

# Warfare in the Horn of Africa

A Monograph

by

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## Abstract

Warfare in the Horn of Africa, by Major Andrew K. Holler, US Army, 35 pages.

This project challenges the Major Paul Godson's previous assertion from a 2014 SAMS monograph that exhaustion is the African way of war. By focusing on the Horn of Africa, this project relies on three case studies: the Eritrean War of Independence, the Ogaden War, and the Somali Civil War, to demonstrate that exhaustion is not a uniformly salient feature of warfare within the African continent. The selected case studies offer perspectives of varying types of conflict, both interstate and intrastate, and conventional and irregular warfare. The project begins by providing a history of the Horn of Africa, explaining the societal and political evolution of the three states of interest, Ethiopia, Eritrea, and Somalia, from precolonial times to present. After disproving the proposition that exhaustion is the African way of war, this research contributes to the professional body of knowledge by drawing regional trends of conflict from the case studies. These trends include the reliance on proxy warfare, territorial significance, and the transnational interest in regional conflicts. The research concludes with emphasis on how military professionals assigned to the region can better prepare themselves to understand this dynamic environment.

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## Acronyms

AMISOM	African Union Mission to Somalia
AU	African Union
CJTF-HOA	Combined Joint Task Force – Horn of Africa
EAF	Ethiopian Air force
ELF	Eritrean Liberation Front
EPLF	Eritrean People’s Liberation Front
ONLF	Ogaden National Liberation Front
SSDF	Somali Salvation Democratic Front
SNM	Somali National Movement
TPLF	Tigrayan People’s Liberation Front
UIC	Union of Islamic Courts
UN	United Nations
UNOSOM	United Nations Operations in Somalia
USC	United Somali Congress
WSLF	Western Somali Liberation Front

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## Chapter 1: Introduction

For the student of war, the Horn of Africa offers a cornucopia of violence and destruction. It has interstate wars and civil wars; conventional wars fought in trenches with air-to-air combat overhead and irregular wars fought by jihadists and followers of a messianic cult; international military interventions and maritime piracy; genocidal massacres and non-violent popular uprisings.

—Alex De Waal, *The Real Politics of the Horn of Africa: Money, War and the Business of Power*

### Testing the African Way of War in the Horn of Africa

In 2014, Major Paul Godson, an Advanced Military Studies Program student, wrote a monograph that relied on a small sample of two case studies. In this study, Godson forwarded the assertion that the African Way of War is exhaustion.<sup>1</sup> Although this research may have merit, considering the physical size and unmatched diversity of the African continent, it may be more appropriate to first test if trends exist in a given region before defining the way of war for the greater continent. Furthermore, in his exploration of the African Way of War, Goodson relied on a model that classifies ways of war into four categories, limiting the possible outcomes to exhaustion, attrition, annihilation, or maneuver warfare.<sup>2</sup>

Narrowing the focus of research and eliminating the restrictive lens of prescribed ways of war provides the opportunity to test Godson's proposition and develop a more nuanced view of the tendencies that exist within the specified region. With these goals in mind, this monograph will test the validity of the African Way of War as exhaustion within the Horn of Africa, the part of Africa of contemporary interest to the United States, by focusing on the nations of Ethiopia, Eritrea, and Somalia. Finally, rather than proposing an alternate way of war, this study will identify the prominent trends of conflict that exist in the Horn of Africa.

### Contemporary Significance

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<sup>1</sup> Paul Godson, "Exhaustion: The African Way of War," (master's thesis, US Army Command and General Staff College, 2014).

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., 16.

At present, the Horn of Africa is the home to significant ungoverned space, such as southern Somalia and portions of the Ethiopian south, which makes the region an enticing and tenable base for violent non-state adversaries.<sup>3</sup> The increasing terrorist activity in the region, particularly in Somalia, increases the region's interest in the US Global War on Terror. For this reason, this study offers valuable insights into a region of strategic military importance.

The United States maintains a permanent military presence in the Horn of Africa through Combined Joint Task Force – Horn of Africa (CJTF-HOA). Established in 2002, CJTF-HOA provides oversight for military operations in support of the Global War on Terror in the Horn of Africa. CJTF-HOA also directs the development of indigenous defense capability and capacity through military engagement, civil-military operations, and enabling support, among other activities to foster regional security and stability.<sup>4</sup> Despite this enduring mission, the body of knowledge related to this operational environment is comparatively miniscule when contrasted against other regions of military interest, such as Iraq or Afghanistan. The research of this monograph will expand the professional body of knowledge accessible to operational planners and tactical advisors through the exploration of trends of conflict in the Horn of Africa.

Particularly in the case of Somalia, the outlook for future improvement is bleak. The African Union Mission in Somalia recently announced a significant drawdown in security contributions to the nation. They plan to withdraw all 21,000 peacekeepers from Somalia by 2020.<sup>5</sup> Unfortunately, these reports are not a contemporary anomaly; rather it represents the prevailing norms of conflict that have existed in the region for decades.

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<sup>3</sup> Stephen Burgess, “Comparative Challenges in Securing the Horn of Africa and Sahara,” *Comparative Strategy* 34, no. 2 (2015): 202.

<sup>4</sup> US Department of Defense, “CJTF-HOA: About the Command,” accessed November 14, 2017, <http://www.hoa.africom.mil/about>.

<sup>5</sup> USAID, “Horn of Africa – Complex Emergency: Fact Sheet #1,” November 28, 2017, accessed December 7, 2017, [https://www.usaid.gov/sites/default/files/documents/1866/hoa\\_ce\\_fs01\\_11-28-2017.pdf](https://www.usaid.gov/sites/default/files/documents/1866/hoa_ce_fs01_11-28-2017.pdf).

This research is relevant, as it will contribute to the existing body of knowledge on the nature of conflict in a region experiencing increasing US military engagement (Army Warfighting Challenge 1: Develop Situational Understanding). Furthermore, the conclusions will provide US military forces deployed in partnered or advisory roles with context regarding the regional norms of warfare (Army Warfighting Challenge 14: Ensure Interoperability and Operate in a Joint, Inter-organizational and Multinational Environment).<sup>6</sup> Finally, this monograph will set the stage for expanded research to explore the characteristics and trends of warfare in the context of the broader African continent.

## Methodology

This project consists of a longitudinal study of conflict in the Horn of Africa, using the nations of Ethiopia, Eritrea, and Somalia as focal points. The Horn of Africa is a prime candidate for the study of African conflict due to the level of steady-state crisis that grips the region.<sup>7</sup> In a region of complex domestic and interstate conflicts, this research focuses on the nations of Ethiopia, Eritrea, and Somalia. As a narrower sub-region, these states provide sufficient opportunities for research that offers a snapshot of regional warfare. However, excluding neighboring states prevents the establishment of definitive and comprehensive trends of war in the Greater Horn of Africa. Nonetheless, research from this sub-region within the heart of the East Africa creates a foundation to build upon in further research of warfare in the Horn of Africa.

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<sup>6</sup> Army Capabilities Integration Center. "Army Warfighting Challenges," last modified December 22, 2017, accessed January 21, 2018, <http://www.arcic.army.mil/Initiatives/ArmyWarfightingChallenges/>.

<sup>7</sup> 3.3 million Somalians are currently living in a state of crisis due to food shortages. Climate forecasts indicate further famine risk on the immediate horizon. In Kenya, the presidential elections in the fall of 2017 sparked civil violence resulting in fifty-five deaths and many serious injuries. In Ethiopia, the government struggles to manage the second largest refugee population in African, with an additional 100,000 refugees coming from Sudan in 2017 alone. Internal clan conflict and violence along the Ethiopian border with Somalia increased in 2017, exacerbating the refugee problem and increasing regional instability. USAID, "Horn of Africa – Complex Emergency: Fact Sheet #1," November 28, 2017, accessed December 7, 2017, [https://www.usaid.gov/sites/default/files/documents/1866/hoa\\_ce\\_fs01\\_11-28-2017.pdf](https://www.usaid.gov/sites/default/files/documents/1866/hoa_ce_fs01_11-28-2017.pdf).

This project begins with a review of the history of conflict in the region from World War II to present, with emphasis on three case studies to explore regional warfare in detail. The case studies selected for this research are the War of Eritrean Independence, the Somali Civil War, and the Ogaden War. These case studies provide longitudinal perspective and variance in the forms of conflict. The selected case studies offer instances of both interstate and intrastate conflict.

The case studies assessed each of these conflicts to test the validity of exhaustion as the African way of war. Furthermore, the study assessed the cases against each other in search of additional tendencies of regional conflict that may be elevated to enduring trends of conflict in the Horn of Africa. Following the completion of the individual case studies, this project will outline the salient trends that are common to all of the conflicts with which this research interacts.

