

# Regional Approach to Conflict Management Revisited: The Somali Experience<sup>1</sup>

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## Introduction

Precipitated by the deadlocks in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Angola, and the like, the United Nations' (UN) Security Council has recently initiated a debate of the use of a regional approach in managing conflicts in Africa.<sup>2</sup> This is, however, not the first proposal in its kind. Since the first-half of the 1990s, such discussion has been going on at both international and regional levels.

However, an extensive examination of the subject is necessary in order to make a general conclusion in respect to the applicability of a regional approach to conflict management. Such an endeavor would not only need to trace the origin of the debate, but also to question the motives and the purposes served thereby. Further, comprehending the overall debate and its practicability as an alternative strategy for addressing African conflicts would be impossible without considering the political context in which the African mechanisms of conflict management have to act. In doing so, it will be important to examine the strength and weakness of regional and sub-regional efforts of conflict management. Analyzing whether the oft-asserted geographical and cultural proximity are indeed assets on which regional and sub-regional efforts of conflict management can rely on is the focus of this paper. By illustrating several cases, in particular the case of Somalia, this paper will attempt to substantiate the thesis that geographical and cultural proximities are not necessarily positively contributing assets, rather they often contribute to the complication of the situation. This is because they inhabit long-standing incompatibility of interests that are the main driving motives of regional actors in involving themselves in or undertaking regional initiatives of conflict management.

At the international level the debate has been circumscribed by interrelated factors that refer to the Western powers and the UN alike. The fresh memory of their experience in Somalia and their pessimistic conclusion in regard to their strategic and economic interests in Africa in the post-Cold War era precipitated the Western powers, in particular the United States (US), to reevaluate the strategy of the "New World Order." While disengagement from Africa was seen as the policy option in this respect, how to fill the vacuum created thereby and how to morally and politically substantiate the move is that about which the West is most concerned. In such circumstances the proposal for regional conflict management was seen by the West not only as an alternative strategy to overcome the dilemma, but also primarily to fulfill the purpose of their disengagement from Africa, i.e. it releases them from a direct responsibility in managing African conflicts and avoids any risks attached to it.

The *Agenda for Peace*, despite the approval it attained at the beginning, also suffered

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<sup>2</sup> See United Nations, "Security Council, with wide-ranging presidential statement, aims to improve cooperation in peacekeeping, conflict prevention in Africa," SC/7290, 4465<sup>th</sup> Meeting Thursday 31, January 2001, where it is stated that "The Council underscored the importance of partnership and enhanced coordination and cooperation between the UN, OAU and sub-regional organizations in Africa."

from similar difficulties. As a framework, it had foreseen the expansion of the UN role in the field of international conflict management that would mean, one way or another, a higher financial and human resources commitment for the Western powers. It was in this respect that President Clinton advised the UN to learn when to say "No." Not only the political pressure for reform, but also the miserable financial situation and its bad records in its peacekeeping missions of the 1990s forced the UN to concede to demands of the West. In this way, the UN was left with no other option but to affirm a regional approach to conflict management where the UN could play a supplementary role. In 1998, Secretary General Kofi Annan turned the UN role in his report on "The Causes of Conflict: The Promotion of Durable Peace and Sustainable Development in Africa" to the UN Security Council into a policy.

Similarly, the debate on the topic of regional conflict management was intensive and, to a great extent, affirmative within the African continent. Government officials, NGO representatives, and academicians alike frequently repeated the phrase "African solutions for African problems." After having been reduced to mere clientele during the East-West confrontation, most Africans considered the end of the Cold War as a new era where they would play an active role in their continent's affairs. A leading African in the field of conflict management, Chris J. Bakewesegha, Head of Organization of African Unity (OAU) Conflict Management Division, states that "the imperative for Africa to take a hard look at the scourge of conflicts, and to design viable mechanisms for conflict resolving and management capacities became more pressing." He further asserts that for "Africa to remain relevant in the New International Order [it] must fill the vacuum left behind by the Cold War engagement."<sup>3</sup>

Accordingly, OAU was restructured to some extent. A new organ, the Mechanism for Conflict Prevention, Management, and Resolution, was established, which seemed to signify the will and effort towards institutionalization of African conflict management. The 1990s also witnessed revitalization of sub-regional organizations. Economic Cooperation of West African States (ECOWAS), Inter-Government Authority for Development (IGAD), and Southern African Development Cooperation (SADC), which were basically formed to boost economic cooperation among the member states, now received an extended mandate to engage in conflict management within their respective sub-regions. Indeed, the African initiatives of conflict management are, by and large, greater than ever before.

## **I. Global Political Circumstances**

### **I.1. Disengagement of the Western Powers from Africa**

The rapprochement of the super powers, the subsequent end of the Cold War, and the ultimate collapse of the Soviet Union left the world with a single dominant power. Aware of its position as the only superpower, the US became keen to play a more central role in world affairs within the pronounced "New World Order." In this respect President George H. W. Bush stated, "The new world could, in time, be menacing as the old... A retreat from American leadership, from American involvement, would be a mistake..."<sup>4</sup> By the time Bush made this statement, the US had already assumed the implementation of its grand strategy. The dominant role of the US during the multinational operation in the Gulf War against the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait, the subsequent engagement of the forces authorized by UN Security

<sup>3</sup> Bakewesegha, J. Chris, 1997, "The Role of the Organization of African Unity in Conflict Prevention, Management and Resolution in the Context of the Political Evolution of Africa." In: *Africa Journal on Conflict Prevention, Management and Resolution*, Vol. 1, No. 1, January- April 1997, p. 5.

<sup>4</sup> Bush, George, as quoted by Church, J. George, "Out with a Bang," *Times*, January 11, 1993, pp. 13-15.

Council Resolution 688 (1991) within Iraqi territory to supposedly provide “humanitarian protection” to the Kurds in the North and Shiites in the South of Iraq seemed to have set a controversial precedent of a “new” strategy of international conflict management.<sup>5</sup>

When a chaotic political situation evolved after the ouster of the Siad Barre regime in Somalia and the humanitarian catastrophe began to unfold as a result, the world community had to react to the new phenomenon of a “collapsed or failed state.”<sup>6</sup> A multinational force, United Task Forces (UNITAF) and later the UN Operation in Somalia (UNOSOM), spearheaded by the US under UN authorization, launched “Operation Restore Hope.” Despite the initial success in providing protection to the humanitarian transports that supposedly avoided further starvation, UNITAF/UNOSOM failed in securing stability and political settlement in Somalia. In fact, the Somali experience was so disastrous that it precipitated re-evaluation of the “interventionist” policy and led to the abandonment of the “grand strategy.” Consequently, the West adopted a policy of disengagement from Africa.

Despite the affirmation for Bush’s policy shown during the election campaign, Clinton declared that domestic politics would be his Administration’s priority. This reflected general public opinion within the US, which perceives foreign policy as a marginal subject that diverts the attention of policy makers from dealing with urgent domestic issues such as taxes, health care, crime, and so forth.<sup>7</sup> In describing the increasing criticism from within the US toward the US involvement in Africa, National Security Adviser Anthony Lake noted:

Those of us who recognize the importance of continued active engagement and support for Africa are confronting the reality of shrinking resources and an honest skepticism about the return on our investments in peacekeeping and development.<sup>8</sup>

The interdepartmental evaluation of those experiences that ultimately culminated in Presidential Decision Directives (PDD) 25 was, in fact, focused on the cost-benefit analysis. In PDD 25 it was specified, besides other criteria, that future US involvement in international conflict management would entirely rely on the relevance to US interests.<sup>9</sup> With such measurement, it seems that Africa would be at the end of the list. According to Herman Cohen, former Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs, “The administration sees no vital American interest engaged in Rwanda, and therefore does not want UN troops to have a muscular mandate.”<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> One should, however, consider that the adoption of Security Council Resolution 688 was not due to the repression of Saddam's regime over the Kurds and Shiite population as such, but its implication for international peace and security. Its preamble said: “(g)ravely concerned by the repression of the Iraqi civilian population in many parts of Iraq, including most recently in Kurdish populated areas which led to a massive flow of refugees towards and across international frontiers and to cross incursions, which threaten international peace and security in the region.”

<sup>6</sup> For discussion of the phenomenon see Zartman, I. William (ed.), 1995, *Collapsed States: The Disintegration and Restoration of Legitimate Authority*, (London, Lynne Rienner Publishers).

