14 The big elephant in the room

The meddling and machinations of IGAD and Ethiopia in Somalia

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Introduction

The Horn of Africa is probably the most challenging region for close cooperation between neighbouring states due to various lateral layers of prolonged armed conflicts, continual political contestations, and chronic intra- and inter-state military confrontations. Sudanese scholar Abdelwahab El-Affendi has boldly asserted that “the Horn of Africa is not the best area for testing the potential of regional co-operation” (El-Affendi, 2001, 581). Relations between Horn of Africa countries have been overshadowed by long-term conflicts between Somalia and Ethiopia on one hand and Eritrea and Ethiopia on the other. Any cooperation between the Horn countries has been particularly and profoundly hampered by the fact that Somalia remains a battleground for Ethiopia and Eritrea. Only when those two countries come to a peaceful resolution of their differences can peace return to Somalia and elsewhere in the sub-region. Ethiopia, with the assistance of the United States (US), acts as a regional partner in the Western project of the “war on terror.” In contrast, Eritrea holds another perspective shared by Egypt and several Arab states, based on their view of Somalia’s geostrategic value as a potential partner in the Horn regarding resistance to Ethiopian domination. Not only Ethiopia, Eritrea, and Egypt, but also Djibouti, Kenya, and Sudan have followed Somalia in applying closer scrutiny to protecting their security and strategic interests in the Horn.

Ever since the collapse of the central Somali state structures in 1991, the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) has played a critical role in the reconciliation processes in post-Cold War Somalia. With mixed feelings about whether it is a hindrance or offers help (Healy, 2015), IGAD’s involvement has been politicised and is popularly considered locally as having much more destructive long-term political consequences than any other regional organisation. Previous scholarship has not sufficiently shown how the expansion of IGAD has contributed to the regional political projects and security strategies concerning Somalia. Some have examined IGAD’s role in the Sudan and South Sudan (Abbink, 2003; Apuuli, 2015; Tekle, 2010), as well as its role in Somalia and Sudan (Malito and Ylönen, 2013; Murithi, 2009). As in West Africa, where Nigeria played a pivotal role in the Economic Community of West African States

(ECOWAS) military mission in Liberia, Ethiopia laboured to lead the IGAD political (and military) project in Somalia. Even as Nigeria, blamed for its hegemonic interest in ECOWAS (Adibe, 1997; Aning, 1999; Ofuatey-Kodjoe, 1994), has shaped the course of ECOWAS's activities, Ethiopia endeavoured to own the IGAD mission in the Horn.

IGAD and Ethiopia became two intertwined political power machines and the organisation has become an instrument for Ethiopian rulers to resolve their security concerns in Somalia and secure predominance in the Horn. Under the banner of IGAD, Ethiopian rulers have heavily influenced – and continue to influence – the regional political space to by seeking to establish remote-controlled states in Somalia and Eritrea. During the Cold War, the role of IGAD in Somalia was limited to the development sector, but since the total collapse of a unitary national Somali state it has broadened its mandate and added a political component. Although the name of IGAD has not been used in the Ethiopian military interventions in Somalia, Ethiopia has managed to project itself as a hegemonic regional power through IGAD. The pursuit of hegemonic regional power in the Horn by current rulers in Ethiopia is intensely contested by Eritrea, Somalia, and Sudan. Examining Ethiopian foreign policies since the regime of Mengistu Halie Mariam illustrates how IGAD as a regional organisation has become useful to Ethiopian rulers in legitimising their involvement in peacebuilding projects in Somalia and South Sudan. Reflecting on international relations and political science theories that suggest “shared sovereignty” (Krasner, 2004, 2005) is necessary for the reconstruction of post-conflict countries; it is not unusual that the relationship between Somalia and IGAD has recently transformed into a patron–client relationship.

