

## II. Organized violence in the Horn of Africa

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For decades, the countries in the Horn of Africa—Djibouti, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Kenya and Somalia (see figure 2.1)—have been plagued by organized violence. However, despite the vast scale of human suffering, the region tends to make the international headlines only when the focus is on piracy or droughts. To provide a coherent overview of the violence that affects the Horn of Africa, this section therefore analyses the region through the lens of UCDP's three categories of organized violence: armed conflict between and within states, one-sided violence against civilians, and violence between non-state actors.<sup>1</sup>

While all countries in the region experienced one or more of these categories of violence during the decade 2001–10, non-state conflicts were by far the most common. A total of 77 non-state conflicts, or 35 per cent of the global total, were recorded in the Horn of Africa. The annual number of active non-state conflicts was fairly stable during the first six years of the period, ranging between 11 and 13. However, the figure then oscillated wildly, first dropping to 2 in 2007, then increasing to 14 in 2008, after which it decreased to 5 in 2009 and 2010.

State-based armed conflict was less common in the Horn of Africa: only five were recorded in 2001–10, of which only one was at the level of war.<sup>2</sup> Nonetheless, states in the region have demonstrated a growing tendency to become militarily engaged in neighbouring countries. For instance, both Ethiopia and Kenya have at times sent troops in support of the Somali Transitional Federal Government (TFG) in its conflict with Harakat al-Shabab al-Mujahideen (Mujahedin Youth Movement, or al-Shabab), which has in turn received both arms and training from Eritrea.<sup>3</sup>

Six actors were responsible for acts of one-sided violence in the region: the Ethiopian Government; the Kenyan Government; Mungiki, a Kenyan religious sect; the Ogaden National Liberation Front (ONLF), an Ethiopian rebel group; the Sabaot Land Defence Force (SLDF), a militia active in the Mount Elgon district of Kenya; and al-Shabab. In the years 2001–2006, only

<sup>1</sup> For definitions of the UCDP's 3 categories of organized violence and a discussion of global trends see section III below.

<sup>2</sup> The 5 armed conflicts recorded for the region were Djibouti–Eritrea (common border), Eritrea, Ethiopia (Ogaden), Ethiopia (Oromiya) and Somalia. Throughout this section, when only the name of a country is given this indicates a conflict over government. When a conflict is over territory the name of the contested territory appears after the country name(s) in parenthesis.

<sup>3</sup> United Nations, Security Council, Report of the Monitoring Group on Somalia and Eritrea pursuant to Security Council Resolution 1916 (2010), 20 June 2011, annex to S/2011/433, 18 July 2011.



**Figure 2.1.** Map of the Horn of Africa

one actor was recorded as crossing the threshold of 25 deaths in a year in attacks targeting civilians (the Ethiopian Government; see below). In 2007 and 2008 there were five such actors, but the number then decreased to one again in 2009 and 2010.

This section continues with an examination of the armed conflict in Somalia, particularly its international aspects. It then describes one of the

worst cases of one-sided violence in the Horn of Africa, taking place in Ethiopia's Somali Region. Finally, it discusses the prevalence of non-state conflicts in the region, focusing on two examples in the Ethiopia–Kenya border area.

### **Armed conflict: the regional effects of Somalia's instability**

Of all the conflicts that are active in the world today, the struggle for government power in Somalia is clearly one of the most protracted. The most recent effort to find a solution led to the establishment of the internationally sanctioned TFG in 2004. However, it was only after Ethiopia's invasion of Somalia in December 2006 and later with the support of the United Nations-authorized African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM) that the TFG was able to move to the capital, Mogadishu.<sup>4</sup>

Prior to December 2010, Hizbul-Islam and al-Shabab, the two main armed Islamist groups in opposition to the government, were in armed conflict with both the TFG and each other. When the leader of Hizbul-Islam, Hassan Dahir Aweys, announced that month that his group had become part of al-Shabab, this made the latter the only explicit armed opposition to the TFG.<sup>5</sup> At the time, al-Shabab controlled all of southern and central Somalia, including large parts of Mogadishu.<sup>6</sup>