<sup>7</sup> Daniel, C.F. Donald, “The United States.” I: *Challenges for the New Peacekeepers*, Trevor Findlay (ed.), (1996: Oxford University Press), p. 89.

<sup>8</sup> Jennifer, Parmelee, “Africans Told To Expect Less from the US,” *The Washington Post*, December 16, 1994, as cited in David R. Smock and Chester A. Crocker, 1995, *African Conflict Resolution: The US Role in Peacekeeping*. (Washington, D.C.: United States Institute of Peace Press), p.2.

<sup>9</sup> See US Department of State, *The Clinton Administration’s Policy on Reforming Multilateral Peace Operations*, Department of States Publications 10161 (Department of State, Bureau of International Organization Affairs, DC, May 1994).

<sup>10</sup> Cohen, Herman, “Getting Rwanda Wrong,” *The New York Times*, June 3, 1994, p. A23.

The genocide in Rwanda was the first, but also the most fatal, consequence of the policy of disengagement. This should be understood in the wider context of US foreign policy, which is said to be based on two fundamental elements, namely "national interests" and American "values." It has been argued that, since the end of the Cold War, conflict situations in the African continent do not really constitute a threat to US "national interests." Containing communism, protecting shipping routes, access to strategic resources (minerals), and promotion of American values, once said to have dictated the US foreign policy in Africa, are no longer crucial. As Michaels Marguerite says, "the imposition of the Soviet Union set America free to pursue its own interests in Africa - and it found it did not have any."<sup>11</sup> Similarly, Obasanjo Olusengu noted that:

The dissolution of Eastern Europe as a socialist bloc, and the attendant radical political transformation that followed, has attracted the attention and the economic interest of the West ... seemingly at the expense of the poorer and needier countries of Africa.<sup>12</sup>

The reluctance of the Clinton Administration to undertake direct intervention in Africa and the restriction of its engagement to mere humanitarian assistance and the provision of financial and diplomatic support to selective regional efforts of conflict management indicated the general state of affairs in the US' African policy. The provision of US\$ 3.3 million to the OAU's peacekeeping operations by the US was just the beginning that culminated in the signing of the African Conflict Resolution Act of 1994 by Clinton. The act authorizes US\$1.5 million annually for Fiscal Year (FY) 1995 to FY 1998 to assist the OAU's conflict resolution program. An additional US\$25 million was authorized in 1995 and 1996 to pay for demobilization and reintegration of African military personnel into civilian societies.<sup>13</sup> Sub-regional organizations, such as IGAD, had also become the benefactors of the financial support. Diplomatic actions of various officials, mainly from the State Department, overt and behind-the-scenes, in several African conflicts are said to be supplementary efforts to the regional initiatives.<sup>14</sup>

The symbolic African tour of Clinton could only be interpreted in the context of the new US policy toward Africa evolving since the mid-1990s. Indeed, Susan Rice, Assistance Secretary for African Affairs, argued in respect to the American (dis)engagement in Africa that the intention was to "accelerate Africa's integration into the global economy" and the US stake in Africa was "an enlightened self-interest."<sup>15</sup> A closer examination of the US initiative of "*Partnership for Economic Growth and Opportunity*," reveals that, at least in respect to conflict management, the US prefers indirect engagement in Africa. The so-called "*African Crisis Response Initiative*," which [was] aimed at building African capacity to respond rapidly

<sup>11</sup> Marguerite Michaels, "Retreat from Africa." In: *Foreign Affairs*, 1993, Vol. 72, No.1.

<sup>12</sup> Obasanjo, Olusengun, "Africa & the Cold War." In: *Africa in the New International Order: Rethinking State Sovereignty and Regional Security*, Edmond, J. Keller and Donald Rothchild, (London: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1996), p.20.

<sup>13</sup> Smock, R. David, Ibid, p.7.

<sup>14</sup> See Rothchild, Donald, 1995, "The United States and Conflict Management in Africa," In: *Africa in the World Politics*, 2nd ed., Harbeson, John W. and Donald Rothchild, (eds.), (Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press). The US engagement in supporting the OAU's efforts in the attempt to settle the ongoing conflict between Eritrea and Ethiopia, Jess Jackson's mediation in Liberia, etc. are but some concrete examples of the US diplomatic efforts supplementary to the regional initiatives.

<sup>15</sup> Susan Rice, Assistant Secretary for Africa, Testimony, House International Relations Committee, Subcommittee on Africa, Washington, DC, February 11, 1999. see: [http://www.state.gov/www/regions/africa/990211\\_rice.html](http://www.state.gov/www/regions/africa/990211_rice.html)

and effectively to peacekeeping and humanitarian challenges,"<sup>16</sup> could be understood as a practical step to enforce a regional approach of conflict management in Africa<sup>17</sup> and to shift from direct engagement to indirect intervention. This was in fact supported by the African Conflict Resolution Act.<sup>18</sup>

Similarly, when French President Francois Mitterrand stated that "the time has come for Africans themselves to resolve their conflicts and organize their own security,"<sup>19</sup> it could not mean anything other than to emphasize the significance of regional conflict management to fill the vacuum left by France's disengagement. When the Rwandan conflict unfolded, France requested support from its Western allies. As no response came, France was forced to abandon the beleaguered African nation and withdrew its troops that were supposedly deployed to protect Rwandan refugees.<sup>20</sup> The withdrawal indeed signified the French disengagement from Africa. Yet France sought to support regional initiatives when they organized a conference in Biarritz, France, in which thirteen African states took part to discuss the formation of an African peacekeeping force. This reflected the French intention "to put squarely on Africa's shoulder the responsibility of keeping the peace in the continent, therefore absolving the West from any entanglement in African Conflicts."<sup>21</sup>

## 1.2. The United Nations

In most cases, the US acted on the basis of the UN mandate, though it was not necessary, given the power at its disposal. The recent NATO military operation in the Republic of Yugoslavia and the air strikes in Afghanistan are cases in point. It has been the purpose of the UN throughout its existence to avoid such unilateral actions, not only because they are considered to be a threat to "international peace and stability," but because they could also undermine the UN's role and its very rationale for existence. The bipolar system of the Cold War that resulted in antagonism among the permanent members of the Security Council had been the major reason for the UN's inactive role in managing conflicts. The end of the Cold War and the rapprochement between the major superpowers was thus believed to create a new opportunity for the UN in this respect. Having recognized this, the UN Security Council requested UN Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali, on January 31, 1992, assess the possibility of improving "the capacity of the United Nations for preventive diplomacy, for peacemaking and for peacekeeping." The Secretary-General came up with a well-formulated document, "*Agenda for Peace*," which was supposed to serve as the framework for the UN in dealing with conflicts in the world. Based on this framework, the UN was no longer restricted to traditional peacekeeping and peace-making activities, but in order to tackle the new

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<sup>16</sup> "African Crisis Response Initiative," see in: <http://www.whitehouse.gov/Africa/crisis.html>.

<sup>17</sup> In a paper released by the Bureau of African Affairs of the State Department on March 27, 1998, it is stated that "Africans are intent upon shaping their own future, in security matters as in other aspects of governance. The United States is interested in working with democratic states in Africa... The US vision for the ACRI is a greatly enhanced African capacity to perform peacekeeping and humanitarian relief operations in a timely, professionally competent manner. ACRI aims to provide equipment and training to 10,000-12,000 African soldiers in well-prepared companies and battalions, commanded by trained African officers and capable of deployed operations with consistent doctrine and procedures, using interoperable communications."

<sup>18</sup> See 103rd Congress, 2nd Session, "African Conflict Resolution Act." In:

<http://www.usaid.gov/regions/afr/conflictweb/reports/s2475.htm>

<sup>19</sup> *The Washington Post*, Nov. 10, 1994.

<sup>20</sup> *The Washington Post*, Aug. 22, 1994.

<sup>21</sup> Adebayo, Oyebade, 1995, "The End of the Cold War in Africa: Implications for Conflict Management and Resolution." In: *Africa After the Cold War: The Challenging Perspectives on Security*, Adebayo & Abiodun (eds.) (Asmara: African World Press/Red Sea Press), p. 169.



phenomenon of the "collapsed state," also made peace-enforcement and peace-building its tasks.

However, a number of cases soon revealed that the reality, which the architects of the *Agenda for Peace* claimed to have grasped, was quite different from the reality on the ground. Adoption of inappropriate strategies, organizational difficulties, and lack of legitimacy from the respective population seem to have been among the major factors that contributed to the failure of many attempts undertaken on the basis of the grand projects. In many cases, UN intervention had even added fuel to the already volatile situation. Things were also left half-done, when the anticipated results failed to occur and as the human and material costs skyrocketed.