This chapter addresses the changing relationship between Somalia and IGAD from a new perspective. It seeks to understand the interplay between the politics of peacebuilding, the lenses of regional power dynamics from which the notion of hegemony cannot be taken out. The chapter approaches the concept of shared sovereignty from a regional perspective, defining the IGAD mission in Somalia as a politically contingent hegemony marred by contestation and conflict that serves Ethiopian interests in Somalia. To unpack these complex dynamics beyond IGAD as an organisation, the chapter critically evaluates how Ethiopian interests in Somalia have overtaken the IGAD political project in the country. The chapter traces the unexplored issue of Ethiopia as a regional actor and its intrusion into Somali affairs through an empirical analysis, using the politics of peacebuilding in the IGAD regional organisation as a lens through which it is possible to approach the question of hegemonic power in post-Cold War Africa (Bamfo, 2010; Seifert, 2008). By specifically analysing the regional political dynamics, new insights into the nature of recurrent conflict in the Horn are gained by assessing the extent to which Ethiopia remains a riparian state which cannot be isolated from the auspices of IGAD. Drawing on ethnographic historical research in Somalia, as well as interviews with senior Somali government officials and IGAD sources, this chapter is the product of more than two decades of research and writing in and on Somalia.¹

Ethiopianisation in the name of IGAD

With the immediacy and imminent adoption of an instrument of power, what do we consider “regional power” to mean in the Horn of Africa sub-region? Given the long territorial disputes within the region (Keller, 1991; Yuusuf, 1976), Kenya and Ethiopia have succeeded in advancing their interests more than other countries, despite their contested neighbourliness with Somalia. Each has preserved – and continues to preserve – its own interest in Somalia peace projects through close cooperation, to lead such processes for its own benefit. The two common factors and features of recent Somali reconciliation projects are internal politics and external intervention. As Apuuli (2010, 277) observed,

every peace initiative in Somalia has been carefully watched by immediate and far-afield neighbours to make sure that any Somali administration that emerges does not damage their interests. Efforts to rebuild the Somali state have thus been marred by both brutal internal opportunists and external actors who can act as spoilers.

It was within this contrapuntal context that, in June 1991, Djibouti organised the first reconciliation conference for Somalia without involving other Horn of Africa countries. Barely two years later, Ethiopia, in partnership with the United Nations (UN) and the Organisation of African Unity (OAU), hosted another conference for Somalia, with the involvement of the international community. In the name of IGAD, Ethiopia has organised – and continues to organise – numerous peace conferences for Somalia and for Sudan and South Sudan.

The existence of IGAD, albeit remote from regional political dynamics, helped Ethiopia ensure the protection for its interests in Somalia. In the 1980s, IGAD was formed at a time Somalia was going through a brutal (un)civil war between the military regime and armed resistance groups. IGAD was not initially an effective organisation capable of politically and militarily intervening in Somalia when the central state disintegrated in 1991. The end of the Cold War led to a change of military regimes in Somalia and Ethiopia. Both countries underwent a process of political upheaval: the dictatorial regimes of Mohamed Siad Barre and Mengistu were forcefully overthrown in 1991, in January and May, respectively. The political transition that Ethiopia went through was profoundly distinct from Somalia's: while Ethiopia was “saved” by the West (Orizio and Bardoni, 2001), in Somalia, a seamless progression of violence followed Siad Barre's ouster (Ingiriis, 2016a). Like Liberia, Somalia became a “forgotten country” fighting a “forgotten war” (*West Africa*, cited in Aning, 1999, 336). This meant that, where Ethiopia evaded outside interference in maintaining its statehood, Somalia was drawn into a long process of peacebuilding and state-building projects initiated from outside. The US assisted in tense transitional peacebuilding processes in Ethiopia, which saw the safe departure of Mengistu from Addis Ababa. The US never attempted to facilitate mediation between Siad Barre and the Somali armed movements, as it had done during the negotiation period between Mengistu and Ethiopian armed groups.

