbors: the Issas' with Somalia and the Afars with Ethiopia. Further complicating the political scene was the claim by both Ethiopia and Somalia over Djibouti territory, which had remained an object of Western, especially French, interest because of its geostrategic location. In fact, the French have remained the dominant foreign force in the country with a relatively powerful military presence. Thus security in the country has been tenuous since independence.

Before 1958, as Clapham explains, the Issas, who comprised about a third of the population, dominated politics in the territory, but because their leader opposed the French in a 1958 referendum to determine the association with France, they lost favor with the colonists who shifted their support to the Afar-Danakil. The French gradually built up the political opposition of the Afars after winning another Guinea-style referendum in 1966 in which France aided the result by expelling many potential voters who were considered immigrant Somali.<sup>30</sup> Ethiopia cooperated with France in maintaining the Afars to deprive Somalia from gaining access through the Issas.

In a major policy shift, France supported the election of an Issa Somali, Hassan Gouled Aptidon to become the president and an Afar, Ahmed Dini to become the prime minister of the new republic in 1977. Through the years Gouled strengthened his powers and, at the same time, attempted to "craft a ruling coalition inclusive of all groups but which nonetheless ensured control by the Issa ethnic group."<sup>31</sup> His efforts to achieve an ethnically-balanced political system has been undermined by the disruptive impact of inter-ethnic relations in the region. As Schraeder points out, the Afars have been sympathetic to their brethren in Ethiopia while the Issas have equally sympathized with the Somali irredentist policy; hence, during the Ogaden war Djiboutians fought against each other.<sup>32</sup>

Most decisive in the unfolding crisis in Djibouti is the loss of legitimacy of the Gouled government in the eyes of the Afars. They have been frustrated by the dominance of the Issas of the civil service, the armed forces and the ruling party<sup>33</sup> and have transformed their dissatisfaction into opposition movements, the most powerful being the FRUD, which began guerrilla warfare with about 3,000 fighters in late 1991. Since then the ruling Popular Rally for Progress (PRP) has fractured and several other opposition groups have emerged, including the Movement for Unity and Democracy (UD), United Opposition Front (UOF), and Democratic Renewal Party (DRP).



Presently political conditions in Djibouti resemble those in pre-1991 Ethiopia and Somalia. In typical Horn-style politics, the Gouled government has responded to growing opposition by beefing up the armed forces. In 1992, armed forces personnel were increased by 200 to 3,200 and military expenditures for this tiny state jumped from \$31 million in 1991 to \$38 million in 1992.<sup>34</sup> As modest as these increases may appear, the 1992 military budget represented 9.6 percent of the gross national product and therefore could have significant negative impact on socio-economic development.

Attempts to resolve the domestic crisis through the ballot box proved illusive when opposition groups alleged fraud in the May 1993 elections that gave Gouled his fourth term of office. Hence, the warfare has continued with increasing intensity since July of that year when the government launched a major offensive against FRUD and disrupted the scheduled visit by the French Minister of Cooperation Michel Rousin.<sup>35</sup> Although the country has not attained the levels of militarization achieved in neighboring Ethiopia and Somalia, the future looks uncertain and bleak. French policy at this time and the politics Gouled elects to pursue to resolve the conflict would determine possible outcomes. Will the French intervene on behalf of Gouled by sending more arms and deploying their troops for his defense? Or, would they encourage him to compromise with his opponents? Would Gouled prefer to resolve the conflict on the battlefield just as Mengistu and Barre did or would he seek democratic solutions? These are critical questions which could shape the direction of Djibouti politics in the coming years.

## **DIMENSIONS OF MILITARIZATION**

Four main features of militarization in the Horn will be briefly discussed relative to Ethiopia and Somalia where they were most evident and in Djibouti where the current situation portends an ominous political future. The features are: quantitative growth of the armed forces; escalated defense expenditure; high propensity for internal and external war; and military dominance of civil society.