The selected nations of interest provide the greatest potential for study for several reasons. The three selected nations share not only geographic proximity, but also a closely tied historic experience, allowing separation from the Greater Horn of Africa for focused study. Conversely, narrowing of this study beyond these three nations becomes problematic, as these nations are home to interlinked security problems that the study cannot assess or understand in isolation.<sup>8</sup> Furthermore, the region provides examples of divergent and conflicting ideologies, which create increased propensity for conflict.<sup>9</sup> Finally, this sub-region's history of conflict provides examples of a variety of different types of conflict, to include wars of independence, border wars in which large standing armies face one another in the field, revolutions, and insurgencies. This variety of conflict provides the diversity required to identify the enduring trends of warfare.

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<sup>8</sup> Axel Borchgrevink and Harald Sande Lie, *Regional Conflicts and International Engagement* (Oslo: Norwegian Institute of International Affairs, 2009), 17.

<sup>9</sup> Axel Borchgrevink, "State Strength on the Ethiopian Border: Cross-Border Conflicts in the Horn of Africa," *Internasjonal Politikk* 62, no. 4 (2004): 190.

Despite the narrowed focus of this study, several limitations remain. First, though the case studies focus on major conflicts, one cannot ignore the relative normalcy of conflict within the Horn of Africa. In overlooking the low-level conflicts in the region, this project leaves room for additional depth of research, which may provide greater understanding of warfare in the Horn of Africa. Additionally, by confining the scope of research to only three nations within the greater region, the number of conflicts with which this research interacts is limited in order to allow for sufficient detail. There is the potential for studying conflicts with other nations, particularly Sudan and Kenya, to reveal more about the conduct and causes of wars in the Horn of Africa.

This project intentionally excludes Djibouti from the nations of interest. Though it holds a central geographic position and is the only other nation that shares borders with each of the selected nations of interest, it fails to provide utility for this research due to its historic youth, its relative stability, and lack of autonomy. Originally established as a French sea-base, Djibouti did not gain independence until 1977 and though not immune to conflict, the nation has avoided significant internal strife since its formation.<sup>10</sup> Though Djibouti is currently the host to the CJTF-HOA Headquarters, for the purposes of this research, it offers minimal value.

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<sup>10</sup> Peter Woodward, *Crisis in the Horn of Africa: Politics, Piracy and the Threat of Terror* (New York: I.B. Taurus & Co Ltd, 2013), 158.



Figure 1. Shaded Relief of the Horn of Africa. Source: US Central Intelligence Agency, “Horn of Africa (Shaded Relief) 2009,” *Perry-Casteñeda Library Map Collection*, accessed February 4, 2018, [http://legacy.lib.utexas.edu/maps/africa/txu-oclc-417699531-horn\\_of\\_africa\\_2009.jpg](http://legacy.lib.utexas.edu/maps/africa/txu-oclc-417699531-horn_of_africa_2009.jpg).

## Historical Overview of Nations of Interest

In the precolonial period, Ethiopia dominated the region, gaining prominence as a Christian nation during the reign of the Roman Empire, a period in which many other parts of the Christian world were experiencing significant upheavals.<sup>11</sup> This relative stability made the early Ethiopian empire a refuge for Christians fleeing the Roman Empire, further solidifying the nation's Christian identity.<sup>12</sup> On

<sup>11</sup> Joseph Harris, *Pillars in Ethiopian History* (Washington, DC: Howard University Press, 1974), 85.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 94.

the periphery of the Ethiopian Empire, tribes such as the Masai, the Somalis, and their predecessors, the Galla, survived in an environment of limited water through pastoral practices.<sup>13</sup> Although that period was one of notable peace and prosperity for Ethiopia, territorial expansion and ideological differences gave birth to conflict in the Horn of Africa. Friction between Ethiopia and Somalia reaches back to the fourteenth century, when the first Ethiopians penetrated Somali territory to gain port access and spread Christianity.<sup>14</sup>

The region entered the stage of global prominence in the 1860s when the Suez Canal opened access to the Red Sea, garnering the attention of colonial powers, namely Britain, France, and Italy.<sup>15</sup> These nations were interested in securing the region only insofar as it supported their maritime interests, and they made no meaningful effort to pacify the interior.<sup>16</sup> It was also in this timeframe that the first Muslims, following the teachings of Muhammad 'Abdulle Hassan, began to spread across modern day Somalia.<sup>17</sup> During the colonial period, Italy staked claims in both present-day Eritrea and Somalia, with both British and French colonists carving coastal footholds in Somaliland. Through control of coastal regions, Ethiopia was the sole African nation to resist colonial control.

The onset of World War II thrust the region into the international stage as an early battleground for European powers. With the Italian presence in the Eritrean colony and occupation forces in Ethiopia, the Horn of Africa became an early flashpoint in the British efforts to counter Axis strength and secure adjacent sea routes.<sup>18</sup> Following the Italian defeat, British forces secured the entirety of the Horn of

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<sup>13</sup> Were and Wilson, *East Africa Through a Thousand Years*, 78.

<sup>14</sup> David Dreyer, "Issue Variation and Rivalry Duration: A Comparative Analysis," *Peace & Change* 40, no. 2 (April 2015): 200.

<sup>15</sup> Andrew Gordon, "Time after Time in the Horn of Africa," *The Journal of Military History* 74 (January 2010): 108.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 107.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 110.

<sup>18</sup> Were and Wilson, *East Africa Through a Thousand Years*, 250.

Africa and leveraged colonial forces to augment their efforts elsewhere, providing formative experience to African military leaders. This created lasting impacts on regional societies at the end of the war.<sup>19</sup>

Military leaders, returning from World War II with new perspectives after receiving exposure to Western education and ideals grew increasingly hostile towards colonial powers.<sup>20</sup> Through both internal political action and appeals to the United Nations, by the late 1960s, the nations of the Horn of Africa eventually achieved independence. However, the departing colonial powers assessed that these African states were still at least "a generation" away from being capable of independent administration.<sup>21</sup> The dust settled with Ethiopia standing as an independent nation, with federal control over Eritrea.<sup>22</sup> Furthermore, decolonialization created an independent Somalia, though ethnic Somalis continued to inhabit border regions in Kenya, Ethiopia, and Eritrea.

On the heels of independence, the Horn of Africa became a playground of Cold War conflicts.<sup>23</sup> Facing drought and starvation in the early 1970s, Ethiopia's imperial government fell victim to the rise of the Derg, a violent Marxist regime that consolidated power by force.<sup>24</sup> Despite the country's political alignment, Ethiopia found support through US engagement as a strategic partner to counter the Soviet backed Somali government lead by Siad Barre.<sup>25</sup> By 1976, these relationships proved untenable, and Ethiopia turned towards the Soviet Union for support. The United States adjusted its strategy to focus on engagement with the Somali government, which was seeking to regain control of ethnic Somali occupied

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<sup>19</sup> Were and Wilson, *East Africa Through a Thousand Years*, 250.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 253.

<sup>21</sup> Bill Freund, *The Making of Contemporary Africa* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984), 217.

<sup>22</sup> James Firebrace and Stuart Holland, *Never Kneel Down: Drought, Development and Liberation in Eritrea* (Trenton, NJ: The Red Sea Press, 1985), 20.

<sup>23</sup> Borchgrevink and Lie, *Regional Conflicts and International Engagement*, 21.

<sup>24</sup> Freund, *The Making of Contemporary Africa*, 255.

<sup>25</sup> Woodward, *Crisis in the Horn of Africa*, 32.



territories within the Ethiopian border.<sup>26</sup> In the midst of Cold War hostilities, the Eritrean people, weary of Ethiopian control, saw a window to seek independence and launched their own war of liberation against Ethiopia.<sup>27</sup>

Though Eritrea was eventually successful in achieving independence, the border between Ethiopia and Eritrea remains contested. To this day, a stalemate grips the two nations, though there is the potential for increased conflict as Ethiopia maintains control of territories to which Eritrea perceives they are legally entitled.<sup>28</sup> However, it is worth noting that the currently disputed areas offer little value to either side and bilateral agreements that permit the inhabitants of these regions greater ease of cross-border movement could completely resolve these issues.<sup>29</sup> Stagnation of the Ethiopian and Eritrean border conflict is only marginally disruptive to Ethiopia, which possesses greater economic power with which to manage the cost of maintaining military forces to hold the line. However, across the border in Eritrea, the maintenance of a large standing army is economically troublesome. Eritrean circumstances create a generation of youth with little faith in a national government that forces them into indefinite military service or low-wage civil service occupations<sup>30</sup> Because Eritrea lacks the strength to continue directly confronting Ethiopia to reclaim territory, the country now focuses energy towards supporting Somali insurgents within Ethiopia in an effort to undermine Ethiopian stability.<sup>31</sup>

At present, the nations of Ethiopia, Eritrea, and Somalia exist as ideological opponents of one another, with each organized in a fashion that its neighbors perceive as a threat to their own internal ideology. Despite the abundance of shared history, these ideological differences arise as a significant

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<sup>26</sup> Woodward, *Crisis in the Horn of Africa*, 32-33.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

<sup>28</sup> Lionel Cliffe, "Eritrea 2008: The Unfinished Business of Liberation," *Review of African Political Economy* 35, no. 116 (June 2008): 325.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 326.