In 1992, four years prior to the restructuring of IGAD as a reformed organisation, Ethiopia convinced both the OAU and IGAD to designate the new authorities in Addis Ababa as the main coordinators of the Somali peace processes (Xildhiban Publications, 2012).² In addition, Ethiopia obtained the approval of the regional heads of states to be the chair of the Horn of Africa Standing Committee on Somalia. This move “formed the basis of Ethiopia’s mandate to broker peace in Somalia” (Apuuli, 2010, 263). The Ethiopian rulers emerged immediately as mediators between the non-state Somali armed groups. IGAD was instrumentalised to apply in practice the long-held Ethiopian foreign policy action plan for Somalia set in motion during the Haile Selassie years and violently pursued during the Mengistu regime. In other words, IGAD as an organisation formed the basis of and became a political platform for Ethiopia to advance its interests in Somalia (Elmi and Barise, 2006). While IGAD’s efforts at peacebuilding in Somalia were superseded by the Ethiopian agenda, IGAD policymakers failed to articulate a clear and coherent policy of their own for Somalia. Instead, they adopted the Ethiopian policy towards Somalia to deal with the ongoing armed conflict in the country. Although Ethiopia was part of the Somali political conflicts well before the fall of the Siad Barre regime (Lewis, 1987), by the mid-1990s it had become the main engine driving the Somali peace processes in a direction beneficial to its own security interests. To entrust Ethiopia with the restoration of peace to Somalia was seen by many Somalis, echoing the animosity between the two countries, as entrusting a hyena with the task of guarding the sheep (Field interviews, Mogadishu, April–July, 2016).

IGAD: tool or electricity?

From early on, IGAD adopted the Ethiopian policy of dealing with the leaders of Somali political factions – the so-called “warlords” – as state actors. There were more factional contenders for power in Somalia than in the rest of the Horn. Rather than isolating them, IGAD accommodated these factional leaders and recognised them as the official representatives of the Somali people, based on the fact that many had been army generals and former members of the Siad Barre regime (Ingiriis, 2016). Ethiopia, by this time, had nothing much to worry about, as it had full control of IGAD. As one Somali official aptly put it, “IGAD has always been an envelope of Ethiopia” and “Ethiopia is the elephant behind IGAD” (Interview with a Somali government official, A. R. B., Mogadishu, 2 July 2016). In 1996, Ethiopia used IGAD’s auspices to authorise itself as the only caretaker for peace and reconciliation in Somalia. A caretaker, Ethiopia would not allow any other power (e.g. Egypt) to enter the Somali political landscape to play a pivotal role as a patron in the Somali peace processes or act as a benevolent parent. In January 1997, at the Ethiopian resort town of Sodere, Somali political factions formed the National Salvation Council (NSC), which was tasked with the establishment of a transitional central authority in Somalia. The NSC was discredited because it was remote-controlled by Ethiopia, and operated out of Addis Ababa, which led many Somalis to consider it as an “instrument of Ethiopia” (Apuuli, 2010,

263). The formation of this council was the first success of the Ethiopian rulers in exerting their influence on Somali politics under IGAD auspices. This was not the case in Eritrea, as Ethiopia did not find the time to use IGAD against the regime of Isaias Afewerki after the outbreak of war in 1998.³ Reconciliation conferences for Somalia held in Addis Ababa since the 1990s have always been structured through the faction-based peace process. At no point has Ethiopia facilitated the formation of a Somali government – whether transitional or interim – to be established in Addis Ababa. Indeed, all Somali governments formed outside the country have been announced in either Djibouti or Kenya.

Somalia was proving to be a real albatross around everyone's neck by the late 1990s and remained a disconcerting reminder to the UN and other international bodies, due in large part to the failure of most – if not all – the numerous (international and regional) peace and reconciliation attempts. In September 1999, newly elected President of Djibouti Ismail Omar Geelle went to the UN General Assembly to urge the world not to abandon Somalia (Anonymous, 2002; Lortan, 2000). Geelle's historic speech revived the lost confidence that Somalis could ever come together to reconcile by themselves. In the summer of 2000, in the small hot town of Arte, the Djibouti government hosted a well-attended peace and reconciliation conference for Somalia – or, as two Somali scholars observed, the largest Somali-owned peace conference ever to have been held (Elmi and Barise, 2006, 40; Anonymous, 2002; Lortan, 2000). The Arte Conference was a watershed and game changer in Somali politics. With the direct advice of Somali intellectuals and indirect advice from non-Somali academics such as British anthropologist Ioan M. Lewis (Lewis and Mayall, 1995), Djibouti mobilised traditional clan leaders to form a government of Somalia by selecting a national parliament, which would in turn elect a president.⁴ Although this alternative approach of involving civil society groups in Somali peace conferences was first attempted by Ambassador Mohamed Sahnoun, the Special Representative of the Secretary-General of the United Nations to Somalia (Sahnoun 1994), Djibouti adopted it with a particularly rigorous attempt at building peace without armed factions.