### **Growth in Force Levels and Expenditure**

In Ethiopia the army grew from the approximately 18,000 enlisted men in 1956 to 29,000 by 1964. By his final year in 1974, Haile Selassie had expanded the army to 41,000. Partly because of the war with Somalia and partly to consolidate itself in power and defeat the Eritrean and Tigray rebellion, Mengistu's regime accelerated the growth from 50,000 in 1975 to a record 300,000 in 1986-87, only to drop slightly to 250,000 in 1989.<sup>36</sup> In his final stand against the rebellion in 1990-91, Mengistu put 438,000 men and women into active military service. Following Eritrea's independence in April 1993, the forces dropped to 100,000; most were former members of the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF) with about 15,000 from the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF), which was showing growing signs of opposition to the new provisional government in Addis Ababa.<sup>37</sup>

As can be expected, upsizing the forces required higher defense spending. From \$39 million in 1969, spending rose through the years to hit \$187 million in 1977; it

accelerated rapidly from \$351 million in 1979 to \$763 million in 1989. In the local Ethiopian currency (birr), expenditures rose from 744 million in 1980 to a high 1.6 billion in 1989, according to the Stockholm-based SIPRI.<sup>38</sup> Significantly, until 1991 government finance was dominated by military requirements; in 1988 it was officially admitted that defense spending accounted for 50 percent of Ethiopia's regular budget. The disbanding of Mengistu's forces in May 1991 following the victory of Eritrea was expected to result in a dramatic drop in budgetary commitments, but because of continuing challenges to the provisional regime, military spending rose astronomically from \$370 million in 1991 to \$811 million in 1992, a vast increase from 8.9 to 20.1 percentage of the gross national product.<sup>39</sup>

Force growth in Somalia followed a similar track, albeit on a lesser scale, obviously because of the country's limited material resources. From a mere manpower level of 2,000 in 1960, the forces grew to 14,000 in 1968 and rose progressively through the years to 30,000 by 1974, ostensibly to support the policy of irredentism. During the 1977-78 war with Ethiopia, Somali forces grew to 54,000 and this number was maintained more or less up to the overthrow of Siad Barre in 1991. Since then the forces have disintegrated and multiple leaders have formed private armies to engage each other in a fratricidal war.

Somali military expenditure grew concurrently with the armed forces. From an annual low of \$11 million in 1969, it rose to \$160 million in 1982 and then declined through the rest of the decade. These figures excluded the value of Soviet supplies which in the 1970s gave Somalia a rough parity in military strength with Ethiopia, as one analyst suggested.<sup>40</sup> This may explain Somalia's endurance in the 1977-78 war with Ethiopia, which compelled the latter to seek massive assistance from the Soviets.

Ironically, despite the extraordinary national extravagance on the military, the armed forces in both Ethiopia and Somalia were not just defeated on the battlefield by internal adversaries, but they went down together with the state. In both countries "no recognizable organization" existed for the armed forces following their defeat.<sup>41</sup> This outcome certainly suggests poor preparation and strategy for low-intensity operations, similar to the American experience in Vietnam. For instance, Siad Barre's assembling of tank battalions, surface-to-air brigades, 40 air defense artillery battalions, 71 surface-to-air missiles of various types, patrol and torpedo boats and even an amphibious craft<sup>42</sup> were all misplaced for urban guerrilla warfare. More important, perhaps, is the lesson that militarization is no indefinite guarantor of state security and elite dominance.

Evidence from the Djiboutian scene shows a steady militarization process for a country of its size. The national army numbered about 2,600 throughout the 1980s and included an 800-strong frontier commando unit, 200-strong armored company, 300-strong gendarmerie force, and 900-strong infantry commando regiment. Additionally, the country maintained an internal security force of 1,400 which included 1,200 in the National Security Force. The French military presence which stood at 3,500-strong in the 1980s had grown to 3,650 by 1991. With these forces President Gouled may feel secure, but the experience of Mengistu and Barre would indicate that any such feeling would be fool-hardy.