<sup>30</sup> Lionel Cliffe, Roy Love, and Kjetil Tronvoll, "Conflict and Peace in the Horn of Africa," *Review of African Political Economy* 36, no. 120 (June 2009): 161.

<sup>31</sup> Cliffe, "Eritrea 2008," 327.

source of friction. The following sections explain these differences within the context of each nation in its present state.

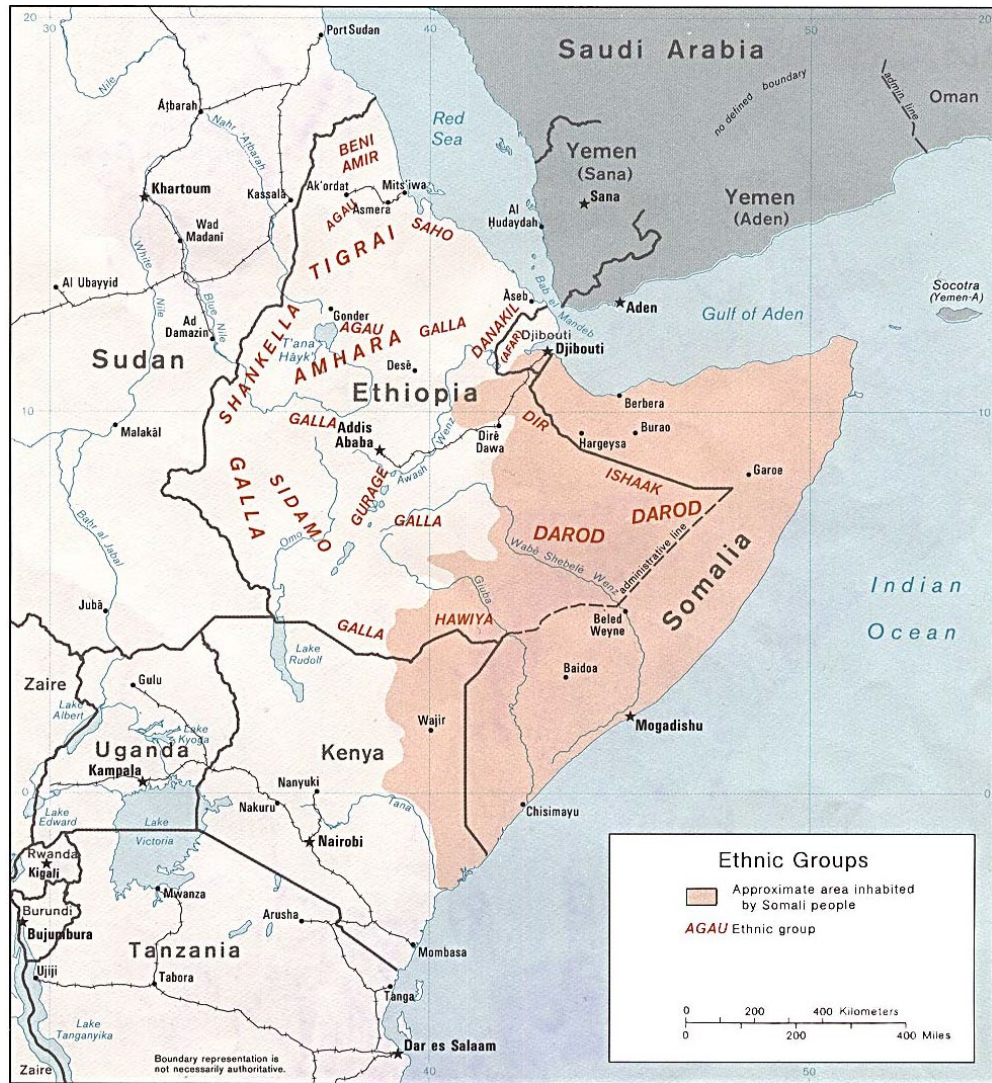


Figure 2. Depiction of the Horn of Africa’s Major Ethnic Groups. Source: US Central Intelligence Agency, “Horn of Africa Ethnic Groups,” *Perry-Casteñeda Library Map Collection*, accessed February 4, 2018, [http://legacy.lib.utexas.edu/maps/africa/horn\\_ethnic\\_80.jpg](http://legacy.lib.utexas.edu/maps/africa/horn_ethnic_80.jpg).

The smallest and the youngest of the nations of interest, Eritrea suffers from enduring border tensions, economic strife, and internal dissent stemming from harsh government controls. With lowlands to the east and west, separated by central highlands, Eritrea enjoys coastal access and elevation changes

that provide climate variance.<sup>32</sup> Unlike other nations in the region, the districts within Eritrea represent a deliberate organization that includes a variety of ethnicities in an effort to promote national identity and contain the population's ethnic pride.<sup>33</sup> This ethnic federalism creates concerns for Ethiopia, which fears the spread of this nationalist ideology.<sup>34</sup> Eritrea's current administration is unelected and maintains power through the prohibition of opposition parties, strict military control, and nearly unlimited conscription for federal service.<sup>35</sup> Eritrea was the early benefactor of Italian development that made the country one of the early frontrunners in industrial modernization; however, the war for independence and the ongoing conflict with Ethiopia severely degraded much of the existing infrastructure.<sup>36</sup> Though the ongoing border disputes create instability for Eritrea, the government leverages this potential for conflict to keep the population focused outward. With the current border dispute still locked in a stalemate, the government remains threatened by armed insurgent groups, some of which enjoy the explicit support of Ethiopia.<sup>37</sup>

Ethiopia is the largest of the nations of interest and represents the most stable nation within the region, though only in relative terms. Ethiopia benefits from its geographic location at the edge of the Rift Valley, which forms a natural barrier between nations to the northwest, while also providing a more stable natural environment. Although only a small fraction of the African continent, Ethiopia claims fifty percent of Africa's land above 2,000 meters, which serves to provide relatively reliable rainfall as well as limiting the spread of diseases like malaria, carried by vectors that cannot thrive at higher altitudes.<sup>38</sup> Four ethno-linguistic parties influence the nation's politics, the most influential of these being the Tigrayan

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<sup>32</sup> Firebrace and Holland, *Never Kneel Down*, 14.

<sup>33</sup> Borgchegrevink, "State Strength on the Ethiopian Border," 178.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 190.

<sup>35</sup> Janes. "Eritrea: Executive Summary," accessed December 2, 2017, <https://janes-ihs-com.lumen.cgsccarl.com/Janes/Display/1303693>.

<sup>36</sup> Michela Wrong, *I Didn't Do It for You* (New York: Harper Perennial, 2005), 66.

<sup>37</sup> Borgchegrevink, "State Strength on the Ethiopian Border," 180.

<sup>38</sup> John Reader, *Africa: The Biography of a Continent* (New York: Vintage Books, 1997), 210-211.

People's Liberation Front (TPLF).<sup>39</sup> Furthermore, their close relation with the United States, China, and others bolsters Ethiopia's status as a regional hegemon.<sup>40</sup> Moreover, Ethiopia boasts continually improving infrastructure and a burgeoning agriculture sector that is a growing part of the Ethiopian economy in the form of the Ethiopian Commodities Exchange.<sup>41</sup> However, unlike neighboring Eritrea, Ethiopia aligns districts with ethnic boundaries, which subvert the government's strength, as groups are more likely to identify as members of their respective ethnic groups rather than holding a national identity.<sup>42</sup> This hobbles the federal government's ability to maintain focus on a national agenda, instead of working to manage divergent regional and ethnic agendas.<sup>43</sup> The federal government's ongoing struggle to provide adequate healthcare to rural districts also agitates ethnic discord, where large numbers of preventable deaths occur due to preventable illnesses like malnutrition and fevers.<sup>44</sup> Furthermore, these ethnic groups are highly interlinked and codependent, yet they are also prone to extreme intra-ethnic violence.<sup>45</sup> This form of state organization places Ethiopia in direct ideological conflict with Eritrea, further increasing the friction between the two nations.