The election of Abdikassim Salaad Hassan as the first internationally recognised president of Somalia sparked anxiety in the inner circles of the Ethiopian regime, unlike in other IGAD member states – Djibouti, Eritrea, Kenya, Sudan, and Uganda – which welcomed the outcome (AFP 2000a, 2000b). Ethiopia considered Salaad and the new government members as remnants of the former Siad Barre regime intent on renewing the idea of Greater Somalia (Pan-Somalism). To discredit the new Somali leadership in the eyes of the suspicious US authorities, the Ethiopian authorities branded Salaad and his government members as "Islamists," adamant they would align with Al-Itihaad Al-Islamiya, with whom they shared the common Somali belief that the Somali state was incomplete; which is to say, there are lost Somali lands occupied by Ethiopia and Kenya. Salaad and his government unwittingly substantiated Ethiopian apprehension by using nationalist rhetoric, reminding Meles Zenawi and other Ethiopian rulers of the fact that Somalia belongs to all Somalis. Like Eritrea's Afewerki, Zenawi attended Salaad's inauguration ceremony in Djibouti, but his facial expression,

as shown on Djibouti television (RTD), suggested that Zenawi was becoming increasingly unhappy about the new development. Amid growing suspicion, Salaad initially attempted to appease Ethiopia and asked his presidential rival Ambassador Abdullahi Ahmed Addow to lead a delegation of high-ranking officials, including presidential adviser Col. Omar Haashi Aden and then ambassador to Egypt Abdullahi Hassan Mohamoud, to travel to Addis Ababa to persuade Zenawi and his regime to maintain good relations with the new Somali government. In a memorandum of understanding signed at the end of meetings with the Somali delegation, the Ethiopian authorities included a clause pledging that they would continue supporting the Somali political factions. This was a clear sign that Ambassador Addow's diplomatic efforts had not borne fruit. In an interview between the author and Salaad in his makeshift presidential palace near the former Banaadir Secondary School in the capital Mogadishu, soon after the delegation had returned, Salaad insisted, with a bit of optimism, that supporting armed political factions opposed to his government would not mean Ethiopia was not bound by the memorandum of understanding. Instead of appreciating the friendly gesture, Zenawi responded by providing support to disparate armed groups to form the Somali Reconciliation and Restoration Council (SRRC) in opposition to Salaad's government. The leadership structure of the SRRC was based on co-chairs, one of whom was Hussein Mohamed Aideed, son of the once powerful Gen. Mohamed Farah Aideed. Anyone familiar with factional Somali politics might not have been surprised to learn that Hussein Aideed, once aligned with Eritrea because Ethiopia had supported his rivals, went to Addis Ababa, for the first time, to join the Ethiopia-backed SRRC.

The aftermath of the Arte Conference

The Ethiopian rulers learned a lesson from the Djibouti peace process: that they must change their strategy of exploiting non-state Somali actors. Drawing on the Djibouti experiment on Somalia, the Ethiopian rulers had to attempt another route from now on to move from shaker to shaper to manufacture the future state of Somalia, instead of remaining the main stakeholder (*The Indian Ocean Newsletter*, 2006). In doing so, they proved to be successful in restructuring the type of Somali government by which Somalia was going to be ruled, while formulating for themselves the form and the face of the Somali state. This was intrinsically aimed at re-engineering the systemic state structure and even re-designing what the state should look like. By realising that, sooner or later, a group most likely hostile to their policies on the Horn could rise to the top of Somali politics, the Ethiopian rulers had to act swiftly. The Addis Ababa policymakers approved the formation of a weak Somali state for Ethiopia by Ethiopia, principally a pro-Ethiopian one led by pro-Ethiopian elements. The issue of restructuring the Somali state to suit Ethiopian interests was made easier by Somali actors seeking to seize power and resources. The weak state structure put in place could force any Somali leader to be a pro-Ethiopian political sycophant. To proceed with the actual implementation of this project, Ethiopia hijacked the Somali peace conference in Kenya and