Somalia, Bosnia, Haiti, and Kosovo are some prominent cases that triggered criticism from all sides. Even significant permanent members of the Security Council were critical of extending UN peacekeeping operations. When Clinton recommended the UN learn to say "No," it could not be that he was only concerned about the consequences of the UN's overstretched capacity and its ineffectiveness, rather he reflected the critics from within the US on the increasing financial and personnel burden that arose for his country with the expanding UN missions. The major aim of PDD 25 was to be selective and avoid further involvement in UN peacekeeping operations that do not serve the national interests of the US. The 1994 report of the Working Group on Peacekeeping and US National Interest summarized the situation from the US viewpoint as follows:

As the members of the United Nations have extended the scope of the world organization's peace operations, and the costs of American participation have risen, the role of UN peace operations in US policy has become a serious issue between the legislative and executive branches.<sup>22</sup>

By withholding their long-overdue financial contribution, the US pressured the UN to introduce comprehensive structural and policy reform. Left without strong political support in a very difficult financial situation, the UN could do nothing but give in to the recommendations of its principal member and reconsider its activities based on *Agenda for Peace*. In fact, the US initiatives to support African conflict management were not only supposed to avoid huge future expenditures, but also to reduce the need for United Nations intervention in Africa like that in Somalia.

Though more in theory than in practice, *Agenda for Peace* had indeed acknowledged the role of cooperation with sub-regional organizations. Boutros-Ghali, as early as 1992, proposed "regional actions as a matter of decentralizations, delegations and cooperation with United Nations efforts as means of easing the burden on the Council."<sup>23</sup> But it was Annan who formulated the significance of the regional approach to conflict management and the need for cooperation between the UN and the sub-regional organizations into a policy. He stated that:

...providing support for regional and subregional initiatives in Africa is both

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<sup>22</sup> Peacekeeping and US National Interest: Report of the Working Group, Henry L. Stimson Center: Washington, DC, 1994) p.16, as cited in: Donald C.F. Daniel, 1996, "The United States." In: *Challenges for the New Peacekeepers*, Trevor Finday (ed.), SIPRI Research Report No. 12, (Oxford University Press), p.91.

<sup>23</sup> Boutros-Ghali, Boutros, 1992, *Agenda for Peace: Preventive Diplomacy, Peace Making and Peacekeeping*, (A/47/277-S/24111), 17 June 1992, paragraph 64.

necessary and desirable. Such support is necessary because the United Nations lacks the capacity, resources and expertise to address all problems that may arise in Africa. It is desirable because wherever possible the international community should strive to complement rather than supplant African efforts to resolve Africa's problems.<sup>24</sup>

For this purpose, Annan proposes several ways of collaboration between the UN and sub-regional organizations. One means of strengthening African capacity for peacekeeping is through training in joint peacekeeping exercises that would be financed by UN and OAU trust funds from member states' contributions. Further, he believes that the UN could collaborate with sub-regional organizations by co-deploying in peacekeeping operations. As a successful example in this respect he mentions the joint operation of ECOMOG and the UN Observers Mission in Liberia (UNOMIL), which helped to restore peace in Liberia.<sup>25</sup> However, as a series of reports on the country reveal, the stated stability has not been achieved nor has the claimed exemplary collaboration between ECOMOG and UNOMIL been without difficulties.<sup>26</sup> Further, as several experiences described below show, regional conflict management could not "represent a panacea for all difficulty problems," as Annan rightfully warns, not only because "regional organizations can face political, structural, financial or planning limitation," but also because "the impartiality or neutrality of their member States may be questioned, for historical reasons or for political reasons or economic reasons."<sup>27</sup>

## II. Structure and Process of African Conflict Management

### II.1. The OAU and African Conflicts

The OAU is the major continental organization that is entrusted with maintaining peace and security in Africa based on its three strategies: 1) supporting anti-colonial struggles; 2) "non-interference" in the "internal affairs" of its member states; and 3) adherence to the principle of "inviolability" of the colonial boundaries.<sup>28</sup> For this purpose the OAU established an organ, the Commission of Mediation, Conciliation and Arbitration that is supposed to exclusively deal with conflicts. However, the member states did not consider the service of the Commission, rather they opted for a more flexible ways of addressing their conflicts through establishment of ad hoc committees under the auspices of the OAU. The ad hoc committees often pursued "a strategy of mediation by persuasion,"<sup>29</sup> where the Heads of State and Government played a central role.<sup>30</sup>

<sup>24</sup> Annan, Kofi, 1998, *The Causes of Conflict and the Promotion of Durable Peace and Sustainable Development in Africa*, Report of the Secretary-General. In: <http://www.un.org/ecosocdev/geninf/afrec/sgreport/report.htm>

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> See Tuck, Christopher, "Every Car Or Moving Object Gone: The ECOMOG Intervention in Liberia." In: <http://web.africa.ufl.edu/asq/v4/v4i1a1.htm> And Olonisakin, Funmi, 1996, "UN Co-operation with Regional Organizations in Peacekeeping: The experience of ECOMOG and UNOMIL in Liberia." In: *International Peacekeeping*, Vol. 3, Autumn 1996, No. 3, pp33-51.

<sup>27</sup> Anna, Kofi, Ibid.

<sup>28</sup> See Adebayo, Oyebade & Abiodun, Alao, 1995, "Redefining African Security." In: Ibid., pp.5-7.

<sup>29</sup> Adebayo, Oyebade, Ibid., p. 147.

<sup>30</sup> The Algeria-Moroccan Ad Hoc Commission functioned from 1963 to 1967. During that period, it is said that the Commission had conducted 12 meetings. Moreover, an additional organ of Council of Ministers was created to exclusively deal with the conflict in question (Naldi, The Organization of African Unity, etc.). As far as the Somalia-Ethiopian dispute was concerned, the Tenth Ordinary Session of the Assembly, in Addis Ababa, in May 1973 established an "eight-man" Good Offices Committee, as a non-permanent ad hoc committee.

Another strategy of conflict management was the deployment of peacekeeping forces in conflict areas. At the 1981 Nairobi Summit, the OAU adopted a resolution to deploy its first peacekeeping forces to war-torn Chad, an experience that highlighted the failure of the OAU in leading such operations. Nevertheless, OAU, despite its persisting institutional distinctiveness as an organization, largely served as a diplomatic arena where Heads of State and Government and Ministers of the member states regularly meet.

Since the end of the 1980s, efforts seemed to be underway to give the OAU a more active role in conflict management. At the Twenty-Sixth Ordinary Session in Addis Ababa, the Assembly of Heads of State and Government issued a "Declaration on the Political and Socio-Economic Situation in Africa and the Fundamental Changes Taking Place in the World." Therein the OAU resolved to create a "solid foundation for self-reliant, human-centered and sustainable development on the basis of social justice and collective self-reliance." As far as conflicts in the continent are concerned, the OAU created the Division of Conflict Prevention, Management and Resolution within its Political Department. The endeavor culminated later (1993) in establishing the Central Organ of Mechanism for Conflict Prevention, Management and Resolution. In paragraph 15 of the Declaration establishing the Mechanism, the Heads of State and Government noted:

In circumstances where conflicts have occurred, it will be its responsibility to undertake peace making and peace building functions in order to facilitate the resolution of these conflicts. In this respect, civilian and military missions of observation and monitoring of limited scope and duration may be mounted and deployed.<sup>31</sup>

Major objectives of the Mechanism were said to be "the anticipation and prevention of conflicts." Structurally, the Mechanism was formed around the Central Organ, which is comprised of representatives of the member states, elected annually, with the Secretary General and the Secretariat as its operational arm. This was indeed to be considered a new step toward institutionalization of an African conflict management system that would be able to respond swiftly and effectively to conflicts erupting in the continent.

One could, however, observe that the role of the Organ has not been so active as it was anticipated to be at the beginning. Looking to hitherto efforts of the OAU in conflicts, the tradition of ad hoc committees has remained a dominant strategy. In its effort to settle the current conflict between Eritrea and Ethiopia, for instance, the OAU established an ad hoc committee led by the successive Chairmen of the General Assembly. The rationale behind such practice is said to be that it was in accordance to:

Africa's traditional and pre-colonial methods of dispute settlement whereby elders, regarded as wise, and commanding the respect and confidence of their respective societies, intervened to resolve differences.<sup>32</sup>

Though the strategy seems to have been effective in some particular conflicts, mainly interstate ones, its implication in hindering institutionalization of African conflict

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<sup>31</sup> As cited by Backwesegha, C. 1997, "The Role of the Organization of African Unity in Conflict Prevention, Management and Resolution in the Context of the Political Evolution of Africa," In: *African Journal on Conflict Prevention, Management and Resolution*, Vol. 1, No.1, January-April 1997, p.10.