Even though the TFG is internationally recognized, its forces are weak and its control does not extend far.<sup>7</sup> AMISOM, rather than the TFG, has carried out much of the fighting against al-Shabab in Mogadishu.<sup>8</sup> A number of non-state groups and regional clan-based administrations have aligned themselves with the TFG and fought against al-Shabab.<sup>9</sup> These groups include Ahlu Sunna Waljamaca, which is supported and sometimes directly assisted by Ethiopia and, more recently, the Ras Kamboni movement, which is often seen as a proxy for Kenyan interests.<sup>10</sup>

When al-Shabab announced a 'tactical' departure from Mogadishu in August 2011, many hoped that the capital would, for the first time in many

<sup>4</sup> For details of AMISOM see chapter 3, sections III and IV, in this volume.

<sup>5</sup> 'Somalia: Aweys surrenders to Al Shabaab, 6 killed in bombing', Garowe Online, 20 Dec. 2010, <[http://www.garoweonline.com/artman2/publish/Somalia\\_27/Somalia\\_Aweys\\_surrenders\\_to\\_Al-Shabaab\\_6\\_killed\\_in\\_bombing.shtml](http://www.garoweonline.com/artman2/publish/Somalia_27/Somalia_Aweys_surrenders_to_Al-Shabaab_6_killed_in_bombing.shtml)>.

<sup>6</sup> International Crisis Group (ICG), *Somalia: The Transitional Government on Life Support*, Africa Report no. 170 (ICG: Nairobi, 2011), p. 27.

<sup>7</sup> United Nations (note 3), p. 11.

<sup>8</sup> International Crisis Group (note 6), p. 17.

<sup>9</sup> On the rest of Somalia (e.g. the self-declared autonomous regions) see the UCDP Conflict Encyclopedia, <<http://www.ucdp.uu.se/database/>>; Pugh, A., 'Block party—breaking Somalia's political paralysis', *Jane's Intelligence Review*, 19 May 2011; and United Nations (note 3).

<sup>10</sup> United Nations (note 3); and '48 people killed in Somalia', Garowe Online, 25 Feb. 2011, <[http://www.garoweonline.com/artman2/publish/Somalia\\_27/48\\_people\\_killed\\_in\\_Somalia.shtml](http://www.garoweonline.com/artman2/publish/Somalia_27/48_people_killed_in_Somalia.shtml)>.

years, return to relative calm.<sup>11</sup> However, a series of suicide bombs and sporadic clashes in late 2011 demonstrated that Mogadishu remained far from secure.<sup>12</sup> The insecurity at that time was exacerbated by the presence of thousands of internally displaced persons (IDPs) who had streamed into the city as a result of widespread famine. In addition, a lack of funds had led to unpaid TFG troops looting international food distribution centres, setting up illegal checkpoints and at times clashing with other government forces.<sup>13</sup>

Al-Shabab itself has also encountered financial problems. Following the TFG–AMISOM offensives of February and July–August 2011, it lost control of Bakara Market, formerly an important source of taxation income. In addition, one goal of Kenya’s intervention in southern Somalia in October 2011—Operation Linda Nchi, which followed a spate of kidnappings on Kenyan soil—was to enforce a blockade of Kismayo port, another former source of income for al-Shabab.<sup>14</sup>

While there seems to be a growing rift between the global jihadists and the Somali nationalists within al-Shabab’s leadership, some analysts claim that increased internationalization of the conflict may transform the movement into a global actor and possibly provide it with new resources.<sup>15</sup> Al-Shabab’s deliberate attempts to internationalize the conflict, including kidnappings and the 2010 bombings in Kampala, Uganda, have led to further international engagement against the group.<sup>16</sup> By the end of 2011, five African countries had troops in Somalia and in February 2012 the UN Security Council approved the expansion of AMISOM from a maximum of 12 000 to more than 17 000 troops, supported by international funding.<sup>17</sup> In turn, al-Shabab is extending its reach outside Somalia and in January 2012

<sup>11</sup> Khalif, A., ‘Al Shabaab militants pull out of key positions in Mogadishu rout’, *Daily Nation* (Nairobi), 6 Aug. 2011.