ensured it would have a strong hand in selecting delegates for the event, first held in Eldoret and later in Mbagathi from 2002 until 2004.⁵ The conference resulted in the selection of a certain group of factional leaders attached to the Ethiopian regime. This was the policy behind a carefully planned arrangement that culminated in the election of Col. Abdullahi Yusuf Ahmed as president. The election result outraged many Somalis who might have anticipated a less war-weary president than a “warlord” backed by – and heavily reliant on – Ethiopian patronage (International Crisis Group, 2004). Not only was Yusuf not an ally of Ethiopia in its war on the Salaad government, he was also a member of the armed opposition groups fighting against Ethiopia.⁶ In his first trip to Addis Ababa, Yusuf asked for aggressive military support from the IGAD countries, known as the “front-line states” (Interviews with a former minister of the Abdullahi Yusuf government, Mogadishu, 7 July 2016; BBC World Service, 2005). Apart from splitting the Somali parliament into pro-Ethiopian elements versus anti-Ethiopian advocates, the move led to a movie-style parliamentary brawl in March 2005, when both camps used their chairs to hit each other. This was an interesting political drama and the chair-throwing brawl was widely watched on television.

The crucial advice Yusuf had received from Ethiopian authorities was to appeal to IGAD countries for a 20,000-strong force to establish his government in the capital Mogadishu, then ruled by opposing armed Hawiye clan-group factions. In less than three months after Yusuf had been declared president, Ethiopia immediately lobbied on his behalf at the African Union (AU) meeting held in Abuja, Nigeria, in January 2005. On the sidelines of the AU conference, the IGAD heads of states decided “to provide security to enable the newly established government of Somalia to relocate back home” (IGAD, 2005). It was agreed that the IGAD military mission to Somalia should be named the IGAD Peace Support Mission in Somalia (IGASOM). No time was lost in assembling the IGAD ministers of defence at Entebbe, Uganda, to draw up a deployment plan for the military mission (The Indian Ocean Newsletter, 2005). The AU was always in line with the IGAD plan and immediately authorised:

the deployment of IGASOM to provide support to the Yusuf government to ensure its relocation to Somalia, guarantee the sustenance of the IGAD peace process, and assist with the re-establishment of peace and security by helping in the formation of the Somalia police and army.

(African Union, 2005)

Kasaija Phillip Apuuli, who served as a conflict prevention, management, and resolution advisor at the IGAD Secretariat, explains three legal and structural difficulties that IGASOM encountered:

First, the fact that the Agreement that establishes IGAD did not provide authority for the organisation to undertake a peace support mission in a member state. Secondly, the IGAD Secretariat lacked the capacity (both human and financial) to handle a peace support operation. Thirdly, and most

importantly, IGAD member state Eritrea, in tense relations with co-member Ethiopia after their 1998–2000 border war, objected to the deployment.
(Apuuli, 2010, 264)

The unusual political manoeuvre to deploy military forces in the name of IGAD was driven by two political developments that occurred in Mogadishu: (1) the emerging power in 2005 of the clan-based Islamic courts, which united under the banner of the Union of Islamic Courts (UIC) in reaction to a US hijack-and-kill campaign against Somali and non-Somali Afghanistan war veterans the UIC was hosting in Mogadishu; and (2) the declaration in February 2006 of the Alliance for Restoration of Peace and Counter Terrorism (APRCT), a motley coalition of nine Hawiye political players, brokers, and businesspeople who profited from the war economy in and around Mogadishu, including Bashiir Raage Shiiraar, Abdi Hassan Awale “Qaybdiid,” Muuse Suudi Yalahow, Mohamed Qanyare Afrah, Omar Mohamoud Mohamed “Omar Finish,” Bootaan Iise Aalin, Abdi Nuurre Siyaad, Abdirashid Shire Ilqeyte, Abdi-Shukri Ali Hersi, and Ibrahim Jeebe. They were later reinforced by Mohamed Omar Habeeb “Mohamed Dheere,” who at first had condemned but later apologised and joined them, apparently under pressure from US and Ethiopian intelligence agencies (Ingiriis, 2006a, 2006b; Menkhaus, 2007).