<sup>32</sup> "Report of the Secretary-General on the Establishment, within the OAU, of a Mechanism for Conflict Prevention, Management and Resolution." Published in: *Resolving Conflicts in Africa: Implementation Options*. (OAU, 1994), p.21.



management is a matter of concern. Moreover, given the political circumstance in which the Heads of State and Government act and, more significantly, the methods by which most African Heads of State and Government came to and hold power in their respective countries makes the argument look implausible. It is quite evident in many cases that African Heads of State and Government do not enjoy the respect and confidence of their respective people. Few of them could be said to possess integrity that would make them recognized and trustful third parties. Further, the role of most African Heads of State and Government in conflict management is largely attributed to their authoritarian governmental style. This is usually reflected in the dominant role of African Heads of State or Government in foreign relations. In fact, the role of an authoritarian ruler in the foreign relations of his country, which implies also his engagement in conflict management of another country, could also be seen as part and parcel of the overall system aimed at aggrandizing his personal power and prestige.

Further, the legal and strategic difficulties African conflict management centered at OAU encounters in addressing intrastate conflicts require close attention. The innovation of the 1990s, including the Central Organ, did not go beyond the tradition. Non-interference in internal affairs still continues to be the most adhered to principle and constitutes legal hindrance in addressing intrastate conflicts as far as the OAU is concerned. Accordingly, the OAU has never taken the initiative in intervening in an internal crisis of a country. The most it has done so far is diplomatically support multinational intervention undertaken by sub-regional organizations, such as in Liberia by ECOMOG, in Lesotho by SADC and in the Sudan and Somalia by IGAD. Further, the OAU has not yet found a reliable means to solve the financial constraints. An "*OAU Peace Fund*" was established to secure a regular and continuous source of financing<sup>33</sup> in support of activities exclusively related to conflict management.<sup>34</sup> However, the Fund relies largely on extra-African generosity.

The continuing perceptual divergence among African states also remained the major hindrance to the establishment of an African peacekeeping force that was proposed in the overall strategy in June 1993. Some African states showed support for the establishment of a standing multinational force, similar to that proposed by Kwame Nkrumah in the 1960s, whereas other states dismissed the proposal as unrealistic and impractical in the context of the organizational and financial difficulties of OAU. Instead, the latter preferred to see each country having a force that is available and deployable for peacekeeping.<sup>35</sup> Despite a series of conferences,<sup>36</sup> there seems to be no sign within the ongoing discussion that the controversy will come to an end and, subsequently, any form of African peacekeeping be realized in the foreseeable time.

Whether the recently announced African Union will be better than its predecessor, the OAU, in overcoming the shortcomings and performing effectively remains to be seen, though it seems a sub-regional organization would constitute the corner stones of the regional

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<sup>33</sup>It was stated that the financial resources would come from 5% of the regular budget of the OAU, voluntary contributions from Member States, as well as from other sources within Africa. Financial contributions from outside Africa may be accepted by the Secretary General given that he consults with the Central Organ and so long as the contribution conforms to the principles and objectives of the Organization's Charter.

<sup>34</sup>As cited by Bakwesegha, J. Chris, "The Role of the Organization of African Unity in Conflict Prevention, Management and Resolution in the Context of the Political Evolution of Africa." In: *African Journal on Conflict Prevention, Management and Resolution*, Vol. 1, No. 1, January-April, 1997, p.9.

<sup>35</sup>See *African Research Bulletin*, Jan 1<sup>st</sup>-31<sup>st</sup>, 1995, 11707.

<sup>36</sup>In November 1994 in Biarritz (France), in January 1995 in Cairo (Egypt) and in January 1995 in Harare (Zimbabwe) are but some of the conferences where the issue of a peacekeeping force in Africa was discussed.

approach of African conflict management.

## II.2. Sub-Regional Organizations Alternative Mechanisms

The critical combination of the OAU shortcomings on one side and the appalling African situation on the other side seem to have necessitated that sub-regional organizations play a vital role in their respective sub-regions. Though most of the sub-regional organizations were established to foster the economic, like the ECOWAS and SADC, and to coordinate measures of food security, like the IGAD, most of them went through a process of mandate expansion during the mid-1990s to incorporate conflict prevention, resolution, and management in their respective sub-regions. Their experiences in the practical field, however, vary.

ECOWAS, for instance, has been much more active, at least in respect to conflict management, than its sister organizations in other parts of Africa. After the ouster of Samuel Kanyon Doe's military rule, Liberia sank into a state of brutal anarchy "characterized by large-scale massacre of civilians, creating a serious humanitarian emergency."<sup>37</sup> As its spillover effect began to be visible at least in the influx of refugees, ECOWAS raised the issue and decided to establish a Standing Mediation Committee (SMC) that subsequently resolved the deployment of the ECOWAS Ceasefire Monitoring Group (ECOMOG) in its first session of 6-7 August 1990. The operation began on 24 August 1990.

The major objective of ECOMOG was to keep peace through monitoring implementation of an agreement reached among the conflicting parties. The task proved to be difficult to fulfill for several reasons. Primarily, the Liberian conflict was a typical intrastate conflict with a continuous division of the warring parties and formation of new ones that created a fluid conflict structure. In such circumstances, it is common for conflicting parties to adopt a "zero-sum" approach to negotiations that is often accepted or otherwise for other purposes, but not to attain an agreement that would be honored. Accordingly, one agreement after another failed in Liberia, whereas the atrocities and killing continued in a brutal form that also engulfed ECOMOG. In particular, the antipathy of some of the conflicting parties toward ECOMOG's role caused the alteration of the mandate to "peace enforcement." The strategy might have indeed enabled ECOMOG to defend itself and to stop the on-going atrocities,<sup>38</sup> but ECOMOG was criticized for its "lack of clarity and impartiality"<sup>39</sup> in Liberia. Another problem was the internal nature of ECOMOG itself. This was associated not only with the old suspicion between Anglophone and Francophone member states, but also resulted from Nigerian dominance both in financial and personnel aspects.<sup>40</sup> According to Tuck:

The maneuverings of the rival Anglophone group, dominated by Nigeria, and the Francophone's, dominated by Cote d'Ivoire had profound implications for the ECOMOG operation. There existed considerable resentment of Nigeria's rather heavy-handed use of its influence.<sup>41</sup>

Further, he states, "as Nigerian influence within the operation grew, it became increasingly

<sup>37</sup> Olonisakin, Funmi, 1996, "UN Co-operation with Regional Organizations in Peacekeeping: The Experience of ECOMOG and UNOMIL in Liberia." In: *International Peacekeeping*, Vol. 3, No. 3, Autumn 1996, p.35.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., p. 37.

<sup>39</sup> Tuck, Christopher, 2000, "Every Car or Moving Object Gone: The ECOMOG Intervention in Liberia. No. 4 . In: <http://web.Africa.ufl.edu/asq/v4/v41a1/htm>

<sup>40</sup> Lt. Col. Aboagye, B. Festus, 1999, *ECOMOG: A Sub-regional Experience in Conflict Resolution, Management and Peacekeeping in Liberia*, (Accra: SEDCO Pub. Ltd.), p145-151.

<sup>41</sup> Tuck, Christopher, Ibid.

difficult to isolate ECOMOG from Nigerian domestic politics.”<sup>42</sup>

Nonetheless, the intractability of domestic issues with the operation could have also led Nigeria and other member states to endure the sacrifices they had to make in Liberia. This is indeed the remarkable characteristic that makes ECOMOG different from other multinational peacekeeping operations. The persistence of the member states in keeping up with the operation despite the losses they were sustaining brought the conflicting parties at last to honor the Abuja Agreement. The governing political system of the ECOWAS states could have also enabled the decision-makers to stick to their decision without fearing any political consequence and public discontent within their respective countries. In fact, public opinion and public accountability that might follow a failed peacekeeping operation often lead policy makers of governments in democratic systems to reconsider their decision again and again. The fundamental question that remains though is whether the ECOMOG operation in Liberia could be considered a success when one takes its costs, the 200,000 lives perished and 1.2 million people displaced, into consideration. Whether the ECOMOG experience could provide a framework that could be applicable in other sub-regions has already become an issue of controversial debate.