Unlike Ethiopia and Eritrea, which must manage many ethnic groups within their borders, Somalia is one of the most homogenous countries in the world in terms of both ethnicity and religion. Somalia is a clan centered culture, with the majority of the population living as nomads associated with

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<sup>39</sup> Janes. "Ethiopia: Executive Summary," accessed December 2, 2017, <https://janes-ihs-com.lumen.cgsccarl.com/Janes/Display/ethis010-nafr>.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

<sup>41</sup> Alex Perry, *The Rift* (New York: Little, Brown and Company, 2015), 344.

<sup>42</sup> Borgchegrevink, "State Strength on the Ethiopian Border," 175.

<sup>43</sup> Cliffe, Love, and Tronvoll, "Conflict and Peace in the Horn of Africa," 160.

<sup>44</sup> Thomas Ofcansky and LaVerle Berry, *Ethiopia: A Country Study* (Washington, DC: US Government Printing Office, 1993), 137.

<sup>45</sup> Borchgrevink and Lie, *Regional Conflicts and International Engagement*, 8.

one of four primary clans: the Hawiye, the Darod, the Isaaq, and the Dir.<sup>46</sup> Beneath these major clans, there are countless sub-clans to which the members are more loyal as one moves further down the clan hierarchy. Throughout Somalia, the population practices Islam almost uniformly, with the majority of the inhabitants speaking one of several Somali dialects except for isolated communities along the southern coast where residents speak either Swahili or Arabic.<sup>47</sup> In terms of physical geography, Somalia hosts a mix of highlands and plains, with arid, hot weather year-round. This climate has a significant impact on the Somali way of life, dampening the ability to practice large-scale agriculture, instead forcing nomadic pastoral practices to exploit the country's sparse natural resources.<sup>48</sup> With only two major rivers, the Somalis rely largely on wells as a water source during dry periods, making the country prone to drought and famine.<sup>49</sup> In the aftermath of colonialization, territories inhabited by ethnic Somalis were included in the claims of neighboring states, which initially served as a means of internal unification for the state, as the population primarily focused on reunification. However, the population perceived Somali government acceptance of international agreements to end these conflicts for reunification as a betrayal by their government and the internal conflict escalated.<sup>50</sup>

This escalation set the stage for the state failure that remains a reality in Somalia today. At present, the country claims a parliamentary government, though neither the parliament nor the president is capable of stabilizing the country, or even exerting influence beyond the capitol city of Mogadishu. The result is a loosely organized system of semi-autonomous regional governments acting in their own self-

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<sup>46</sup> Robert Gorman, "The Horn of Africa: The Anatomy of the Somali Civil War and Famine," *The Washington Report on Middle East Affairs* 11, no. 8 (1993): 18.

<sup>47</sup> Helen Metz, *Somalia: A Country Study* (Washington, DC: US Government Printing Office, 1993), 94, 104.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, 59.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>50</sup> Woodward, *Crisis in the Horn of Africa*, 38.

interest.<sup>51</sup> The aftermath of the civil war and the following governmental collapse left Somalia with no formal infrastructure. The country lacks its own central banking, is unable to maintain road networks, and provides no permanent communications networks, yet the Somali people adapt and form improvised systems of their own.<sup>52</sup> The lack of health infrastructure in Somalia is particularly problematic. Diseases such as malaria, tuberculosis, leprosy, and several other infections and parasitic diseases are widespread and unchecked.<sup>53</sup> Despite all of this, one overarching element of the Somali narrative endures. Even without the focus a federal agenda, the desire for unification of all territories inhabited by ethnic Somalis remains and continues to pose a threat to neighboring nations, particularly Ethiopia.<sup>54</sup>

## Chapter 2: Literature Review

The literature with which this research interacts includes both history and political science perspectives. From this literature, several major themes arise. Historical accounts provide the necessary background to understand the longstanding influence of ethnic groups and clans on regional politics. Other commentary focuses on explaining the complex causes of regional conflicts to the international community, both for the purposes of providing understanding and for offering proposals for future conflict management and regional development.<sup>55</sup> Whereas the study of history alone is sufficient to test exhaustion as the way of war in the Horn of Africa, the addition of causal analysis creates the ability to synthesize a more comprehensive understanding of current trends of warfare in the region.

The most salient theme in the available literature is that the Horn of Africa is a region of complex and interrelated disputes. Furthermore, the nations within the Horn of Africa all lack the leadership

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<sup>51</sup> Janes. "Somalia: Executive Summary," accessed December 2, 2017, <https://janes-ihs-com.lumen.cgsccarl.com/Janes/Display/1303847>.

<sup>52</sup> Metz, *Somalia*, 133.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, 111.

<sup>54</sup> Borchgrevink, "State Strength on the Ethiopian Border," 190.

<sup>55</sup> Borchgrevink and Lie, *Regional Conflicts and International Engagement*, 37-38.

necessary to negotiate these complex disputes.<sup>56</sup> Internal governance is unable to represent the variety of ethnic groups and clans within their borders, and there is no means of regional governance capable of providing solutions to emergent conflicts.<sup>57</sup> Though other widely accepted works, such as Jacob Herbst's *States and Power in Africa*, posit that African nations do not fight wars over territory, border disputes are among the most common causes for conflict in the Horn of Africa.<sup>58</sup>

Territorial rivalries benefit from both domestic and external political support, which generates the will necessary to continue the struggle for reclamation of disputed areas.<sup>59</sup> Due to the multifaceted value of territory, to include natural resources such as oil, precious metals, or water, as well as cultural and historic value, territorial conflicts in the region have a tendency to be escalatory and enduring in nature.<sup>60</sup> In this manner, nations often elevate territorial conflicts within the Horn to "symbols of national unity" wherein the members of the central government leverage external threats as a means of focusing their populations outward to maintain political control internally.<sup>61</sup> There are numerous examples within the region that demonstrate that leaders who willfully cede territory to neighboring states increase the risk of internal dissent and risk losing their positions of power.<sup>62</sup>

State strength is a driver of the forms of conflict, wherein conflict between two stronger states is more likely to relegate the conflict to follow a bipolar, head-to-head, structure, whereas weaker states are more prone to engage in more complex forms of conflict via proxy warfare.<sup>63</sup> Additionally, lack of state

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<sup>56</sup> Redie Berekateab, *The Horn of Africa* (London: Pluto Press, 2013), 437.

<sup>57</sup> Mengisteab, *The Horn of Africa*, 2.

<sup>58</sup> Jeffrey Herbst, *States and Power in Africa: Comparative Lessons in Authority and Control* (Princeton, NJ: University Press, 2000), 46; Mengisteab, *The Horn of Africa*, 5.

<sup>59</sup> Dreyer, "Issue Variation and Rivalry Duration," 194.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, 197.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, 199.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>63</sup> Borchgrevink, "State Strength on the Ethiopian Border," 192.

strength presents a significant limiting factor for regional stability, as governments lack the resources to project significant power beyond their own capitols.<sup>64</sup> These limited military resources also constrain governments from wider security operations, often leading national leaders to prioritize force employment to offensive operations rather than addressing internal stability.<sup>65</sup>

As noted, the available research provides a wide variety of recommendations for ways to improve the security situation in the Horn of Africa. Recommendations range from directed international involvement to the implementation of comprehensive training programs for soldiers of the region to provide post-military employment opportunities other than military coups.<sup>66</sup> Although these proposals provide valuable context to the study of the region through their discussion of recurring problems, they offer little in identifying unique trends of warfare specific to the Horn of Africa. Therefore, this study will not emphasize or expand upon the research regarding solutions to the regional patterns of conflict.

## Case Study Contribution

Whereas academic interest in the region is vast, the available literature deals largely with the causes of conflict as well as potential solutions and preventative measures that might stabilize the region. This study, however, seeks to synthesize the available literature into a coherent distillation of conflict trends that is accessible to tactical and operational forces engaged within the region in either partnered or advisory roles, providing military leaders with a more accurate representation of the norms of conflict within this African sub-region. These case studies provide value by allowing an evaluation of warfare in the Horn of Africa from a longitudinal perspective, engaging with significant conflicts in a region of persistent conflict at different points throughout several decades. This allows the isolation of those trends of warfare that are indeed enduring cultural norms of combat, rather than trends dictated by time, available resources, and technology. Furthermore, each case study provides information on a different

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<sup>64</sup> Burgess, "Comparative Challenges in Securing the Horn of Africa and Sahara," 205.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, 206.