The rise of the UIC proved profoundly significant in shaping the Somali political scene. Taking advantage of intense public grievances against the APRCT members to get rid of them, the UIC leaders attracted sympathy among influential opinion shapers from the British Conservative Party who blasted 10 Downing Street for not having known better than to follow US policy on Somalia (Dowden, 2011). However, the Ethiopian authorities successfully managed to exploit the US power machinery to destroy two major Somali-owned peacebuilding and state-building initiatives – which is to say, the evolution of the Salaad government and the emergence of the UIC. Ethiopian threats against both initiatives later turned out to be propaganda (Warbrick and Yihdego, 2007, 674). The UIC authorities acted like political novices and deserve their own share of the blame. In addition to reverting to reckless military acts and making thoughtless political speeches on the media, they failed not only to critically rethink global political dimensions, but to consider regional political dynamics when making life-and-death decisions. Worst of all, they embraced emotional proposals by Somali diaspora academics in the US, who gave them radical guidance on standing up to Ethiopia (Field notes, Minneapolis, May–August 2008).⁷

IGAD and the AU, having invested in the unpopular Yusuf government, were unwilling to recognise the UIC as a government, unlike the European Union, which ostensibly did, sending a high-level delegation, led by European Commissioner for Humanitarian Aid Louis Michel, to Mogadishu for serious negotiations (BBC News, 2006). Michel managed to convince the UIC leaders, especially those labelled “hardliners” such as Sheikh Col. Hassan Dahir Aweys, to sign a nine-point memorandum of understanding and agree to hold talks with Yusuf’s government “without preconditions” in order to ensure “a negotiated settlement of

their differences” (BBC News, 2006). The Ethiopians attacked the UIC forces while Michel was mediating between competing Somali forces in Mogadishu and Baydhabo.

Militarisation of IGAD: the notion of IGASOM

The peace-making element of IGAD was reinvigorated by the US authorities, who wanted local partners in their “war on terror.” As one Somali government official highlighted, other than socio-economic development programmes, a military mandate was never included in IGAD’s legal obligations (Interview with a Somali government official, A. R. B., Mogadishu, 2 July 2016). On top of the military mandate, politics and diplomacy, which were not uncommonly used in the regional body to manipulate Somali factional groups, were also included in the IGAD operations. The AU echoed the same IGAD proposal directed by Ethiopia (The Ethiopian Herald, 2007a). In a special session in September 2006, the AU approved a peacekeeping mission to Somalia in the name of IGAD (Seifert, 2008, 36). The UN Security Council, by lifting an arms embargo imposed on Somalia since 1992, joined the AU and IGAD in December 2006 to authorise the deployment of military force to support the Yusuf government.⁸ While the IGAD charter does not stipulate the conduct of military deployment, the backing of the UN Security Council was sought to provide the necessary legitimisation to deploy forces in IGAD’s name. Ethiopia did not wait for the bureaucratic UN system and soon sent a strong force to Somalia to face the UIC threat. When the tension between the Yusuf government and the UIC quickly escalated in late 2006 (*Africa Confidential*, 2006), it was agreed that the IGASOM project be discarded altogether and replaced by the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM).⁹ Assisted by Ethiopian forces, the AMISOM forces were enlarged to protect a government seen by most Somalis as a puppet of Ethiopia (Bamfo, 2010).¹⁰

When an insurgency and a series of uprisings were sparked in the capital Mogadishu in 2007 and 2008, the US authorities acknowledged the need to legitimise the Somali government Ethiopia’s rulers were trying to install in Somalia.¹¹ Aside from using IGAD, which was seen as an Ethiopia-dominated organisation, the US authorities tasked the UN office in Somalia with organising a reconciliation conference in Djibouti for leaders of the UIC and the Transitional Federal Government, who had failed to resolve their political conflict at a conference in Khartoum, Sudan, and Sana’a, Yemen. The shift in US diplomacy in Somalia forced Ethiopia to accept the participation of the “moderate” wing of the UIC in a new political power-sharing arrangement with the Ethiopia-backed government. Yusuf refused to accept the new conciliatory approach, but the IGAD Council of Ministers meeting in Addis Ababa on 18 November 2008 threatened him with the imposition of “targeted sanctions including travel bans and freezing of assets among others, on all those in and outside Somalia who had become obstacles to the achievement of peace in Somalia” (IGAD, 2008). Yusuf had only three options: (1) to accept the outcome of the conference without interference; (2) to dismiss Prime Minister Nuur Hassan Hussein “Nuur Adde,” who was delegated to lead