What has been often emphasized in such debate is the significance of a regional power in sub-regional conflict management. The role of post-Apartheid South Africa within SADC is currently intensively discussed. When the South African troops, together with troops from Botswana, moved into Lesotho in the early morning of 22 September 1998, the debate became rich with one concrete example. Operation Boleas, as the intervention was called, was a reaction to the unfolding internal political problems in Lesotho as a result of failed negotiations between the country's political forces and the subsequent mutiny by part of the Lesotho Defense Force. It was argued that the intervention was conducted after a request from the government of Lesotho and with the agreement of SADC to "...prevent any further anarchy and create a stable environment for the restoration of law and order.”<sup>43</sup> A similar argument was used when some SADC member states sent troops to the DRC in August 1998 on an ad hoc basis that was retroactively endorsed by the sub-regional organization.

Whereas in Lesotho the situation could be stabilized as a result of the intervention, the situation in DRC remained instable and volatile. One remarkable difference between the two interventions was the composition of the states. While the role of South Africa in Lesotho was dominant to the extent that it was labeled an "invasion" by critics, the South African government opted not to deploy any troops, rather maintaining the emphasizing on the need for a negotiated settlement in DRC. Countries, like Angola, Namibia, and Zimbabwe reacted to the request of the late President Laurent Kabila of DRC and deployed their troops to aid the latter in his fight against the advancing rebel forces, but they had no role in Lesotho. This and the disagreement as described above in the ECOMOG intervention in Liberia reveal how susceptible the initiatives and engagement of sub-regional conflict management are to the respective national and personal interests of the member states and their leaders.

Such constraints have indeed held the IGAD back from advancing organizationally and extending its capacity in a way that would have enabled it to assume an active role like its sister organizations in other parts of Africa. The lack of a principal regional power, like South

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<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

<sup>43</sup> See <http://www.mil.za/SANDF/Current%20Ops/Boleas/Boleas-2.htm>

Africa in SADC and Nigeria in ECOWAS, is often mentioned as a peculiar shortcoming in relation to the weakness of IGAD. Yet, the overall political circumstance of the Horn of Africa could be also a factor that does not encourage cooperation among the states. In this respect Lionel Cliffe argues that:

...Almost all conflicts in the Horn of Africa since the 1970s could be said to have primarily internal origins, but they were amplified by a pattern of 'mutual intervention'. Each government sought to deal with its own internal conflicts by some degree of support for insurgencies in neighboring states.<sup>44</sup>

Nonetheless, IGAD reaffirmed the principle of "non-interference in the internal affairs of Member States" that could be considered as a preemptive legal act in this respect. Structurally, IGAD has created a division of Political and Humanitarian Affairs to deal with conflict prevention, management, and resolution through dialogue. Since 1993, IGAD has been actively involved in resolving the conflict in the Sudan. Its major achievement was the consensus on the Declaration of Principles in which the conflicting parties, namely the central government and the SPLM/SPLA, agreed on the principle of self-determination for the Southern Sudan. The realization of the principle proved to be difficult to attain. This is not only due to the resistance from the constituencies within the Northern political groupings and the government of Sudan towards the principle, but IGAD's weakened position in enforcing its decisions. The latter is mainly the consequence of the different approaches and strategies existing among the member states in their pursuit of the goal and its preferred results.

In the past, three of *IGAD's member states* have pushed for the ouster of the NIF (National Islamic Front) government in Khartoum and expected the government to fall soon. They emphasized putting military pressure on Khartoum.<sup>45</sup>

Moreover, the role of IGAD in managing conflicts has been seriously and negatively affected by the conflicts among the member states. The uneasiness and even confrontational relationship Uganda, Eritrea, and Ethiopia have entertained with the Sudanese government has paralyzed the IGAD's initiative in that particular conflict and other activities. The current conflict between Eritrea and Ethiopia has also exacerbated the sub-regional political situation that became a more hostile active engagement of a sub-regional organization.

Apart from the political aspect, sub-regional organizations act also in an unclearly defined legal basis, in particular when it comes to their attempts at managing intrastate conflicts. Article 52 Paragraph 1 of the UN Charter does not "preclude the existence of regional arrangements" and their engagement in conflict management as long as it is "consistent with the Purposes and Principles of the United Nations."<sup>46</sup> Paraphrasing this provision it could be said that sub-regional organizations are free to initiate and conduct conflict management in a country as long as they see their action as being in accordance with the purposes of UN in maintaining international peace and security. Before doing so, however, the sub-regional organization should be able to substantiate that a certain situation in a country constitutes or has the potential to constitute a threat to international peace and security. Given the fact that there is no universally accepted scale to identify an evolving

<sup>44</sup>Lionel Cliffe, "Regional Dimension of Conflict in the Horn of Africa." In: *Third World Quarterly*, Vol. 20, No.1, pp. 89-111, 1999.

<sup>45</sup> See "A New Approach to Peace in Sudan." In: *Special Report in USPI Consultation*, <http://www.uspi.org>

<sup>46</sup> See <http://www.un.org/aboutun/charter/>

situation as a threat or otherwise to international peace and security, and the fact that member states of a sub-regional organization have diverging values and interests in a particular situation, the provision is susceptible to a variety of possible interpretations. In such circumstances, it seems legitimate to ask whether the situations in Liberia, Sierra Leone, Guinea Bissau, Lesotho, and DRC constituted threats to international peace or threats to the individual interests of the intervening states.

In order to overcome such problems, the Security Council is authorized to determine an evolving situation as a threat to international peace and security. Accordingly, Article 53, Paragraph 1 stipulates that the engagement of a sub-regional organization in conflict management, in particular "peace enforcement," should not be taken "without the authorization of the Security Council." Observing practices of the sub-regional organizations in the context of such a provision, it becomes evident that most sub-regional interventions in Africa were conducted outside the international law, at least at their first stages.

Sub-regional organizations acting on-the-spot did not succeed in overcoming the difficulties the OAU has encountered. The rationale behind a sub-regional approach to conflict management is said to be the familiarity with the problems at hand and the cultural, social, and historical affinity of the sub-regional actors. Though these factors could indeed be considered an asset for the establishment of a sub-regional mechanism of conflict management, total reliance on them alone can, however, not guarantee success for the maintenance and functioning of such a mechanism. As illustrated above, geographical, cultural, and historical proximities can even generate sentiments and tensions, since the actors not only share those elements, but also have different interpretations of them. Accordingly, the cross-boundary interaction, if not intervention, is very intense, particularly at the time of conflict.

### **III. The Case of Somalia**

#### **III.1. Somalia: A Brief Historical Background**

Soon after the defeat of Italian fascism in East Africa, a heated debate on former Italian colonies arose among the victors of the World War II. As no agreement could be reached among them, the issue was transferred to the newly established UN, which resolved it with a 10-year UN-trusteeship of Italian Somaliland under Italian administration. However, no substantial change occurred in the case of the other territories inhabited by Somalis. British Somaliland continued to be ruled by Britain, whereas the Northern Frontier District was associated with the British colony of Kenya. The Haud and Ogaden territories, however, became issues of long and controversial debate between Britain and Ethiopia until the latter regained its sovereignty over the territories.

One of the major impacts of that historical juncture was the rise of modern Somali nationalism, especially among the educated segment of the society whose central political demand was the "unification of Somalis in the Horn under one flag."<sup>47</sup> With the unification of

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<sup>47</sup> During the course of the Second World War, the Allied forces defeated Italian fascism in the Horn of Africa. As a result, the former Italian colonies fell under British Military Administration. At the international level, the four powers, namely the United States, Soviet Union, Britain and France, started to debate on the future status of the former Italian colonies, namely Italian Somaliland, Eritrea, and Libya. During this period several proposals were presented. The idea of a "Greater Somalia," for instance, was introduced by the British, whereby they envisaged integrating the "Greater Somalia" into their Empire. The idea was, however, not accepted by the other powers. Particularly, Ethiopia vehemently rejected the idea. Nonetheless, the idea had an impact in increasing



the Italian Somaliland and the British Somaliland, the subsequent independence, and establishment of the Republic of Somalia in 1961, the political demands of the Somalis were partly attained. Yet, the unification of the rest of the Somali territories continued to be the top political priority of successive governments and would have long-term implications on the country.