## **Civil-Military Relations and the Demise of States**

The effects of over two decades of militarization in the Horn were drastic: the armed forces dominated and controlled the Ethiopian (1974-91) and Somali (1969-93) societies; national economies were ruined; domestic conflicts and differences over border demarcations were militarized; and war became an acceptable means for settling political differences. The problem of security was compounded by the decline in economic resources which, in turn, was complicated in Somalia by the irredentist policy and growing domestic unrest; in Ethiopia it was compounded by the aggressive pursuit of independence by the Eritreans and Tigreans and the equally aggressive resistance by Ethiopian authorities.

In both cases, the ruling elites simply refused to compromise their hold on power and determined to achieve military victory over their opponents. These realities defined sharply the role of the armed forces in the two countries and American and Soviet support in maintaining them. The forces and national security became the focus of assistance and development and they gained pre-eminent positions in their respective societies. As governing bodies, the military controlled legislative, judiciary and executive powers. The excessive militarization, among other factors, paradoxically enfeebled the states and led to their ultimate demise.

### **Demise of the Ethiopian State**

In Ethiopia the politically dominant Amhara elite focused attention and energy on self-preservation; the material development and well-being of society in general were neglected and this had serious consequences. In the 1970s, for example, Ethiopia had an illiteracy rate of about 90 percent of a population of 30 million; life expectancy at birth stood at 36 years. Safe drinking water was almost non-existent and infant mortality rate was about 150 deaths under one year per one thousand. As one general who headed the American military group observed, the "cumulative impact of the abject poverty and misery, the illiteracy, the immense maldistribution of wealth . . . , the rampant collusive corruption, the completely ruthless autocratic 'divide and rule' exercise of power by the Emperor"<sup>43</sup> permeated the fabric of the Ethiopian society. These debilitating socio-economic conditions affirmed the claims of oppression by opponents of Haile Selassie and contributed to his overthrow by the military in 1974.

As with the emperor, Mengistu's priority was not socio-economic development, it was to fight an unwinnable war against rebels. His 15 years of scientific socialist experimentation further impoverished his people: statistically the World Bank in the 1980s rated the country as the most deprived nation on earth. With a population of about 45 million, Ethiopia had a GNP per capita of \$130 in 1987; the GDP growth of production declined from the 2.7 percent registered between 1965 to 1980 to 0.9 percent between 1980 and 1987. In the same period, agricultural production declined from 1.2 percent to -2.1 percent.<sup>44</sup> In a 1990 study of 140 countries by the Washington-based World Priorities, Ethiopia ranked 137th, 121st and 125th on GNP per capita, education and health respectively; on military expenditure per capita, however, it ranked 86th. With

a population of 51 million the country had only 92,000 teachers and a mere 800 physicians.<sup>45</sup>

Mengistu's dogged determination to win on the battlefield naturally bloated the armed forces; it also demoralized his forces when their efforts proved fruitless. Moreover, pressure from the separatist groups grew unbearably intense with the impetus clearly on their side. By February 1990, the Eritrean Peoples Liberation Front (EPLF) had almost overrun the strategically vital port of Massawa; other groups closed in on Addis Ababa. Unfortunately for him, this time the Soviets were averse to rescuing him as they did in 1977-78. His own country in turmoil over severe economic contraction and threats of territorial disintegration, and fanning *glasnost* and *perestroika* to foster Western support, former Soviet President Gorbachev was in no mood to prop up a regime which, in any case, teetered on the brink of demise. Since 1987, the Soviets had attempted to distance themselves from Mengistu's failing fortunes. In April 1990, Gorbachev pulled most of his military advisers and even refused to allow Soviet cargo planes in Addis Ababa to be used to resupply Asmara, which had been cut-off by the separatists.

Further diminishing Mengistu's options was the strong wind of political change that blew across the continent during 1989-90, primarily as a result of the demise of the Cold War. The "severe economic and political disappointments of the 1980s" also precluded politics as usual.<sup>46</sup> As one African leader after another announced reforms, the psychological pressure, at least, would have compelled him to fall in line, especially since Ethiopian conditions epitomized the political and economic malaise that had gripped the continent. He was forced to concede to the basic demand of Eritrean autonomy at the US-sponsored peace negotiations in February 1991.