the government delegation to the Djibouti conference; or (3) to resign from the presidency. Yusuf decided to sack Nuur Adde, appointing Mohamed Mohamoud Guuleed “Ga’madheere” instead. This did not work out the way it had done when Yusuf had insisted on the departure of Ali Mohamed Geeddi as prime minister in October 2007. As a consequence of his decision, which went against US and Ethiopian interests, Yusuf was himself pressed to resign in December 2008 (Interview with Mohamed Mohamoud Guuleed “Ga’madheere,” Mogadishu, 22 April 2016). It was thought likely that Yusuf’s successor would be a hardliner from the UIC like Sheikh Aweys, but Ethiopia as the chief orchestrator of IGAD would never have accepted him as president of Somalia because of his previous Islamist links (Interview with senior IGAD diplomat, Abuja, 2 September 2016). It should be noted that the label “Islamist” is a broad term in Somali politics, which makes it easy to target political enemies to attack and eliminate them.

The Djibouti conference ended with the election of Sheikh Sharif Sheikh Ahmed as president in January 2009. The prediction of many Somalis and the international community was that Nuur Adde would be president. Even though they could not dictate the outcome, the Ethiopian rulers favoured Sheikh Sharif for the sole reason that he would be able to separate the “moderates” from the “extremists.” His election officially divided the disjointed groups of the UIC into three warring factions: the group-turned-government led by Sheikh Sharif himself; Hisbul Islam led by Sheikh Aweys; and Al-Shabaab, the most powerful of all. Sheikh Sharif’s tenure ended while he was still busy with deal with the Al-Shabaab particularly following its full retreat from the capital (Discussions with Sheikh Sharif Sheikh Ahmed, Oxford, November 2014 to March 2015). The fragile new government led by Hassan Sheikh Mohamoud, who came to power in September 2012, was increasingly unable to deal with Al-Shabaab and became dependent on Ethiopia and AMISOM for protection and assistance. The new regime went as far as to intertwine the military policies of Somalia and Ethiopia (Ethiopian News Agency, 2016).¹² Under IGAD’s auspices, Ethiopia restarted the unending mediation sessions between the warring Somali groups, including the government. The Ethiopian military forces in Somalia began using a different military and political approach than other AMISOM forces (Qaranimo Online, 2016; AMISOM, 2016). From 2012, the rumour in Mogadishu was that the Ethiopian representative of the IGAD mission in Mogadishu, Gen. Gabre Adhana, was more powerful and influential than the Ethiopian ambassador to Somalia (Field notes, Mogadishu, April to August 2016; *Shabelle News* 2016).

Conclusion

The election of Mohamed Abdullahi Mohamed “Farmaajo” as president in Somalia in February 2017 was clear evidence that the Ethiopian policy towards Somalia cannot be successful when it comes to supporting backing a favourite candidate to sit the Villa Somalia, the presidential palace. In Mogadishu, Farmaajo campaigned on a slogan of reviving lost Somali nationalism, which would create unease with Addis Ababa. The Ethiopian rulers’ political manoeuvres should

not be underestimated. At best, they are politically adept at influencing things to their own advantage, regardless of whoever comes to power in Somalia. At worst, although they are now in a weaker position owing to the recent domestic political challenges, they are still militarily capable of sabotaging any Somali leadership that attempts to challenge their broader regional interests.

Two power structures are helpful for Ethiopia to ensure preservation of its objectives in Somalia in this regard. Apart from IGAD, the “republican” federal system in Somalia, where each major clan demands its own state, gives Ethiopia influence over the Somali leadership. Ethiopia has benefitted directly and indirectly as the IGAD gatekeeper in Somalia and remains the main beneficiary of the federal system in Somalia. Over four years (2012–2016), IGAD played a leading role in the facilitation of state-building processes in south-central Somalia. The prevailing political perception is that those areas most likely will continue even when “federalism” is abolished.