At the diplomatic level, the Somali endeavour was in contradiction with the principle of "inviolability of colonial borders" as enshrined in the OAU Charter in 1963 that became the basis of the post-colonial political feature of Africa.<sup>48</sup> Left without any legal basis for their claim, the Somalis felt they were forced to employ any necessary means to achieve their goal, which led Somalia to increasing diplomatic isolation within the African continent. Ethiopian as well as Kenyan regional and international diplomatic positions also contributed greatly to the alienation of Somalis.

Internally, having enjoyed a period of "relative peace and liberal democracy" dominated by inter-clan competition in the first nine years that followed independence,<sup>49</sup> Major-General Mohamed Siad Barre took power after a bloodless *coup d'état* on October 21, 1969 by accusing the civilian government of failing to realize the unification of all Somalis in the Horn. Consequently, the National Assembly was abolished and the constitution was set out of force. Instead the Supreme Revolutionary Council (SRC) was formed to lead the country through the ideology of 'scientific socialism' that marked the inclination of the military government toward the Soviet Union. Huge military and economic assistance from the Soviets enabled Siad Barre to consolidate his power and begin the military campaign toward the realization of the 'unification of Somalis in the Horn.' In early 1977, through joint military operations, the West Somali Liberation Movement (WSLM)<sup>50</sup> and the Somali national army could bring together a large part of the Southeast region of Ethiopia largely inhabited by Somalis.

The Soviets were motivated neither by Siad Barre's ideological affiliation nor by genuine belief that the Somalis deserved to be united, but by the geo-strategic interest in the Horn.<sup>51</sup> This became evident when political change occurred in Ethiopia. The Soviets switched sides and began to support Colonel Mengistu Haile Mariam during the power struggle within the *Derg* in 1977 from which the latter emerged as the strong man. The United States, hitherto a principal supporter of Emperor Haile Selassie, was expelled from Ethiopia and reluctantly began to support Somalia. With huge Soviet military support, Ethiopia would defeat the Somali army, moving them out of its territory.

The defeat in the Ogaden War revealed Siad Barre's inability to unify the Somalis. This led the regime to lose one of the pillars whereby it attempted to legitimise its power. The adventurous war campaign had absorbed the scarce financial and human resources of the country and increasingly led to the deterioration of the socio-economic conditions of the

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political consciousness and sentiment of pan-Somali nationalism.

<sup>48</sup>Issa-Salwe, M. Abdisalam, 1996, *The Collapse of the Somali State: The Impact of the Colonial Legacy*, (London: HAAN Publishing), pp.69-70.

<sup>49</sup>Laitin, D. David and Samatar, S. Said, 1987, *Somalia: Nation in Search of a State*, (Boulder, Colorado: Westview), p.73. See also Ghalib, Jama Mohamad, 1995, *The Cost of Dictatorship: The Somali Experience*, (New York: Lillian Barber Press, Inc.), pp. 57-82.

<sup>50</sup> West Somali Liberation Front (WSLF) was said to be purely Siad Barre's creation and fought against the Ethiopian central government for the liberation of the Somali-inhabited regions in Ethiopia.

<sup>51</sup>Marte, Fred, 1994, *Political Cycles in International Relations*, (Amsterdam: VU University Press), p.217.

population. The refugee influx and the prohibition of exports of livestock to Saudi Arabia due to the eruption of cattle disease in the late 1980s exacerbated the situation. Overt corruption and the suppressive acts of the regime provoked public discontent and resistance. As the regime increasingly faced collective desertion of its soldiers and higher officers, it attempted to employ a type of "clan" politics in which the "clan" served as a basis of political loyalty. Ultimately, political power was confined in the hands of a small circle of the Merehan clan and Siad Barre's close family members. Similarly, his opponents organized themselves along the clan basis.<sup>52</sup> As early as 1978, immediately after the Ogaden War, an army mutiny took place by army officers largely from the Mejerdeen sub-clan who formed an armed opposition group, the Somali Salvation Democratic Front (SSDF). Some years later, the Issaq clan in the northern part of the country also formed their armed movement, Somali National Movement (SNM) to counter the repressive acts of the government against their clan. In 1989, the Hawiye clan, inhabiting the capital Mogadishu and its surrounding area, established a political opposition group, the United Somali Congress (USC), whereas the Ogadeni formed the Somali Patriotic Front (SPF). The clan fragmentation of opposition groups has continued and drawn Somalia into a state of protracted armed conflict among the various clan-based groups. Post-Barre Somalia is a phenomenon commonly known as "collapsed state" in the current political discourse.

### III.2. Attempts at Regional Conflict Management

#### III.2.1. The Horn Committee

One of the first regional efforts in settling the Somali conflict was the Ethio-Eritrean initiative, which aimed at bringing about a broad-based conference in which all parties to the conflict were supposed to take part. The initiative, however, failed. A major factor for the failure was said to be that the international community was not ready to support the initiative.<sup>53</sup> The identity of the initiators<sup>54</sup> and the structure and process of decision-making within the UN itself in providing support to regional initiatives of conflict management might have been among the reasons that led the UN to react as it did towards the Ethio-Eritrean initiative as early as in mid-1991.

Nonetheless, the initiative continued at the sub-regional level. In April 1992, a Horn of Africa Standing Committee (Horn Committee) was established of representatives of the neighboring states in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. The host country was elected to chair the committee. The Horn Committee organized the first all-party meeting among Somali warring factions in the town of Bahr-Dar, Ethiopia, in May-June 1992. The participants discussed

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<sup>52</sup>Such phenomenon have been observed in many parts of the world, where states, grand ideas, or projects failed and people turned to narrow social units to find security and identification. An elaborated study in this is presented by John Paul Lederach, 1995, *Preparing for Peace: Conflict Transformation Across Cultures*, (Syracuse University Press).

<sup>53</sup>Sahnoun, Mohamed, *Somalia: The Missed Opportunities*, pp. 9-10.

<sup>54</sup>Both governments in Eritrea and Ethiopia were "liberation movements" who came to power through long armed struggles against the internationally recognized government of Mengistu Haile Mariam, which had a significant position in African and international diplomacy. The time of their power seizure and the time of their initiative was short. Moreover, the (leftist) ideologies that were entertained by both "liberation movements" in their long struggle had contributed to their somehow "negative" image in international relations after the end of the Cold War. The yet unclear legal de jure status of Eritrea could have also been a factor that led the UN to react reluctantly in providing support to an initiative taken by the former outside its militarily freed national territory. Finally, the historical relationships between Ethiopia and Somalia, which were far from a "friendly neighborhood," could have been a factor in arising a suspicion toward the Ethiopian initiative in Somalia. The UN might have considered this factor when it was to support the initiative.

humanitarian and political aspects of the Somali conflict.<sup>55</sup> The Somali factions agreed among others on unhampered distribution of humanitarian assistance and the opening of all ports, airports, and roads. It was also agreed that the Horn Committee would maintain its consultation with all factions. Yet, the effort of the Horn Committee was shattered by parallel initiatives of the UN and the US to establish cease-fire and “appropriate” conditions for the arrival of the United Task Forces (UNITAF).

Conflicting parties in general, non-state conflicting parties in particular, usually prefer to consider and show readiness to accept bigger powers’ initiatives than those of smaller states, such as Eritrea or Ethiopia. This is because meetings organized by bigger powers are often accompanied by publicity and media presence. Non-state conflicting parties, as all the Somali parties were, do not usually have access to such facilities and may see a possibility and even an opportunity in such occasions to address their causes to a wider public. The presence of the media, in particular, is likely to provide an opportunity to the leaders of the conflicting parties to enhance their personal publicity and aggrandizement, which is, in fact, part of the whole conflict over power and prestige. Another significant reason why conflicting parties are likely to accept bigger powers’ initiatives could be also due to the “carrot and stick” principle of the bigger powers’ mediation. However, conflicting parties usually accept an initiative of bigger powers with presumption, if not with confidence, that they are capable of presenting their cause as “just” and so they could persuade the third party that it has an interest in supporting the “just” cause. In contrast, the smaller states, like those in the Horn of Africa, have no potential leverage equivalent to that of the UN or the US. Therefore, the Horn Committee initiative was easily shattered.