<sup>12</sup> E.g. on 4 Oct. a suicide bombing killed up to 120 people, according to local hospital sources. ‘Hospitals overwhelmed as bombing death toll rises’, IRIN, 5 Oct. 2011, <<http://www.irinnews.org/Report/93896/SOMALIA-Hospitals-overwhelmed-as-bombing-death-toll-rises>>.

<sup>13</sup> ‘Somali government soldiers warned over killings’, BBC Monitoring Africa, 7 Nov. 2011; and Guled, A., ‘African Union troops reach outskirts of Mogadishu’, Associated Press, 20 Jan. 2012, <<http://news.yahoo.com/african-union-troops-reach-outskirts-mogadishu-083503256.html>>.

<sup>14</sup> United Nations (note 3), p. 28; and ‘Kenya–Somalia–West: Operation *Protect the Nation* follows wave of abductions’, *Africa Research Bulletin*, 9 Nov. 2011, p. 19 032.

<sup>15</sup> Weinstein, M. A., ‘Harakat al-Shabaab “gobbles up” Hizbul Islam’, Garowe Online, 23 Dec. 2010, <[http://www.garoweonline.com/artman2/publish/Somalia\\_27/Somalia\\_Harakat\\_al-Shabaab\\_Gobbles\\_Up\\_Hizbul\\_Isam.shtml](http://www.garoweonline.com/artman2/publish/Somalia_27/Somalia_Harakat_al-Shabaab_Gobbles_Up_Hizbul_Isam.shtml)>; and International Crisis Group (note 6), p. i.

<sup>16</sup> International Crisis Group (note 6), p. i.

<sup>17</sup> UN Security Council Resolution 2036, 22 Feb. 2012. The countries with troops in Somalia were Ethiopia and Kenya and, as contributors of troops to AMISOM, Burundi, Djibouti and Uganda. In addition, France and Israel are among the countries openly supporting Operation Linda Nchi with logistics and there are continuous reports of US drone attacks inside Somalia. ‘France to support Kenya’s incursion into Somalia’, BBC Monitoring Africa, 25 Oct. 2011; and ‘Some 19 civilians killed in “US drone attack” in southern Somalia’, BBC Monitoring Africa, 17 Sep. 2011. See also chapter 3, sections III and IV, in this volume.

named a leader in Kenya, suggesting the organization's interest in increasing its regional influence.<sup>18</sup>

This regionalization of al-Shabab's actions has led to calls for a tougher response, particularly since the bombings in Kampala. Politicians and military commanders from Uganda—which contributes a large proportion of AMISOM's troops—have signalled that AMISOM should move towards peace enforcement.<sup>19</sup> While international engagement in Somalia has so far largely been driven by a desire to stabilize the situation, a likely consequence of internationalization could be an expansion of the conflict beyond Somalia's borders. Domestically, external intervention may also result in increased support for al-Shabab.

### **One-sided violence: abuses in Ethiopia's Somali Region<sup>20</sup>**

As the global patterns predict, more non-state actors than governments carried out one-sided violence in the Horn of Africa in 2001–10.<sup>21</sup> However, the Ethiopian Government was the worst actor both in terms of the number of active years and the number of people killed. The years 2003 and 2004 were the bloodiest (with around 500 and 250 fatalities, respectively), while a more recent peak was recorded in 2007, when over 160 civilians were killed. In that year, almost all of the Ethiopian Government's one-sided violence was carried out in Somali Region, in the country's south-east, which has been the scene of an intermittent intrastate conflict between the government and secessionist rebel groups since the mid-1970s.