However, Mengistu's compromises came too late. Forces of the EPLF, the TPLF and the Ethiopian People's Democratic Revolutionary Front (EPDRF), a new coalition of various ethnic groups, were indisputably in control of the battlefields. The government's forces, on the other hand, were completely exhausted and they disintegrated rapidly under fire. The second round of American-brokered peace talks was underway in London in May 1991 when, on the 21st, Mengistu resigned the presidency unceremoniously and boarded his private plane for a self-imposed exile in Zimbabwe. His regime and the socialist state collapsed immediately as the EPDRF troops entered and occupied Addis Ababa. Thus ended the tumultuous rule of Mengistu.

The installation in power of the provisional government of Meles Zenawi in June 1991, and the agreement among all political factions to recognize the right of each ethnic group to self-determination may have blunted the internecine domestic conflict. The emergence of Eritrea into independence in particular may have closed the chapter on the longest secessionist war in Africa. However, all is not so well in Ethiopia. Opposition is growing against the ruling EPDRF coalition. Even though the coalition signed a cease-fire agreement with the Oromo Liberation Front in April 1992, the OLF and other groups, the All-Amhara People's Organization (AAPO) and the National Democratic Union (NDU) boycotted the regional council elections two months later and the elections could not be held in the Afar and Somali regions because of a precarious security situation.<sup>47</sup>

## **Demise of the Somali State**

The fate of Siad Barre's state followed an analogous track. Conditions in Somalia were equally oppressive, but he resisted popular demand for change. Instead, he focused national energy on the development of the armed forces for domestic and foreign defense and offense. The internal crisis reached its apogee in May 1989, when opposition forces launched a guerrilla war to overthrow him. As the unrest deepened together with an economy in disarray and the changing winds of African politics, Barre relented and announced a program of political and economic reforms in January 1989, particularly for the turbulent northern provinces. These were never implemented, however, and the war proceeded with increasing intensity.

As government forces could not stem the tide of popular uprising, Siad Barre fled Mogadishu in an armored personnel carrier in December 1991. But unlike Ethiopia, the struggle for power and control following the fall of the regime took a tragic turn. The various warring factions, particularly Mohammed Ferrah Aideed's Somali National Alliance (SNA) and chief rival Gen. Mohammed Siyad Morgan, could not agree on who would fill the leadership vacuum and the country broke up on clannish lines and traditional leaders engaged each other in blood-letting for control. The northeastern region of the country declared itself an independent republic of Somaliland.

With conditions deteriorating so badly, the international community, led by the United Nations and, later the United States, had to send troops on a humanitarian mission. In August 1992, the UN Operation in Somalia (UNOSOM) arrived in Mogadishu but was unable to make much headway. In December the US-led multinational Unified Task Force (UNITAF) landed. On 4 May 1993, UNITAF handed over control of the military and humanitarian operations to UNOSOM II. Nonetheless, by the end of the year the state of Somalia had decomposed to crown a long period of political, economic and military bankruptcy. In March 1994, the US withdrew the remainder of its forces, and in March 1995 the UN ended its mission.

The tragedy of Somalia epitomized the ultimate outcome of militarization. The long rule of Siad Barre nurtured a national culture that legitimized violence in the settlement of disputes; in his vain attempt to maintain his government, he saturated the country with arms. His opponents did likewise in order to match his military power. Thus, following his downfall, the fractured society was awash in arms as each faction sought to gain dominance by military means. Commenting that "[t]here [were] more arms than food in Somalia" in view of a devastating famine, the UN Secretary General Butros Butros-Ghali aptly observed that the arms were not fabricated in Somalia: "they were given by the outside world, to serve outside interests" and that "those who provide arms are partners in the crime."<sup>48</sup> These observations underscored the direct linkage between external and domestic forces in the creation of the quagmire.