The current federal state structure of Somalia has stemmed from the Ethiopian conception of federalising Somalia into various discrete mini-state entities. As an IGAD press release (2014, 1) plainly revealed: “We support the ongoing efforts of the FGS [Federal Government of Somalia] in ensuring the establishment of the pillars for the federal system of the country.” The government in Mogadishu was directed to concentrate on forming new states “in a manner that does not undermine the existing federal states” (IGAD, 2014, 1). The suggestion and the support were in line with the “building block approach” project proposed by Ethiopia in 1998, which was first applied in northeast Somalia and resulted in the formation of Puntland State (Bryden, 1999).¹³ According to the IGAD press release: “The IGAD Special Envoy added that the country was indeed moving towards attaining the goals of federalism as enshrined in the vision of 2016 aimed at building a strong, peaceful, prosperous, united and sovereign Somalia” (IGAD, 2014, 1). Even though the system of federalism was clearly stipulated in the provincial constitution for Somalia, the IGAD press statement was used to make its point more relevant to the present political reality by referring to the so-called Vision 2016, a new deal project for Somalia supported by international donors. One Somali elder has posed some critical questions worthy of further study:

Who has given Ethiopia [permission] to federate Somalia without a public referendum? Basically, without asking people whether they prefer a federal system or centralised state system? How do they impose undefined federalism on a people who had not asked for [it] in the first place?

(Discussions with B. H. D., Mogadishu, 29 May 2016).

The answer is buried in the *Ethiopianisation* of IGAD.

Notes

- 1 This chapter was first presented as a paper at the conference titled “Policy Dialogue on Regional Economic Communities (RECs) in Africa” at the Institute for Peace and

Conflict Resolution, Abuja, Nigeria, 1–2 September 2016. I thank the attendees for their positive comments and encouragement. I am also grateful to Nordic Africa Institute for the invitation to attend the conference.

- 2 Between 0m:20s and 1m:24s.
- 3 Eritrea suspended its IGAD membership temporarily on 27 April 2007 but tried with no avail to reactivate it on 25 July 2011. For more on the Eritrean “in” and “out” relationship with IGAD, see Andemariam (2015); for the Ethiopia–Eritrea proxy war in Somalia, see Menkhaus (2007).
- 4 Geelle invited 30 Somali intellectuals from around the world. At the time of the conference, a series of publications by Lewis suggested the restoration of traditional leaders in contrast with the so-called “warlords” (Lewis and Mayall, 1995).
- 5 For an overview of the Mbagathi conference, see Webersik (2014).
- 6 Days later, influential MPs who were opposed to Col. Yusuf won a vote in parliament that compelled the new president to select the prime minister from within parliament.
- 7 For a discussion of the “ebb and flow” of the UIC, see Abbink (2009).
- 8 It should be noted that, despite a UN monitoring group’s revelations, the Ethiopian authorities continued to violate an arms embargo imposed on Somalia by the UN Security Council in 1992 (Associated Press, 2006).
- 9 There were also calls from Djibouti urging Ethiopia to pull its troops out to ease tension (Shabelle Media Network, 2007). The Ethiopian government position was that “threat not ambition drove it into war” (Ethiopian News Agency, 2007).
- 10 For celebratory accounts of AMISOM, see Fahlén (2015) and Freear and de Coning (2013). For critical analysis, see Anderson (2014); Fisher (2012); Hesse (2015); Williams (2009, 2013a, 2013b, 2014).
- 11 The official name of the government was the Transitional Federal Government (TFG). In a joint operation between Ethiopia and Kenya, the TFG was used as a legitimising device to extradite alleged foreign supporters of the UIC (The Ethiopian Herald, 2007b).
- 12 A document released by Minister of Foreign Affairs Abdisalam Hadliye states that

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Investment Promotion of the Federal Republic of Somalia is working tirelessly to establish, renew and strengthen all partnerships of mutual interest which serves our interests and that of our neighbours and allies across the globe.

Press Release, for Immediate Release, 6 July 2016,
Mogadishu, Somalia (Ministry of Foreign Affairs,
2016).

- 13 Puntland followed a similar yet dissimilar pattern from Somaliland by allowing itself to be part of Somalia under a federal system. For the differences between Somaliland and Puntland, see Hesse (2010, 343–362).

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