<sup>66</sup> Diane Chido, *Civilian Skills for African Military Officers to resolve the Infrastructure, Economic Development, and Stability Crisis in Sub-Saharan Africa* (Carlisle, PA: Strategic Studies Institute, 2011), 4.



type of conflict. This approach provides the best method of identifying commonalities between divergent forms of conflict that are more likely than not to manifest in the future regardless of the nature of those engagements. Relying on existing research, these case studies will disprove the notion of exhaustion as the African way of war and contribute to the synthesis of regional patterns of warfare within the Horn of Africa.

## Chapter 2: Case Study 1 – Eritrean War of Independence

### Origins of Conflict

In 1950, the UN established Eritrea as a Federated State of Ethiopia, giving the Ethiopian ruler sovereignty over the federal government while allowing Eritrea control of its own domestic affairs.<sup>67</sup> Though well intentioned, this set the stage for Eritrean dissent as the citizens of Eritrea felt increasingly marginalized by the Ethiopian empire that Eritreans perceived as primarily interested in exploiting the country for its ports. On the heels of federation, political movements for Eritrean independence started to form, drawing international attention. In 1952, a UN resolution laid the groundwork for Eritrean political control. Ethiopian Emperor Haile Selassie accepted the UN resolution and ratified the new Eritrean constitution, but by 1955, agreements regarding Eritrea's domestic autonomy began to dissolve.<sup>68</sup>

By 1961, failure to achieve any political progress towards Eritrean independence eventually gave rise to the creation of the Eritrean Liberation Front (ELF), established with the goals of preserving national identity, safeguarding interests of oppressed Eritrean majority, and leading the push for freedom from Ethiopian control.<sup>69</sup> This motivated Ethiopia to take a more aggressive stance towards asserting control over Eritrea, increasing military presence, which inspired increased Eritrean efforts to dissolve the federation and rise as an independent nation.

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<sup>67</sup> Lionel Cliffe and Basil Davidson, *The Long Struggle of Eritrea for Independence and Constructive Peace* (Trenton, NJ: The Red Sea Press, 1988): 22.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, 27.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, 76.

## Progression of Conflict

The increased presence of Ethiopian forces created a sense of urgency among the Eritreans. This rising sense of urgency combined with failures of political action to bring about Eritrean independence and increasingly prominent internal ideological differences eventually sparked a fracture in the ELF, giving birth to the Eritrean People's Liberation Front (EPLF). This ideological split created a civil war that unfolded alongside the Eritrean fight for independence.<sup>70</sup>

In the initial phases of the conflict, Haile Selasie gradually deployed approximately half of Ethiopia's 45,000 soldiers to Eritrea.<sup>71</sup> Though the Ethiopian forces represent a relatively professional force, with modern equipment and the benefit of US backing, purges weakened the military, particularly in the senior officer ranks, in an effort to protect the regime from a military coup.<sup>72</sup> Conversely, the EPLF fielded largely irregular forces without strong central leadership, motivated and unified by strong sense of national identity. The Eritreans employed these ad hoc forces for positional and conventional combat blended with widespread guerilla strikes.<sup>73</sup>

As Ethiopia struggled to regain control of an increasingly discontent Eritrea, the regime's greatest fears were realized. During this period of instability, the military regime, the Derg, replaced Haile Selasie in 1974. Though outwardly espousing a peaceful resolution to the Eritrean conflict, while simultaneously increasing military action to crush the opposition groups, the Derg created newfound unity between ELF and EPLF.<sup>74</sup> In the following years, the Derg deployed nearly half of the Ethiopian Army (40,000

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<sup>70</sup> Lionel Cliffe and Basil Davidson, *The Long Struggle of Eritrea for Independence and Constructive Peace* (Trenton, NJ: The Red Sea Press, 1988): 77.

<sup>71</sup> James Henze, *Rebels and Separatists in Ethiopia: Regional Resistance to a Marxist Regime* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND, 1986), 36.

<sup>72</sup> Cliffe and Davidson, *The Long Struggle of Eritrea for Independence and Constructive Peace*, 59.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, 77.

<sup>74</sup> Cliffe and Davidson, *The Long Struggle of Eritrea for Independence and Constructive Peace*, 78.

soldiers) and fielded a peasant army of over 100,000 troops<sup>75</sup> These forces massed in Eritrea and began a campaign of severe civilian reprisals in an attempt to quell the separatist movement.<sup>76</sup>

Unfortunately, this action had the opposite effect on the Eritrean psyche. Galvanized by Ethiopian atrocities, liberation groups were able to draw nearly unlimited support from the population and enjoy unchecked freedom of movement throughout the countryside.<sup>77</sup> Furthermore, this action ultimately motivated Eritrean diasporas, which provided the EPLF with monetary donations that allowed the Eritreans to manage the long war with minimal internal resources.<sup>78</sup> Just as the Ethiopian atrocities inspired external action from the diaspora, it also provided the fuel that eventually allowed the EPLF to mobilize a force of nearly 300,000 soldiers.<sup>79</sup>

The growing Eritrean forces also garnered significant attention and support from abroad, with support from Saudi Arabia and the Soviet Union, as well as training cadres from Cuba, Syria, and China that mentored Eritrean forces on guerilla warfare.<sup>80</sup> The Ethiopians, backed by the United States and Israel, among others, continued to struggle to balance the fight against Eritrea with their own internal volatility. The Derg, struggling to maintain domestic control while simultaneously exerting power in Eritrea, fell into the trap of further alienating its own population. This created a rift between its allies, providing opportunities for Eritrea to leverage Ethiopia's internal opposition groups, namely the Tigrayan People's Liberation Front.<sup>81</sup> The Derg's tenuous relationship with the United States, upon which it relied for arms necessary to continue the conflict, checked Ethiopian aggression against Eritrea to a degree.

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<sup>75</sup> Robert Gorman, *Political Conflict on the Horn of Africa* (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1981), 57.

<sup>76</sup> Cliffe and Davidson, *The Long Struggle of Eritrea for Independence and Constructive Peace*, 78.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid.

<sup>78</sup> Tanja Muller, "From Rebel Governance to State Consolidation: Dynamics of Loyalty and the Securitization of the State of Eritrea," *Geoforum* 43 (2012): 794-795.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid., 797.

<sup>80</sup> Henze, *Rebels and Separatists in Ethiopia*, 36.

<sup>81</sup> Henze, *Rebels and Separatists in Ethiopia*, 35-36.

However, the failure to fully prosecute the war effort created further discord among the Derg leadership. This created internal conflict resulting in the execution of several senior military leaders and the desertion of many others, further undermining the regime's legitimacy and capability.<sup>82</sup>

By 1977, the United States, now wary of the Derg's future, refused to provide further support, pushing Ethiopia into the Soviet sphere, marking a significant reshuffling of alliances on both sides of the conflict.<sup>83</sup> However, for the Derg this shift came too late, as during the same period, the TPLF, backed by the EPLF, entered the stage as a real threat to the Derg regime both within the borders of Ethiopia and on the Eritrean front.<sup>84</sup> Through operational coordination and cooperation, the EPLF and the TPLF were able to stress Ethiopian forces, while simultaneously conducting raids and seizures of Ethiopian cities and military garrisons. Though the TPLF rarely held such gains, these offensives taxed the Ethiopian military and forced an unsustainable extension of resources.<sup>85</sup> The partnership between the TPLF and the EPLF was far from perfect, wrought with ideological friction that significantly disrupted cooperation in the mid-1980s, the alliance eventually allowed the TPLF to topple the Derg regime in 1991 and allowed for the long-awaited Eritrean independence.<sup>86</sup>

## Outcome

The overthrow of the Derg regime spelled the end of the Eritrean war for independence, with the nation earning international recognition as a state in 1993.<sup>87</sup> Though the TPLF, as the ruling party of Ethiopia, initially offered support to an independent Eritrea, this honeymoon period proved short lived.

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<sup>82</sup> Gorman, *Political Conflict on the Horn of Africa*, 58.

<sup>83</sup> Cliffe and Davidson, *The Long Struggle of Eritrea for Independence and Constructive Peace*, 79-80.

<sup>84</sup> Michael Woldemariam and Alden Young, "After the Split: Partition, Successor States, and the Dynamics of War in the Horn of Africa," *Journal of Strategic Studies* (2016): 7.

<sup>85</sup> Cliffe and Davidson, *The Long Struggle of Eritrea for Independence and Constructive Peace*, 93.

<sup>86</sup> Woldemariam and Young, "After the Split," 7.

<sup>87</sup> Woldemariam and Young, "After the Split," 8.