The crackdown on civilians in 2007 was preceded by the ONLF's escalation of its military struggle for an independent Ogaden, the south-eastern part of Somali Region. Aided by arms entering the region from neighbouring Somalia, the ONLF became more active and in late April stormed a Chinese-run oilfield, killing 74 people. This led to an increase in counterinsurgency operations by the Ethiopian National Defence Force (ENDF) and in July a major military campaign was initiated, with large

<sup>18</sup> Sheikh Iman Ali was named al-Shabab representative in Kenya in 2012. 'Al-Shabaab names Kenyan leader', Somalia Report, 10 Jan. 2012, <[http://somalireport.com/index.php/post/2489/Al-Shabaab\\_Names\\_Kenyan\\_Leader\\_](http://somalireport.com/index.php/post/2489/Al-Shabaab_Names_Kenyan_Leader_)>. Other al-Shabab leaders with international experience include Swedish–Somali Fuad Shongole and Omar Hammami (also known as Abu Mansur al-Amriki), who was born and raised in the USA. McGregor, A., *Who's Who in the Somali Insurgency: A Reference Guide* (Jamestown Foundation: Washington, DC, 2009), pp. 10–13.

<sup>19</sup> The interpretation of AMISOM's mandate has already changed. 'Mandate of AU troops in Somali capital said changed to enforcement of peace', BBC Monitoring Africa, 30 June 2011.

<sup>20</sup> This section is based on Human Rights Watch, 'Ethiopia: crackdown in east punishes civilians', 4 July 2007, <<http://www.hrw.org/news/2007/07/03/ethiopia-crackdown-east-punishes-civilians>>; Human Rights Watch (HRW), *Collective Punishment: War Crimes and Crimes against Humanity in the Ogaden Area of Ethiopia's Somali Region* (HRW: New York, 2008); and Ethiopian Human Rights Council (EHRCO), 'EHRCO Condemns Massacre Committed on Innocent Oilfield Workers', Press release, 26 April 2007, <[http://www.ehrco.org/index.php?option=com\\_content&id=14](http://www.ehrco.org/index.php?option=com_content&id=14)>.

<sup>21</sup> On the global pattern see section III below.

parts of Somali Region being cut off from the outside world. In late July 2007 the Ethiopian Government banned the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) from the region, claiming that it had sided with the opposition forces. A few weeks later the security situation also forced Médecins sans Frontières (MSF, Doctors without Borders) to leave.

While independent coverage of events in the region was thus largely lacking, reports that did emerge indicated that the government's counter-insurgency campaign was marred by gross human rights abuses. The ENDF deliberately and repeatedly attacked civilian populations in an effort to root out the insurgency. Relatives of suspected ONLF members were particularly targeted but simply being an ethnic Somali, and more specifically a member of the Somali Ogaden sub-clan (which has a special link with the rebels), was enough for a person to be considered a suspect.

### **Non-state conflicts: unrest in border areas**

Non-state conflicts form a heterogeneous category, but they can be crudely classified by organization type.<sup>22</sup> Non-state conflicts in the Horn of Africa follow the pattern seen in the rest of Africa, in that a majority (80 per cent) are fought between informally organized ethnic or religious communities. Further important distinctions can be made within this subgroup of actors on the basis of different geographical and topical clusters. The case studies below concern two distinct conflict clusters on the border between Ethiopia and Kenya.

#### *The western Ethiopia–Kenya border cluster*<sup>23</sup>

The remote area straddling the border between north-west Kenya and south-west Ethiopia is home to a large number of agro-pastoralist groups, between which relations are very fluid. While some groups are seen as 'eternal enemies', seemingly in a constant state of conflict, others serve as allies of convenience from time to time. This border area, on which neither state exerts much influence, is inhabited by the Turkana, Dassanech, Nyangatom, Suri and Dizi peoples, among others. Over the past decade the UCDP has recorded non-state conflicts between a number of these groups.<sup>24</sup>

<sup>22</sup> On the classification by organization level of the parties see section III below.

<sup>23</sup> This subsection is based on Schlee, G. and Watson, E. E. (eds), *Changing Identifications and Alliances in North-East Africa*, vol. 1, *Ethiopia and Kenya* (Berghan books: New York, 2009); Abbink, J., 'Ritual and political forms of violent practice among the Suri of southern Ethiopia', *Cahiers d'Études Africaines*, vol. 38 (1998), pp. 271–95; Abbink, J., 'Ethnic conflict in the "tribal zone": the Dizi and Suri in southern Ethiopia', *Journal of Modern African Studies*, vol. 31, no. 4 (Dec. 1993), pp. 675–82; and Abbink, J., 'Violence and the crisis of conciliation: Suri, Dizi and the state in south-west Ethiopia', *Africa*, vol. 70, no. 4 (2000), pp. 527–50.