Nonetheless, the UN sponsored an Informal Preparatory Meeting in Addis Ababa from January 14 to 15, 1993 chaired by UN-Secretary General Boutros Boutros-Ghali. The informal meeting culminated in the Addis Ababa National Reconciliation Conference, which lasted from March 15 to 27. The conference issued the Addis Ababa Agreement signed by 15 Somali faction leaders. Apart from the UN, and in particular its Secretary General, which played a central role in convening the conference, Ethiopian involvement did not pass unrecognized in bringing about the Agreement. A Somali participant of the conference described his observation on the Ethiopian role as follows:

In the morning of 27 March 1993, some officials from the Presidency of Ethiopia came around and delivered a message that ‘the faction leaders’ were required at 10:00 a.m. at the President’s office for an urgent meeting...Suddenly, while we were watching the television in the lobby of the hotel at 22:00 hours a lady newsreader appeared on the screen with a flash announcement saying: ‘the Somali leaders have signed an Agreement.’

The same observer concluded, “This 12 hour long meeting seemed to be more fruitful than the past twelve days of going to the hall and returning to the hotel.”<sup>56</sup>

Since not much concrete is known yet about the content of the talks behind the closed doors of the Ethiopian President's office, further discussion can only be based on speculation.

<sup>55</sup> Horn of Africa Standing Committee, “The Bahr Dar Declaration and Agreement on the Humanitarian Aspect of the Problem in Somalia,” 1992, *unpublished document*.

<sup>56</sup> Omar, Mohamed Osman, 1996, *Somalia: A Nation Driven to Despair, A Case of Leadership Failure*, (New Delhi: Somali Publications Co. Ltd.), pp. 101-102.

Nonetheless, the Addis Ababa Agreement has been at the center of controversy. Seeing the Agreement as "best" possible solution to the crises, some blamed the UN for failing to appropriately implement it and for the setbacks in the reconciliation process following the clash between Somali militias and the multinational force in Somalia. Some went further and criticized the very nature of the Agreement and the process by which it came into being. The signing of the Agreement by the faction leaders exclusively had "legitimized" the signatories as decisive political actors. At the same time it led to the marginalization of significant representatives of various Somali social groups who attended the 12-day conference. Though it was frequently argued that the Agreement "empowered the people," in the end the only 'people' empowered were those who bore the responsibility for the bloody conflict.<sup>57</sup>

Besides the narrow base of the Agreement and the process by which it came into being, its claim to refer to the whole of Somalia was among the obstacles it faced. The SNM rejected this claim as this contradicted with its ultimate political goal of declaring an independent Republic of Somaliland. Accordingly, SNM neither signed nor conceded to the points enshrined in the Agreement, but diplomatically expressed its "good will" to see peace in Somalia.<sup>58</sup>

### III.2.2. Mandating Ethiopia

Be this as it may, the IGAD member-states mandated Ethiopia to facilitate political settlement in Somalia in consultation with the neighboring states. The OAU Summit in Cairo, Egypt, reaffirmed the mandate in 1993, when the establishment of the Central Organ was inaugurated. Ethiopia was nominated as the chair of the Central Organ that gave more weight to its mandate, later endorsed by the UN. On the basis of this mandate, Ethiopia conducted its facilitation, which culminated in a high-level consultation meeting convened at the Sodere holiday resort, Ethiopia, from November 22 to December 31, 1996. It was reported that 26 Somali political movements took part in the meeting where they agreed on the establishment of a National Salvation Committee (NSC) with 41 members and a National Executive Committee (NEC) with 11 members.<sup>59</sup> Further, it was stated that a National Reconciliation Conference (NRC) would be convened in Bossaso in November 1, 1997.

The Sodere Meeting was supposedly a success story in the process of reconciliation in Somalia. In his speech at the inaugural ceremony, the Ethiopian Foreign Minister, Seyoum Mesfen, said that the Sodere Meeting was characterized with the "spirit of give-and-take" and that "...the interest of the Somali people was given precedence over sectarian and individual interests."<sup>60</sup> The Sodere Meeting was also portrayed as the foundation of the future process of reconciliation in Somalia. But the goals envisaged in the Sodere Declaration were apparently not achieved. Neither was the NRC convened as planned nor could the groups represented in the NSC retain their coalition. The Sodere Meeting ended up in fiasco. The opposition of the United Somali Congress/Somali National Alliance (USC/SNA) led by the son of the late General Mohamed Farah Aideed, Hussien Aideed, could be seen a major factor.<sup>61</sup> Moreover,

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<sup>57</sup> Hellander, Bernhard, "The Addis Ababa Agreement: The Ultimate Bribe," *Somalia News Update*, Vol. 2, No. 12, March 30, 1993, [Bernhard.Hellander@antro.uu.se](mailto:Bernhard.Hellander@antro.uu.se).

<sup>58</sup> Somali National Movement, Press Release, March 15, 1993, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.

<sup>59</sup> *African Confidential*, Vol. 38, No.2, 1997.

<sup>60</sup> "Can We Now See Light at the End of the Tunnel in Somalia?" Foreign Minister, Seyoum Mesfen, Addressing the Sodere Meeting, in: *Ethioscop*, Vol. 3, No.1, 1997.

<sup>61</sup> In a press statement by the Transitional Government of Somalia established by Aideed's group on February 7, 1997 in Nairobi, Kenya, and in a fax-letter from Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the TGS addressed to Leopold G'Ferdinand, Foreign Minister of the Republic of Cameroon, on January 30, 1997, the opposition of the

the government of the self-proclaimed Republic of Somaliland rejected the Sodere Meeting, because it referred to Somalia as a whole; a claim that contradicted the political goal of the former.<sup>62</sup>

### **III.2.3. Regional Competition and Interests**

The Sodere Agreement was not the first, and by no means the last, effort to fail. Attributing the failure of the regional efforts only to inner-Somali constraints is, however, not always plausible. The most prevalent and contributing factor to the failure of regional efforts to settle the Somali conflict was the lack of coordination and resulting contradiction among the simultaneous regional initiatives. Whenever one regional actor took an initiative, another initiative followed, often with differing results. Apart from the mandated country, Ethiopia, countries such as Kenya, Egypt, Italy, and Yemen had been active in Somalia. Why the OAU and the IGAD failed to coordinate these efforts and why the respective states chose unilateral attempts seem to be the crucial questions in understanding the regional dimension of the Somali conflict and the attempts to its settlement. Identifying the intentions and motives of the regional actors in this respect is, therefore, the first step.

As far as the neighboring countries are concerned, ever since its independence Somalia was viewed as a threat to the security of the sub-region. This is mainly due to the political ambition the Republic of Somalia pursued throughout its existence. As described above, both the first civilian government and the Siad Barre regime constructed their basis of legitimacy on pan-Somali nationalism whose major political goal was to reunite the Somali people under a single state. In attempting to realize the unification, the Somali state had a series of direct diplomatic and military confrontations with its neighbors. The most common strategy was provision of military and logistical support to insurgencies and opposition groups fighting against ideologically and/or strategically hostile governments in the neighboring countries. This was exacerbated by the involvement of the superpowers.<sup>63</sup>

After the ouster of Siad Barre, no significant change occurred in this respect. The phenomenon of collapsed state in Somalia, which is the result of the emerged power vacuum, became even more threatening to the stability and security of the neighboring countries. The absence of a recognized power and/or the presence of multi-powers increased the unpredictability of political development in the country. This was a reason for concern for any party that had an interest to be maintained in Somalia. The neighboring states were also concerned because of the geographic and ethnic proximity that makes them susceptible to a spillover effect from the conflict. Such a phenomenon is likely, in particular when there is a history of mutual intervention in each other's internal affairs. The existence of a strong minority group across the border that does not historically identify itself with the prevailing political entity constitutes an additional potential in this respect.<sup>64</sup>

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USC/SNA to the Sodere Meeting and Declaration was clearly stated.

<sup>62</sup> In a letter dated February 3, 1997, addressed to the OAU Secretary-General, Salim Mohamed Salim, the President of the Republic of Somaliland, Mohamed Ibrahim Egal, argued that the Republic of Somaliland was not part of the Sodere Declaration and did not feel bound by it.

<sup>63</sup> Habte Selasie, Bereket, 1980, *Conflict and Intervention in the Horn of Africa*, (New York: Monthly Review Press). Lefebvre, A. Jeffrey, 1991, *Arms for the Horn: US Security Policy in Ethiopia and Somalia, 1953-1991*, (Pittsburgh, Pa.: University of Pittsburgh Press). Volker, Mathies, 1998, *Der Grenzkonflikt Somalias mit Äthiopien und Kenya*, Hamburg Institut für Afrika-Kunde.