By the late 1990s, economic friction and unresolved border disputes once again led the two nations to military confrontation.<sup>88</sup> This conflict remains a point of contention today and has developed into trench style fighting between organized and disciplined forces locked in a stalemate, who augment their efforts to disrupt adversary governments through the support of state sponsored (both overt and covert) proxy groups.<sup>89</sup>

## Conclusion

This case study demonstrates that warfare in this region is more complex than simple exhaustion warfare. Rather than fighting to stalemate, Eritrea leveraged adaptive methods of warfare, ranging from massed forces fighting in pitched battles to guerrilla forces engaging in guerilla warfare to achieve their goal of independence. This conflict is more akin to a war of attrition, to which both sides have adapted and appear prepared to continue well into the near future.<sup>90</sup> Additionally, this case study refutes Herbst's claim that African conflict is not motivated by territorial interest as territory was of primary concern for both the Eritrean's seeking sovereignty and the Ethiopian's seeking to maintain control of the coastal resources. The involvement of the international community in the Eritrean war for independence showcases the transnational tendencies of conflict within the region. Finally, this case study demonstrates the importance of ethnic ties in conflict in the Horn of Africa. Though short-lived, shared family ties between the leaders of both organizations facilitated cooperation between the EPLF and TPLF.<sup>91</sup>

## Chapter 3: Case Study 2 – Ogaden War

### Origins of Conflict

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<sup>88</sup> Ibid., 9.

<sup>89</sup> Borchgrevink, "State Strength on the Ethiopian Border," 178.

<sup>90</sup> Paul Watson, "Arms and Aggression in the Horn of Africa" *Journal of International Affairs* 40, no. 1 (Summer 1986): 174.

<sup>91</sup> Woldemariam and Young, "After the Split," 7.

The conflict for control of the Ogaden region of Ethiopia is rooted in the post-colonial demarcation of international boundaries. The boundaries of the newly independent nations in the Horn of Africa were assigned primarily along historic colonial lines, neglecting the ethnicities of their inhabitants. This left many ethnic Somalis under the control of other nations, including Kenya, Somalia, and Eritrea. In the case of Ethiopia, ethnic Somalis in the Ogaden, forced into Ethiopian borders by British decree, held no representation in the central government and harbored feelings of maltreatment that pushed them towards the Somali state.<sup>92</sup> Since the colonial times, reunification of the Ethnic Somalis and their inhabited territories was the primary focus for Somali leaders. However, in the years immediately following decolonialization, the strength of neighboring states discouraged Somali aggression.<sup>93</sup> From the perspective of the Ethiopian Empire, the idea of a unified Somalia was little more than a subversive social construct, provided by the departing British and Italian colonists to undermine Ethiopian control.<sup>94</sup> Unfortunately, Ethiopia's assessment of the legitimacy of a unified Somali state had no bearing on the political and societal factors pushing the Somalis towards recovering the territories and resources to which they felt entitled due to the presence of ethnic Somalis.

In 1943, the first Somalian political party, the Somali Youth Club (which later became the Somali Youth League), took control of the Somali government, setting out to build a sense of nationalism and reduce the influence of the many divided clans.<sup>95</sup> The keystone of this movement was the unification of ethnic Somali inhabited territories.

The political boundaries dividing ethnic Somalis and neglect from the Ethiopian government created tension for the Somali nationals seeking Greater Somalia, and pushed ethnic Somalis toward

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<sup>92</sup> Tom Farer, *War Clouds on the Horn of Africa: The Widening Storm* (New York: Carnegie Da Capo Press, 1979), 97.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*, 100.

<sup>94</sup> Lee Cassanelli, *Shaping Somalia: Reconstructing the History of a Pastoral People* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1982), 35.

<sup>95</sup> Metz, *Somalia*, xxii.

dissent. This goal, combined with the longstanding fear of Ethiopian expansion, allowed Somalia to create a narrative that cemented itself in the national ethos.<sup>96</sup> By the 1970s, the situation on the Horn reached a point where the Somalis finally assessed that the recovery of the Ogaden was possible. With Soviet backing, the Somali ground forces were rapidly expanding, with nearly twice the number of tanks, armored vehicles, and aircraft than their Ethiopian adversaries.<sup>97</sup> Furthermore, the ongoing war between Ethiopia and Eritrea limited Ethiopia's flexibility should Somalia force them to fight on a second front. By contrast, Somalia was enjoying a period of relative internal stability and popular support for offensive action to seize the Ogaden.<sup>98</sup> The Derg usurpation of Haile Selassie's regime in 1974 served to spark the instability that lit the fire of the Ogaden war.

## Progression of Conflict

The disarray immediately following the Derg takeover, gave rise to opposition groups, such as the Western Somali Liberation Front (WSLF). These groups, focused on throwing off the mantle of Ethiopian control and reuniting with the Somali nation initiated the Ogaden War by attacking Ethiopian outposts and conducting other guerilla actions in 1975. Though the Somali government denied formally supporting the WSLF, by 1977 the group's numbers had reached nearly 50,000 fighters.<sup>99</sup> Once Somalia could no longer deny the commitment of regular forces, the conflict quickly transitioned from a guerilla action to a conventional conflict and Somalia relocated entire mechanized brigades to the front.<sup>100</sup>

Despite overwhelming forces and early victories, the Somali forces faced serious challenges early in the conflict. Chief among these was the shift of international support. Put off by Somali aggression, the

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<sup>96</sup> Cassanelli, *Shaping Somalia*, 200.

<sup>97</sup> Gorman, *Political Conflict on the Horn of Africa*, 66.

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*, 69.

<sup>99</sup> Metz, *Somalia*, 184.

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.*, 185.

Soviet Union opted to shift its support to Ethiopia instead. Though the United States offered to fill this gap for Somalia, the reorganization of allegiances left the Somalis in the field with Soviet equipment that they no longer had the means to maintain.<sup>101</sup> Furthermore, the Americans were less enthusiastic about supporting the Somalis than their Soviet predecessors, significantly undermining the early Somali estimates of their capability to succeed. Both sides suffered severe training shortfalls within their ground forces. The both nations generated ground forces faster than existing institutions could train them and often deployed well before they were fully prepared for combat.<sup>102</sup> However, a significant training disparity existed between the two belligerents' air forces. Though the Somali Air Force enjoyed numerical superiority over Ethiopia's smaller air force engaging in combat on two fronts, the Ethiopian pilots had superior training.<sup>103</sup> Within the first six months of the conventional conflict, the Ethiopian Air Force (EAF) established air superiority over Somali forces and aggressively punished Somali armored formations from the sky. By February of 1978, the EAF reduced Somali forces sufficiently to launch a counteroffensive. Bolstered by Soviet supplied equipment and Cuban ground forces, the Ethiopian Army recaptured all major population centers in the Ogaden, forcing Siad Barre to order the withdrawal of all remaining Somali forces in early March, thereby ending the conventional conflict.<sup>104</sup>

## Present Conditions

Though Ethiopia's triumph over Somalia's conventional units forced their withdrawal from the Ogaden, it did not mark the end of conflict, only a transition. The WSLF continued to enjoy Somali support, with some Somali National Army units remaining in the Ogaden, maintaining guerrilla actions into the 1980s.<sup>105</sup> Furthermore, as Somalia's ability to support the insurgents declined through the 1980s

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<sup>101</sup> Gorman, *Political Conflict on the Horn of Africa*, 69.

<sup>102</sup> *Ibid.*, 67-68.

<sup>103</sup> *Ibid.*, 68.

<sup>104</sup> Metz, *Somalia*, 186.

<sup>105</sup> *Ibid.*



and 90s, Eritrea, seeking to destabilize Ethiopia, picked up the cause of the separatists. Eritrea continues to provide basing, training, and logistical support to groups like the Ogaden National Liberation Front (ONLF) who continue the fight to liberate the Ogaden region.<sup>106</sup> Even though the collapse of the Somali government in 1991 eliminated Somalia's ability to support the separatists, Ethiopia has been unable to end the conflict. In fact, in some ways, the collapse of the Somali state improved conditions for groups like the ONLF, who operate from bases and networks within Somalia's ungoverned spaces to continue their fight against the Ethiopian government.<sup>107</sup>

## Conclusion

The Ogaden War offers another example of how warfare in the Horn of Africa is more complex than simple exhaustion warfare. Even though regular forces are defeated and governments collapse, adaptive combatants persevere. This case study also provides evidence of the preeminence of historical perspectives on conflicts within the region. The long-held Somali enmity towards Ethiopia was a driving factor in their offense, and played a major role in their decision to go to war.<sup>108</sup> Additionally, this conflict demonstrates the complex relationship between territory and ethnicity within the region. Whereas that recovery of the Ogaden certainly offered Somalia resource benefits in terms of additional pastoral lands, this was not a significant part of their national narrative. Instead, the government focused on the reunification of ethnic Somalis to justify their aggression and win the support of the population.<sup>109</sup> Finally, this case study highlights the importance of international players in conflict in the Horn of Africa. Though other conflicts bring other nations to the table, the Ogaden War demonstrates the incredible influence these players have on prewar analysis as well as the conflict's outcome. Somalia started the

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<sup>106</sup> Borchgrevink, "State Strength on the Ethiopian Border," 183.