<sup>24</sup> Specific conflicts recorded include those between the Turkana and Dassanech; the Nyangatom and Turkana; and the Dizi and Suri peoples.

While fighting can be triggered by a wide variety of events—for example, the killing of a person by an opposing group—several underlying reasons appear to explain many of the conflicts in the area. One of the most common causes is access to natural resources, particularly water and grazing land. As pressure on these resources has increased, underlying tensions based on a conflictual past have been exacerbated, resulting in intermittent fighting. The level of violence in the region tends to increase in the wake of droughts.<sup>25</sup> Cattle raiding, which has been practised in the area for centuries, is another major cause of deadly conflict between the groups. Raiding of neighbouring groups continues to be a way to replenish herds in the wake of disease or drought. One raid can create a vicious cycle of counter-raids that often leads to substantial violence. Yet another reason for fighting is that young men traditionally constitute their respective villages' fighting force. Once initiated, they are responsible for protecting both the tribe and its cattle. This has led to many instances of violence, with young men wishing to demonstrate their bravery.

*The eastern Ethiopia–Kenya border cluster*<sup>26</sup>

Between 2001 and 2010, four of the main tribes inhabiting the eastern part of the Ethiopia–Kenya border were involved in five different conflicts that shared a number of characteristics.<sup>27</sup> Typically, the conflicts occurred sporadically, resulted in comparatively low levels of violence and involved frequently shifting alliances.

There are several interrelated reasons for the high number of non-state conflicts in this cluster. One is shifts in affiliation to the two overarching clan families in the region, the Oromo and the Somali, which view each other as traditional enemies.<sup>28</sup> Some groups shift affiliation strategically as they can be viewed as Oromo according to one set of criteria (e.g. language) and Somali according to another (e.g. religion).

Another important reason is the historic westward expansion of the Garre from their traditional homelands in Somalia into present-day Kenya and Ethiopia. This led to conflicts with groups already present in the area, forcing some to move further westwards and encroach on other groups' traditional homelands, thus creating new conflicts. In addition to this his-

<sup>25</sup> On the links between natural resources and conflicts see Melvin, N. and De Koning, R., 'Resources and armed conflict', *SIPRI Yearbook 2011*.

<sup>26</sup> This subsection is based on eds Schlee and Watson (note 23); and Kefale, A., 'Federal restructuring in Ethiopia: renegotiating identity and borders along the Oromo–Somali ethnic frontiers', eds T. Hagman and D. Péclard, *Negotiating Statehood: Dynamics of Power and Domination in Africa* (John Wiley and Sons: Chichester, 2011).

<sup>27</sup> The areas that experienced conflict were Mandera, Marsabit, Moyale and Wajir districts of Kenya and the southern part of the Oromia and Somali regions of Ethiopia. The 4 tribes were the Borana, Gabra, Garre and Guji, which were involved in 5 dyads: Borana–Gabra, Borana–Garre, Borana–Guji, Gabra–Guji and Garre–Borana/Guji.

<sup>28</sup> Note that Somali here refers to ethnicity rather than nationality.

toric movement, groups also migrate as a reaction to environmental factors. Due to difficult living conditions in this arid region, droughts have a particularly destructive impact, provoking violent conflicts over scarce resources. As in the cluster further west, albeit to a lesser extent, livestock raids play into the conflicting relations between these tribes.

Political motives also add to the complexity. Domestically, this mainly concerns control over local administrations. In Ethiopia, for instance, the complexity stems from the country's reorganization as an ethnic federation in the early 1990s, which established a clear link between land and ethnicity. This resulted in increased interest in the possession of 'pure' ethnic territory, resistance to which led to non-state conflicts. Internationally, the dynamics of the relationship between Ethiopia and Kenya—which is dominated by the fear that Somalia's instability might spread beyond its borders—influences events in the cluster. Ethiopia and Kenya also fear each other's potential hegemonic aspirations. Thus, a number of non-state conflicts are drawn into the general entanglements of the Horn of Africa.