<sup>64</sup> Ever since the Ethiopian central state gained control over the Somali inhabited territory of today's Ethiopia in the scramble for Africa, it has never enjoyed political legitimacy among the Somalis who persistently perceive and refer to the Ethiopian state as a colonial state.



Somalia without a central government -- and also Somalia with a government committed to pan-Somali nationalism -- can constitute a security threat to the central government in Addis Ababa. The Ethiopian military operation in Somalia and also the diplomatic involvement in the Somali peace process can be understood in this respect.<sup>65</sup> The aim of such involvement could not be altruism. To the contrary, it was derived mainly by self-interest that could only be realized through dictation of the course of political development in Somalia and that could have at least three purposes.

First, Ethiopia would like to make sure that no organized threat could come from Somalia. To this end it would attempt to influence the balance of power among the fighting factions, by supporting "friendly" Somali groups so they could gain the upper hand in the ongoing power struggle in reconstituting a Somali state. Second, through gaining political and also military influence, Ethiopia might be keen to realize its long-standing geo-strategic ambition, including access to sea.<sup>66</sup> Possession of the two important Red Sea ports had been one of the major issues of the 30-year war between Eritrea and Ethiopia. After the independence of Eritrea, Ethiopia remained without any direct access to the sea. Though an agreement was reached between Eritrea and Ethiopia that the Eritrean ports would serve as "free ports" for Ethiopia, the latter was eager to get another alternative, which became a matter of urgency after the outbreak of war between the two neighboring countries. Third, assumption of regional hegemony could be as important as the above factors in Ethiopia's decision to become involved in the Somali conflict. Ever since Menelik II, Ethiopia has acted as a peripheral hegemonic power, which was facilitated through its relationship with the European powers.<sup>67</sup> Its sustainability has been strongly linked with this relationship.<sup>68</sup> The current government attempted to revitalize the traditional relationships with the West, mainly

<sup>65</sup> *African Confidential*, Vol. 37, No. 21, 18 October 1996; *Neue Zürcher Zeitung*, 8, January 1997, reported on military involvement of the Ethiopian governments' forces deep inside Somali territory siding with some of the warring factions.

<sup>66</sup> Ever since Ethiopia was constituted as a modern political entity, one of the major concerns of the political elite of the country has been access to the sea. The statement of the Imperial Ethiopian Government made during the Conference of Council of Foreign Ministers of the Four Powers in London in summer 1954 is valid then and now in expressing the concern of the Ethiopian elite. It says: "Historical and legitimate claim to the re-integration of those territories (Eritrea and Somali territories) which, for thousands of years, incontestably formed part of the Ethiopian States, stretching at its zenith, from Red Sea in the north to the Indian Ocean in the South." The Addis Tribune, [http://www.africanews.org/east/eritrea/stories/19980522\\_feat5.html](http://www.africanews.org/east/eritrea/stories/19980522_feat5.html)

<sup>67</sup> Some scholars, such as Holcomb, Bonnie and Ibssa Sisai (1990), *The Invention of Ethiopia*, (Trenton, N.J.: Red Sea Press), even argue that Ethiopia was an independent colonial state created to serve the interest of European powers.

<sup>68</sup> In reaction to the slowly advancing negotiation with the US and Ethiopia on establishing a cooperation agreement in the late 1940s, Haile Selassie complained that it was the "duty of Ethiopia to suppress communism," but "the suppression of communism depends upon successful carrying out programs of economic development. However, Ethiopia's need (for) economic assistance have been relatively ignored by the US." Cited in U.S Department of State, *Foreign Relations of the United States*, 5(1995), p.1699. An agreement of cooperation was signed between the US and Ethiopia on May 22, 1953. The central points of the agreement were the provision of a 25-year lease to the US to operate a military communication center, known as Kagnev, in Eritrea in exchange for economic and military assistance to Ethiopia. According Lefebvre A. Jeffrey, 1991, *Arms for the Horn: US Security Policy in Ethiopia and Somalia 1953-1991*, from the time of signature up to the agreement's termination in 1977, Ethiopia received US\$185 million worth of military assistance, US\$36 million in "Foreign Military Sales," and a cash agreement of US\$135 million. In general, Ethiopia was a recipient of around 45% of the US military assistance budget to sub-Saharan Africa. (pp.13-14). John Sarensen (1993), in his work *Imagining Ethiopia*, deals extensively with the way they have been perceived in the West and how the perceptions have contributed in the Western policy-making.

the US, which was weak during Mengistu's rule.<sup>69</sup> Active diplomatic and military involvement in Somalia is an integral part of the Ethiopian role as peripheral hegemonic power. This was, indeed, recognized by the West whose development aid and military assistance to Ethiopia increased during the 1990s.<sup>70</sup> The anti-Islamic fundamentalism campaign of the Western powers that reached its climax in the aftermath of September 11, 2001 provided a good opportunity for states that strive for regional hegemony. Indeed, Somalia is considered believed to harbor international terrorist groups and, thus, Ethiopia will have no difficulty in substantiating its actions in that country vis-à-vis the West.<sup>71</sup>

## Conclusion

The arguments employed in support of sub-regional conflict management emphasize regional actors' political and military advantage, their better understanding of the conflict, their possession of greater acceptance by the conflicting parties, their stronger and lasting commitment, and their relatively cheaper equipment and personnel compared to non-regional actors.<sup>72</sup> Though some of these aspects could be attributed to the strength of regional conflict management, several cases have illustrated that it is at least as complicated as international conflict management attempts. The complications are not only related to the financial and logistical shortcomings from which most of African peacekeeping operations suffer, but also to geographical and cultural proximity. Though regional actors could have a better understanding of the conflict in their respective regions, as in the case of Somalia and Liberia, it is underlined that how Ethiopia and Nigeria respectively assumed sides gravely jeopardized the impartiality of the sub-regional conflict management. This is in fact the central problem of regional conflict management that arises from the intertwined interests precipitated by the geographical proximity. Be it Ethiopia in Somalia, South Africa in Lesotho, or Nigeria in Liberia, the dominant role these countries played in respective sub-regional conflict management was mainly to defend their interests. It is indeed such vital interests that force the countries to remain persistent and committed to their engagement in regional conflict management despite its increasing costs. The undemocratic decision making structure within the country gives the decision makers free hand to pursue what they think is relevant to their interests without fearing public scrutiny. This is less the case in South Africa than in Nigeria under military rule and in Ethiopia under an elite ethnic minority.

In such circumstances, sub-regional conflict management exacerbates the already volatile situation in a country and gives it a regional dimension where other actors unilaterally intervene to pursue their interests. This creates not only duplicity of initiatives and confusion, but also contributes to the failure of sub-regional conflict management. Coordination problems and competition were not evident in the case of South African-led SADC initiative in Lesotho, but were apparent in Somalia and Liberia. It is further emphasized that regional conflict management acts in a legal vacuum. Though the UN Charter recognizes the role of sub-regional organizations in managing conflict in their respective regions in accordance with the UN principles and purposes, it does not specify what the scales are to determine those principles and purposes. This means that sub-regional organizations could undertake

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<sup>69</sup> Since the first-half of the 1990s, one can observe an increase in US assistance to the Ethiopian government.

<sup>70</sup> International Herald Tribune, November 11, 1996, as cited by *Economic Intelligence Unit*, country report, 1st Quarter 1997.

<sup>71</sup> See *Le Monde Diplomatique*, December 2001 issue.

<sup>72</sup> Howe, Herbert, 2001, "Lessons of Liberia: ECOMOG and Regional Peacekeeping." In: *Nationalism and Ethnic Conflict*, Brown, Michael E., Coté Owen R. Jr., Lynn-Jones, Sean M. and Miller Steven (eds.) (Massachusetts Institute of Technology), p. 267.

initiatives as long as they are in a position to substantiate their action as such. Yet, such possibilities make regional conflict management susceptible to being subservient to interests of regional actors. Article 53 of the UN Charter does not solve the problem, but shifts it to another level, namely to the Security Council.

Despite its emancipative impact, regional conflict management is unlikely to be an alternative to the international conflict management centered around the UN. Its insufficient preparedness in financial and technical aspects and its susceptibility to being used as a pretext to preserve interests by dominant regional powers jeopardizes its neutrality and so, too, its acceptance as a strategy by conflicting parties. Whether the recently announced African Union would be in a position to overcome the difficulties illustrated here is questionable. It is, however, obvious that any effort in that direction would take an extended period of time before it bears fruits, and that might come too late for the situation in Africa.

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