<sup>107</sup> Ibid., 184.

<sup>108</sup> Gorman, *Political Conflict on the Horn of Africa*, 69.

<sup>109</sup> Ibid.

Ogaden War with Soviet backing, a relationship it expected to endure. However, losing the support of the Soviet Union, in exchange for American support, which involved more words than deeds, severely degraded the Somali ability to maintain momentum.<sup>110</sup> Moreover, the transition of support proved to be a boom for Ethiopia, as the Soviet's aggressive military assistance allowed them to overcome logistical challenges and training shortfalls.<sup>111</sup>

## Chapter 4: Case Study 3 – Somali Civil War

### Origins of Conflict

Somalia's defeat in the Ogaden War proved catastrophic for the nation. The aftermath of the conflict left the Somali military without essential equipment or cohesive units. Though the United States still offered aid to the Somali government, it was hesitant to open the purse strings of military aid due to fears that money might flow into the hands of guerrilla forces and reignite the conflict.<sup>112</sup> Beyond materiel shortfalls, the sound defeat at the hands of Ethiopia also created dissention among the remaining Somali officers, many of whom abandoned the regime and formed opposition groups.<sup>113</sup> Furthermore, the Ogaden War generated hundreds of thousands of refugees, which increased the strain on Somalia's floundering economy, driving further instability in a region still reeling from war and famine.<sup>114</sup> The Somali leader, Siad Barre, still attempting to remain in power through stoking clan rivalries, resorted to increasingly heavy-handed administration.<sup>115</sup> This environment facilitated the rise of opposition groups that ultimately moved to topple the Barre regime.

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<sup>110</sup> Ibid., 71.

<sup>111</sup> Ibid., 72.

<sup>112</sup> Ibid., 209.

<sup>113</sup> James Fergusson, *The World's Most Dangerous Place* (Boston: Da Capo Press, 2013), 159.

<sup>114</sup> Gorman, *Political Conflict on the Horn of Africa*, 211.

<sup>115</sup> Metz, *Somalia*, 187.

## Progression of Conflict

Immediately following defeat in the Ogaden, movements to remove the Barre regime took form. Opposition groups developed along clan lines, as marginalized parties grew increasingly disaffected with a regime that favored only Said Barre's own clan, the Darod Mareehaan.<sup>116</sup> Groups such as the Hawiye United Somali Congress (USC), the Darod Marjeerteen Somali Salvation Democratic Front (SSDF), and the Isaaq Somali National Movement (SNM) formed to oust Siad Barre. Of these groups, Barre assessed the SNM as the greatest threat, as the group benefitted from overt Ethiopian support.<sup>117</sup>

In 1988, seeking to reduce the pressure from opposition groups, Siad Barre entered into an agreement with the Ethiopian Derg, promising to cease efforts to secure the Ogaden on the condition that Ethiopia cut ties with the SNM.<sup>118</sup> Though this agreement proved beneficial to Ethiopia, allowing them to concentrate forces on the Eritrean problem, for Somalia it marked the tipping point for the regime and the nation as a whole. For the citizens of Somalia, this move effectively killed the national dream of a pan-Somali state and further eroded the people's toleration of Said Barre's regime. Furthermore, Barre was unable to control the SNA despite the withdrawal of Ethiopian support.<sup>119</sup> This disenfranchisement led to the rising influence of opposition groups and the marginalization of the reigning party as it poured its scant remaining resources into holding on to power. Even more problematic for Siad Barre was the Western response to his aggressive efforts to maintain control. Unwilling to cosign the Somali government's escalating violence, the United States withdrew all of its support to Somalia in 1989.<sup>120</sup>

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<sup>116</sup> Ibid., 187.

<sup>117</sup> Woodward, *Crisis on the Horn of Africa*, 37-38; Fergusson, *The World's Most Dangerous Place*, 159.

<sup>118</sup> Woodward, *Crisis in the Horn of Africa*, 38.

<sup>119</sup> Woodward, *Crisis in the Horn of Africa*, 38.

<sup>120</sup> Martin Merideth, *The Fate of Africa: A History of the Continent since Independence* (New York: Public Affairs, 2011), 469.

By 1991, the erosion of the Barre regime's power was nearly complete. The USC, under the leadership of General Muhammed Farrah Aideed, controlled the country immediately surrounding the capital of Mogadishu, forcing Siad Barre to flee the country.<sup>121</sup> Upon Barre's flight, the remnants of the Somali military completely disintegrated, leaving the remaining weapons and equipment for the taking, which competing clan leaders willingly seized for their own purposes.<sup>122</sup> Internal fighting between USC leaders transformed the capital of Mogadishu into the central battleground, while other groups returned to their clan territories to secure their family interests. This created a system of ad-hoc regions with the SNM reforming Somaliland in the north, the SSDF holding the eastern region of Puntland, with continued clashes over control of Mogadishu and the southern regions.<sup>123</sup>

Following the collapse of the Somali state, the nation experienced several years of severe drought. Food became a source of power and warlords of rival factions fought for control of the remaining fertile land, destroying farms and dislocating farmers. Those crops that reached harvest were help captive, as attempting to move food across the country without the risk of looting or destruction at the hands of rival militias, thereby creating a "man-made famine."<sup>124</sup> By 1992, the situation was so dire, the UN felt obligated to intervene. In that same year, peacekeepers, under the banner of United Nations Operations in Somalia (UNOSOM) began flowing into the country. Initially focused on humanitarian relief and peacekeeping operations, the UN forces failed to understand the environment, finding that access to areas that needed the most help required making deals with warlords, inadvertently pouring cash into the hands of exploitative leaders and fanning the flames of conflict.<sup>125</sup> The UN operations involved outside forces from across Africa, as well as others from countries such as Pakistan, Australia and the

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<sup>121</sup> Metz, *Somalia*, 187.

<sup>122</sup> Merideth, *The Fate of Africa*, 470.

<sup>123</sup> Ibid.

<sup>124</sup> Mary Harper, *Getting Somalia Wrong: Faith, War and Hope in a Shattered State* (New York: Zed Books, 2012), 59.

<sup>125</sup> Ibid., 63.

United States. At its peak, the UNOSOM mission swelled to a force of 30,000 peacekeepers, making it the largest UN operation to date.<sup>126</sup> With peacekeeping operations stymied by this non-permissive environment, at the close of 1992, the UN opted to alter the UNOSOM mandate to include offensive operations.<sup>127</sup> These operations, like their stability-oriented frontrunner, proved fruitless, with American forces departing by 1994 after an embarrassing failure in the First Battle of Mogadishu in 1993.<sup>128</sup> In 1995, the remaining UNOSOM forces withdrew from Somalia, marking the international community's failure to restore stability to Somalia.<sup>129</sup>

By the early 2000s, the only semblance of government in Somalia was a loose affiliation of sharia courts, which became the Union of Islamic Courts (UIC), enforcing strict Islamic law in Mogadishu and surrounding areas in the southern region of the country. However, like other major groups, clan identities eventually undermined the UIC's authority, causing yet another split within the controlling faction.<sup>130</sup> One of the UIC's offshoots, Al Shabaab, started consolidating power in the region in 2004, gaining control over the majority of southern Somalia by 2006.<sup>131</sup> The group demonstrated an impressive talent for appealing to diasporas for funding and support, permitting its rapid growth.<sup>132</sup> Though the African Union deployed troops to counter this threat and rebuild Somali capacity, their efforts were unable to prevent Al Shabaab's growth. Leveraging famine to control the Somali population, and garnering the support of Al

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<sup>126</sup> Ibid., 60.

<sup>127</sup> Ibid.

<sup>128</sup> Ibid., 61.

<sup>129</sup> Lester Brune, *The United States and Post-Cold War Interventions: Bush and Clinton in Somalia, Haiti, and Bosnia, 1992-1998* (Claremont, CA: Regina Books, 1999), 33.

<sup>130</sup> Harper, *Getting Somalia Wrong*, 41.