Needless to say, the arms proliferation undermined the mediating role of traditional elders, facilitated the descent into full civil war that followed, and severely hampered the efforts of volunteer agencies and multinational military forces to distribute food, restore

law and order and create a functioning government. The task of disarming Somalia proved deadly. While the UN showed a determination and commitment to restore the country to civility, the armed groups proved resilient with the capacity to resist and make deadlier the task of the world body. Twenty-four Pakistani troops of the UNOSOM were ambushed in June 1993; a UN helicopter was also shot down on 24 September, killing four soldiers. These incidents escalated the conflict between the UN and Somali opposition forces, reportedly led by Mohammed Aideed, and attempts by the Americans to kill or capture him militarized the humanitarian mission and caused a serious backlash for President Bill Clinton who, consequently, adopted a new approach in October 1993 to accommodate Aideed in the search for a political settlement and national building in Somalia.

The restoration of Somalia has proved to be a difficult enterprise not simply because of the traditional antagonisms among the various clans; neither is it because of any natural character of the people. The failure of the external efforts stems from the historic involvement of foreign powers in Somali affairs; the people have been highly suspicious and even resentful of the good intentions of the United States and the UN, especially because of their paternalistic and patronizing approach to the crisis. For instance, combat-ready American marines made their spectacular amphibious landings without any coordination with the local militia and the program of food distribution proceeded without the involvement of these militia who controlled the territories to be traversed. Because the humanitarian exercise was so militarized, it quickly aroused suspicions about the real intent of the Americans.

Thus, the laudable effort soon turned into a quagmire and the massive international undertaking to save Somalia had to be aborted and the country's future continues to hang in the balance. Meanwhile, a total of 355,000 war and war-related deaths were reported between 1988-1992; with a population of 7.8 million in 1990, Somalia had 64,000 under arms but only 11,000 teachers and 500 physicians in 1992.<sup>49</sup> This picture is only but a small reflection of the abject impoverishment that years of militarization have brought upon the people of Somalia.

## **TOWARD DEMILITARIZATION AND RECONSTRUCTION**

What are the prospects for peace and progress in the turbulent Horn of Africa? Undoubtedly, the demise of the Cold War offers opportunities for Ethiopia and Somalia to rebuild and for Djibouti to strengthen its fragile polity, even though new constraints on security and development could complicate and frustrate such possibilities. For instance, it may prove difficult to satisfy the parochial desires of the various groups, ethnic and clan cleavages, and some may actively resist the challenges of the new era. This difficulty in reconciling traditional enemies may even deter mediators, sympathizers and supporters of peace and reconstruction. Also, the emerging democratic rule in eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union would constrict Western support for reconstruction in the Horn as competition for aid will be more intense. Indeed, with its diminished global strategic relevance, the Horn could be marginalized in a world without competing ideologies. Needless to say, the present is not an auspicious time for developing nations that were



caught in the vortex of the East-West conflict to rechart and recast the course of their history.

The task of reconstruction could be difficult, if not impossible, in a militarized environment because it inhibits individual and collective creative energies toward development. New approaches to nation building must, therefore, be sought within the framework of demilitarization which should exceed mere demobilization and downsizing of armed forces. To avoid the pitfalls and social contradictions that crippled the previous states, demilitarization should steer toward authentic political and economic change in the region at large.

To demobilize the armed forces is to render thousands unemployed. People who have known nothing but war for years will suddenly be let loose. To contain the potential for unrest and to meet the important need for rapid reconstruction and to give millions self-worth and pride, Ethiopia and Somalia should consider the formation of workers brigades following demobilization. The brigades should have the specific purpose of assisting in national reconstruction for a specified period after which they should also be demobilized because they should have been trained in the process for future self-employment. Their task should include food production, construction of roads, schools, and other public amenities. Funding for such an undertaking should be mobilized under the auspices of the United Nations. Analogous to conditions in Japan and Germany at the end of World War II, Ethiopia, Somalia and Eritrea should be earmarked for a special development assistance. Another Operation Restore Hope and UNOSOM would be more costly than funding such civilian initiatives.

The approach to peace and progress should recognize the commonalities among the various nationalities on the Horn. They have a long shared history, have long intermixed and their geographic contiguity and infrastructure inter-linkages recommend a strong base for collective action toward peace and development. It is important for Ethiopia, Somalia, Djibouti and Eritrea to find a common ground for peaceful co-existence which alone would ensure their security and progress. The history and objective conditions of the region suggest four collective approaches toward this end: non-aggression pact, policy of disarmament and non-militarization, cultivation of democratic culture, and regional economic cooperation and integration.