<sup>131</sup> Peter Tase, "Terrorism, War and Conflict, an Analysis into the Horn of Africa – Al Shabaab in Somalia: US and UN Efforts to Reduce Violence," *Academicus International Scientific Journal* no. 7 (2013): 27-28.

<sup>132</sup> Burgess, "Comparative Challenges in Securing the Horn of Africa and Sahara," 208.

Qaeda, Al Shabaab demonstrated it had grown into an international threat, launching successful attacks in Uganda and Kenya in 2010 and 2013, respectively.<sup>133</sup>

Though African Union forces, deployed as part of African Union Mission to Somalia (AMISOM), were able to wrest control of major population centers such as Mogadishu and Kismayo from Al Shabaab control, they are presently unable to contain the organization.<sup>134</sup> The UN is again engaged in capacity-building efforts in the country, but the situation remains tenuous.

## Present Conditions

At present, Somalia exists as a system of four improvised states with Somaliland in the northern region, Puntland to the east, an infantile government controlling Mogadishu, and Al Shabaab still operating with impunity in the southern parts of the country.<sup>135</sup> Conflicts between these regions, as well as more unstable localities continue. Neighboring states, namely Kenya, Ethiopia, and Eritrea are engaged in building the capacity of the government of Mogadishu, though under the table they also offer support to lesser factions where they perceive instability to be in their own self-interest. However, despite the ongoing instability, many Somalis have found innovative ways to achieve economic growth, with businessmen and pastoral farmers managing to carve out "standards of living that are equal or superior to many other African nations."<sup>136</sup>

## Conclusion

This final case study offered yet another example of the narrative of exhaustion warfare as the norm on the African continent. The Somalia National Army was not defeated through exhausted rather it

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<sup>133</sup> Paul Roitsch, "Capacity and Competence: Full-Spectrum Counterinsurgency in the Horn of Africa," *Small Wars & Insurgencies* 26, no. 3 (2015): 498.

<sup>134</sup> *Ibid.*, 499.

<sup>135</sup> Harper, *Getting Somalia Wrong*, 111.

<sup>136</sup> Ken Menkhuas, *Somalia: State Collapse and the Threat of Terrorism* (New York: Routledge, 2005), 56.

completely ceased to exist. In this sense, it may be more appropriate to explain this defeat as annihilation through political and societal upheaval. Furthermore, the ongoing Somali problem demonstrates the transnational nature of conflict in the Horn of Africa. International players influenced the downfall of Siad Barre's regime through neglect or through support of opposition groups and remained engaged, even in the face of great defeat. Neighboring countries appear as key stakeholders throughout the collapse of the Somali government and beyond and remain so today. Finally, the consistently fluid nature of conflict, wherein combatants seize territory through the deployment of massed, though irregular, forces, then transition to guerilla tactics such as bombings and assassinations, demonstrates that attempting to codify a way of war is a fool's errand.

## Chapter 5: Conclusion

### Trends of War on the Horn of Africa

This research demonstrated the imprudence of presenting exhaustion as the African way of war. If nothing else, the provided case studies demonstrated the enduring nature of conflict in the Horn of Africa. Combatants will shift between forms of warfare as necessary rather than seek a negotiated settlement. However, though the proposed way of war fails to stand up to scrutiny in this region, this project revealed several other salient trends of conflict in the Horn of Africa. First, proxy warfare appears to be a regional norm, appearing in each of the provided case studies. Second, is the importance of territory in conflicts in this region. Finally, conflicts in the Horn of Africa are a lightning rod for international engagement.

### Proxy Warfare and Mutual Interference

One of the primary means leveraged to avoid exhaustion warfare in the Horn of Africa is proxy warfare. Rather than regularly committing professional forces to direct engagements, the residents of the Horn have mastered the art of influencing internal actors to disrupt rival states. Also known as mutual interference, this practice creates a highly intertwined dynamic between states that creates a prolonging

effect on both internal and external conflicts.<sup>137</sup> Whereas this tactic often provides short-term benefits to the proxy's sponsor, these groups are difficult to control and often create unintended problems for the host, either creating effects within the host's border or opposing other sponsored groups.<sup>138</sup>

## Territorially Focused

Colonial powers established borders in the Horn of Africa without regard to ethnicity or cultural heritage. This created the seeds for territorial conflict as nations seek to reclaim ethnic and tribal ties. The divergent ideologies of the nations on the Horn of Africa further complicate territorial claims, as inhabitants of border regions often see the ideology of the neighboring state as more appealing or promising, encouraging them to take arms against the reigning government. Furthermore, environmental factors increase the value of territory, particularly for the drought prone coastal nations of Somalia and Eritrea. When the threat of famine looms, the additional pastoral lands in Ethiopia become a valuable asset worth fighting for. All of the nations examined in this study demonstrated the value of narrative, using conflict over territorial claims to unify the population, focusing them on outward goals rather than looking inward at their own governments' shortcomings. Territory within the Horn of Africa possesses both physical and moral value and creates conflicts that tend towards escalation.<sup>139</sup>

## International Interest

Since the first colonists arrived, the world has been unable to turn its attention from the Horn of Africa. Considering its strategic location overlooking the Gulf of Aden, world powers cannot ignore the Horn of Africa. Whether through generating strength through diasporas, international support, or direct intervention, conflict on the Horn of Africa regularly includes transnational elements. Therefore, understanding conflict in this region requires assessment within the global context. Though historically,

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<sup>137</sup> Borchgrevink, "State Strength on the Ethiopian Border," 172.

<sup>138</sup> Ibid.

<sup>139</sup> Dreyer, "Issue Variation and Rivalry Duration," 197.



conflicts in this region drew outside actors in, the evolution of conflict continues. With assistance from other international terrorist organizations like Al Qaeda, Al Shabaab has demonstrated its ability to transform itself from a local terror group to a major governing entity capable of carrying out attacks far beyond the confines of the Horn of Africa. This trend is unlikely to change in the future, as the Horn of Africa remains a focal point for both the AU and the UN.

## Relevance to Today's Military Professional

Upon establishing trends of warfare in the Horn of Africa based on these case studies, several implications for US forces operating in the Horn of Africa arise. First and foremost, is the importance of context. For the operational planner, any attempt to understand or explain the operating environment must include an assessment of the country of interest within its larger geographic and historical context. As the case studies demonstrate, the intertwined relationships between the nations of the Horn of Africa. Any assessment constructed based on a single country in isolation is incomplete at best. Planners must seek to understand the complex relationship the nation of interest shares with its regional neighbors and the larger international community. Additionally, planners must balance this "big picture" perspective with an understanding of the interests and relationships of the ethnic and clan sub-communities within the regional system.

Furthermore, planners must avoid the practice of assessing the environment solely on present conditions. The residents of the Horn of Africa, and the larger African continent, possess a deep history that contributes to their social construct and shapes the way they view themselves and their neighbors. Planners cannot understand actions within this region outside of this historical context. US forces must seek to identify the enduring cultural narratives at work within the region in order to prevent a tone-deaf response that falls short of the intended aims.

Finally, planners must take account of their own biases when planning begins. Though a tendency towards a condescending view of the governments and peoples within the region exists, such perspective

is counterproductive. Military leaders should cast a wary eye towards previously established “ways of war,” particularly in a region as dynamic as the Horn of Africa. Placing too much emphasis on broad, overarching, and prescriptive models creates a risk of “theory-induced blindness,” wherein planners become attached to a particular lens and are unable to perceive the divergent reality unfolding around them.<sup>140</sup> For example, implicit acceptance of exhaustion of the African way of war might lead to a cascade of invalid assumptions for a military organization operating in the Horn of Africa. From a military standpoint, this project's case studies reveal that the people of this region are highly adaptive in combat and willing to persevere regardless of the circumstances. In this light, planners may find more utility in fostering the region's existing cultural pride rather than attempting to reinvent the wheel in favor of a construct more familiar to the planners.

## Opportunities for Further Research

Whereas this project revealed trends of conflict within the Ethiopia, Eritrea, and Somalia, future research should endeavor to test these trends within the context of the Greater Horn of Africa, including conflicts involving nations such as Sudan, South Sudan and Kenya. Additionally, further studies of other regions of the continent to test for the presence of these trends and identify other distinguishable trends of conflict will contribute to the body of knowledge regarding warfare on the African continent. Furthermore, as this project demonstrated a region of evolving methods of conflicts, future scholars should be revisit and reassess these findings over time to confirm these trends endure and identify other emergent tendencies. Africa is among the largest and most diverse continents and is therefore likely to provide widely divergent trends of conflict, which will only grow more important to US interests as the continent's population grows and international interest continues to develop.

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<sup>140</sup> Daniel Kahneman, *Thinking Fast and Slow* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2011), 276.



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