- **Treaty of Non-aggression**

To create a lasting peace in the Horn, it is imperative that a non-aggression pact be signed among Ethiopia, Somalia, Eritrea and Djibouti. Somalia must renounce the notion of Greater Somalia; Ethiopia's acceptance of Eritrea's independence should be sustained; and all must honor Djibouti's sovereignty and neutrality. The affirmation of existing borders will eliminate the root cause of conflicts; moreover, by assuring equal sovereignty it will create confidence in the states for discussions toward regional cooperation.

- **Policy of Disarmament and Non-militarization**

A policy of disarmament should be pursued by all four Horn states. Implicitly, armies would be downsized radically where they exist; a few hundred may be maintained to protect local strategic points. Ethiopia and Somalia should take advantage of the collapse of organized national armies and build a true civil polity; Eritrea should do likewise as a new state and disavow any pretence to armament. Such a policy among the three will pressure Djibouti to rid itself of French influence, so that the subregion will be free of any foreign military presence. The policy of disarmament and non-militarization will not only support the non-aggression pact, but would allow national energies and resources to be channelled into economically productive programs. Notably, similar orientation in Japan and Germany following World War II has been fundamental to their subsequent economic and political successes.

### • **Nurturing Democratic Culture**

Political structures and institutions should be created to nurture democratic governance taking full cognizance of the realities of the socio-ethnic configurations in the states. While preserving the basic tenets of constitutional democracy, adequate provisions should be made to address the peculiarities of Horn societies. For instance, it may be preferable to institute some form of ethnic autonomies rather than the centralized governments which, in the past, enabled one group to dominate the state. Structure of national governments and appointments should also be made to reflect the ethnic composition of the society. The political dispensation should assure full participation of citizens in the political process; orderly and peaceful leadership change (incumbent leaders must trailblaze by sponsoring transparent elections and leaving office gracefully in event of a loss); and the protection of human rights. Finally, vigorous mass education (both formal and informal) should be undertaken to nurture democratic culture.

### • **Economic Cooperation and Integration**

Economic development is difficult, if not impossible, to achieve in microstates with limited natural endowments. Such is the case of most African states and their ultimate economic salvation lies in integrated economies. The Horn states are no exception and it will be futile for them to pursue isolated development. Agreeing on an open market system with the necessary regulations, the Horn states should create structures that would support the development of an integrated regional economy and allow free movement of people across borders. The January 1993 trade agreement between Ethiopia and Eritrea is a good start and should be extended to the other states to form the basis for an integrated regional trade system. Realistically, state intervention in the economy may be necessary at the early stages of reconstruction; Japan and Germany did the same. However, such interventions should not be pursued at the expense of individual freedom and liberties to produce and own wealth so as not to blunt private initiatives that would ultimately sustain economic development.

The emphasis on de-militarization, collective political and economic security and democratization is an important one and cannot be repudiated summarily as naive or incomprehensible because of the persistence of ethnic strife and the lack of a history of

democratic practice in the region. The political bankruptcy of regimes and past failures to reconcile warring factions only suggest the difficulty and frustration not the absurdity of seeking lasting solutions. The turbulence on the Horn is, in fact, the product of a system constructed in time and space; to dismiss any possibility for reconstruction and to describe the area as "a mean, brutal part of the earth whose peoples are committed to the idea that violence can resolve political difficulties"<sup>50</sup> is not only uncharitable but cruel. Until recently the same extremism could be expressed about the Palestinians and South Africans who were considered the most recalcitrant and violent in politics. It was incomprehensible that Nelson Mandela would be freed to be elected president of a democratic South Africa. Whoever thought in August 1993 that on 13 September 1995 Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin would shake hands with PLO leader Yasser Arafat on the lawns of the White House over a peace agreement and for Arafat to be mobbed the next day by Senators at the US Capitol? These recent events give hope and attest to the fact that those who make history master and respond positively to the exigencies of the present and do not hold tenaciously to the past.

A legitimate concern, however, is whether there are capable leaders at this critical historical juncture who understand the past and are prepared to be guided progressively by it to change course. Signs are that in Eritrea the government of Isaias Afewerki is steadily building democratic structures; in Ethiopia the provisional regime of Meles Zenawi has reportedly abandoned the forced unity of the country and given autonomy to nationalities. As A.M. Babu observes, the "right to self-determination" in the new Ethiopia is "a pioneering trend that will salvage Africa from its present ethnic and cultural crisis."<sup>51</sup> This notable shift in a long-standing policy has not fully resolved the nationalities question because ethnic agitation lingers in some quarters. However, it reflects a new appreciation for the exigencies of the present, an unthinkable development in the country under both Haile Selassie and Mengistu. The Somali case remains pathological; however, it is not inconceivable that the dynamics of conflict could change to allow the emergence of progressive leaders.

## CONCLUSION

The challenge of reconstruction in the Horn is enormous and even daunting. It calls for legitimate leaders who can resist the temptation of power intoxication and mobilize the people toward progressive goals; those who can devise appropriate strategies to create political and economic infrastructure that leads to stability and prosperity. Attempts should be made to break primordial ties and forge enlightened national policies that ensure regional peace. And, recognizing the history and objective realities of the Horn, national development and security must be sought within a framework of non-militarization and renunciation of territorial claims, democratic politics, and subregional economic cooperation and integration.

After decades of strife, economic bankruptcy, political chaos, and destructive ideologies of militarization, only a long-term strategy for peace, stability and development can restore the Horn states to permanent normalcy. The demise of the Cold War does not necessarily guarantee the solution of regional conflicts; it could even ignite them as the

tragedy of Yugoslavia demonstrates. However, the decline of ideological polarization in world politics makes it less constraining to seek sustainable and enduring rather than ad hoc and indeterminate solutions. What is needed is the persistence of the world's goodwill, support and encouragement for change in troubled regions such as the Horn. In this context, Ethiopia, Somalia, Djibouti and Eritrea should seek their place under the sun on their own terms as dictated by their historic and current realities. Their leaders have the awesome responsibility to make this happen.

## Endnotes

1. The notion of Greater Somalia (Somali irredentism) refers to the determination to re-incorporate the Somali-inhabited areas of the Ogaden region in Ethiopia, Djibouti, and the Northern Frontier District of Kenya. For details, see Saadia Touval, *TSomali Nationalism, International Politics and the Drive for Unity in the Horn of Africa* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard, 1963).
2. According to the International Institute for Strategic Studies, the French maintained a force of 3,500 in 1991. See *The Military Balance 1990-1991* (London: International Institute for Strategic Studies, 1991), p. 101.
3. For the most recent analysis of Djibouti's domestic problems, see Peter J. Schraeder, "Ethnic Politics in Djibouti: From 'Eye of the Hurricane' to 'Boiling Cauldron'," *African Affairs*, 92 (1993), pp. 203-21.
4. For an excellent summary of this historical conundrum, see Yohannes Okbazghi, *Eritrea: A Pawn in World Politics* (Gainesville, FL: University of Florida Press, 1991), chap. 2.
5. Edmond Keller, "Self-Determination and Regional Security in Africa," mimeo, 10 May 1991.
6. Okbazghi Yohannes, "Behind the Ethio-Eritrea Federation: The Conspiracy Thesis (Parts One and Two)," *Journal of Eritrean Studies*, II, no. 2; III, no. 1 (Winter and Summer 1988).
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8. Henry F. Jackson, *From the Congo to Soweto: U.S. Policy Toward Africa since 1960* (New York: Quill, 1984), p. 225.
9. I. William Zartman, *Ripe for Resolution: Conflict and Intervention in Africa* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), p. 124.
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11. Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI), "Militarization and Arms Control in Latin America," *World Armament and Disarmament SIPRI Yearbook, 1982* (London: Francis and Taylor, 1982), p. 393.
12. Nicole Ball, "Militarized States in the Third World," in Michael T. Klare and D.C. Thomas, eds., *World Security: Trends and Challenges at Century's End* (New York: St. Martin's, 1991), p. 199.
13. Baffour Agyeman-Duah, "The United States and Ethiopia: The Politics of Military Assistance," *Armed Forces and Society*, 12, no. 2 (Winter 1986), pp. 287-307.
14. Records of the US Joint Chiefs of Staff (hereafter RUSJCS), Joint Chiefs of Staff Memo 2197/1, National Archives, Washington, DC, 19/5/51.
15. See RUSJCS, Memo of the Chief of Staff, US Air Force, JCS 2197/2, 28/5/51.
16. See RUSJCS, JCS 2197/3, 21/7/51. Exchange of notes on US arms for training was accomplished in February 1953.
17. US Department of State (DOS), Foreign Service Despatch/302, 15/1/53.
18. Agyeman-Duah, "The United States and Ethiopia."
19. David and Marina Ottaway, *Afrocommunism* (New York: Africana, 1981), p. 173.
20. Ruth L. Sivard, *World Military and Social Expenditures 1983* (Washington, DC: World Priorities, 1983), pp. 9, 11. For details of the Soviet action, see Andrew J. Pierre, *The Global Politics of Arms Sales* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1982), pp. 256-59.
21. US Arms Control and Disarmament Agency (USACDA), *World Military Expenditures and Arms Transfers, 1990* (Washington, DC, November 1991), Table III, p. 131.
22. *The Military Balance 1990-1991*, p. 131.
23. See fn. 1.
24. See Zartman, *Ripe for Resolution*, p. 88.
25. An Attempted coup occurred in December 1961 following independence in 1960; political parties were formed on clannish lines; the governing coalition government broke up in 1964; there were incessant changes in premiership; sixty parties contested the 1969 elections; the president was assassinated in October 1969 and two weeks later Gen. Siad Barre seized power.

26. See *Newsweek*, 26 September 1977.
27. Zartman, *Ripe for Resolution*, p. 106-7.
28. *World Military Expenditures and Arms Transfers 1990* (Washington, DC, 1991).
29. Schraeder, "Ethnic Politics in Djibouti."
30. Clapham, "Ethiopia and Somalia."
31. Schraeder, "Ethnic Politics in Djibouti."
32. Ibid.
33. Kassim Schehim and J. Searing, "Djibouti and the Question of Afar Nationalism," *African Affairs*, 19, no. 315 (1980), pp. 209-26.
34. *The Military Balance 1993-1994*, p. 224.
35. *Keesings Record of World Events*, 38, no. 1 (February 1992), p. 38711; 39, nos. 7/8 (August 1993), p. 39546.
36. *World Military Expenditures and Arms Transfers 1968-1977; 1978-1990*.
37. *The Military Balance 1993-1994*, p. 206.
38. Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, *SIPRI Yearbook, 1990* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), p. 189.
39. *The Military Balance 1993-1994*, p. 224, 227-28.
40. See *African Confidential*, 114, no. 8 (13 April 1973), p. 4.
41. *The Military Balance 1990-1991*, p. 119.
42. Ibid., p. 117.
43. US Department of Defense, "End of Tour Report of Brig. Gen. Harold Yow, Chief of MAAG/Ethiopia, 28 July 1973 - 11 August 1975." Declassified document.
44. The World Bank, *World Development Report 1989* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), Tables 1 and 2, pp. 164, 166.
45. Ruth L. Sivard, *World Military and Social Expenditures* (Washington, DC: World Priorities, 1993), pp. 50-51.



46. Claude E. Welch, Jr., "The Single Party Paradigm: De Mortuis?" *TransAfrica Forum*, 8, no. 3 (1991), pp. 85-94.

47. See *Keesings Record of World Events*, 38, no. 6, p. 38952.

48. *Africa Recovery*, United Nations, Briefing Paper No. 7, (15 January 1993), p. 18.

49. Sivard, *World Military and Social Expenditures*, p. 45.

50. A comment by one anonymous referee of an earlier version of this manuscript.

51. A.M. Babu, "Ethiopia: Model for Africa," *New Africa* (London), May 1994, p. 15.