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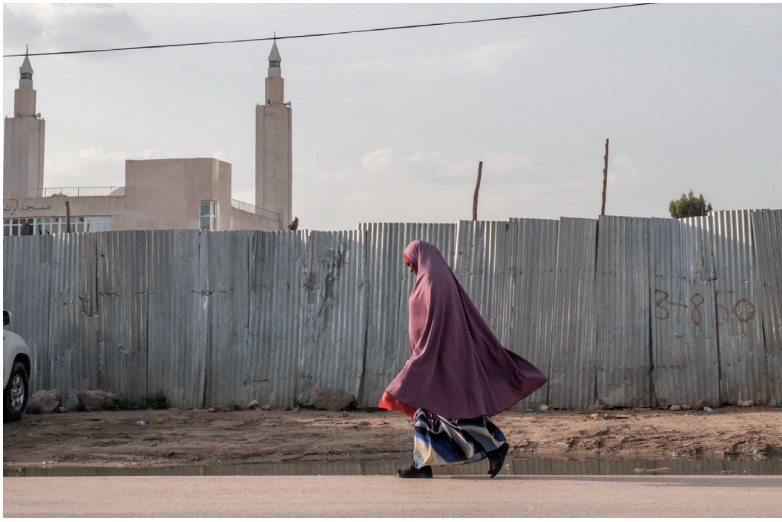

Ethiopia and Somalia's Political-Security Entanglement

The Evolution of the Political Marketplace in the Horn of Africa

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PeaceRep Somalia research aims to deepen the understanding of the country's fragmented predicament, ten years after the establishment of the Federal government and in light of the continued pervasiveness of conflict and political instability, both domestically and regionally. Our research themes include: sub-national governance through checkpoints; justice and security in Somalia; building on the Galkayo 'local' agreement; emergent conflict and peace dynamics across the Somali regions (Ethiopia, Somalia and Kenya). The programme will continue to analyse and engage stakeholders around peacebuilding processes and in relation to events that unfold in real time.

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Executive Summary

Ethiopia and Somalia have been deeply entangled in political and security terms since the early 1990s as the emergence and rise of the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) evolved alongside the collapse and fragmentation of political order in Somalia. This entanglement was initially determined by Ethiopia's framing of its own Somali Regional State (SRS) and Somalia itself (including Somaliland and Puntland) primarily in security terms. It was also informed by the party-state discipline and strategic coherence of the EPRDF.

This research report explores the penetration of a market logic, framed as a political marketplace, that has evolved in this regional entanglement. While this logic informs Somalia's own political evolution for a much longer period, the years 2010–2018 mark the first critical juncture of this trajectory in Ethiopia. A second critical juncture is associated with the change of regime in Ethiopia in 2018 at both federal and SRS levels. This change continued a market logic but involved a different set of actors and a shift from a monopolistic regime in the SRS to a decentralised and less predictable configuration of actors.

Key Findings

1) Prior to the death of Ethiopia's Prime Minister, Meles Zenawi, in 2012, Ethiopia's posture and foreign policy towards Somalia and its own Somali region was framed primarily in security terms. These core-periphery relationships were enacted through a disciplined party-state regime that included the presence of federal 'agents' in the SRS.

2) Following the death of Zenawi, this party-state discipline has steadily loosened and in the SRS a market logic was accelerated through the appointment of a new President and strongman in 2010. The new regime in the SRS included the establishment of the paramilitary 'Liyu' Police. Through his position, the President came to monopolise coercive and economic resources and utilised this capacity to expand his power and influence within the Ethiopian political and security apparatus. We refer to this period as the first critical juncture in the evolution of a political marketplace in Ethiopia.

3) The changes taking places in the SRS from 2010 had implications for relations with Somalia, particularly at the sub-national level, where a dominant Somali figure, the SRS President, was able to project his power and influence across the border with the backing of the EPRDF, the Liyu Police and the Ethiopian National Defence Force (ENDF).

4) A second critical juncture is associated with the change of regime in Ethiopia in 2018 at both federal and SRS levels. This reconfigured the character of the political marketplace from having a monopolistic actor in place to a decentralised and less predictable marketplace.

5) These different junctures in Ethiopia have had profound implications for Ethiopia-Somalia relations at different levels, including national and sub-national interactions. Today, Somalia's core-periphery relations continue to be shaped by Ethiopia's engagement, though in more unpredictable ways.

Recommendations

1) Recognising the growing influence of market logics in Ethiopia's political and security landscape is important for understanding policy coherence in Ethiopia, cross-border conflict in the Ethiopia-Somalia regions, and core-periphery relations in Somalia itself.

2) Policymakers must consider that Ethiopia is a more unpredictable neighbour towards Somalia than it was in previous years. This quality can include a disconnect between postures and positions at central and decentralised levels. In other words, policy positions in Addis Ababa may not always reflect the actions of Ethiopian security actors at local levels in Somalia.

3) Policymakers and analysts need to take into account the proliferation of brokers, often with competing interests, who operate both locally (within Ethiopia) and across Somalia's sub-regions, which is an outcome of an expanded transactional logic across this territorial space.

Introduction

Over the last 30 years, Ethiopia's political and security influence and entanglement in Somalia has been profound. Initially, in the early 1990s, the newly empowered EPRDF, led by the Tigrayan People's Liberation Front (TPLF), asserted its dominance over the federal government system in Ethiopia.[1] This took place while Somalia's central state collapsed and its post-state political order evolved in a more fragmented manner. The polities of Somaliland and Puntland emerged, which have remained the two most coherent forms of authority since.[2] Following the death of Meles Zenawi in 2012, Ethiopia's internal coherence and state-party discipline loosened while Somalia was undergoing its own political evolution under a newly recognised and internationally supported federal governmental system.[3]

When considering the deeply entangled set of relations between Ethiopia and Somalia, the positionality of the SRS is particularly important. While the SRS is considered part of Ethiopia politically, it is economically (and culturally and linguistically) part of the wider Somali territories.[4] The vast border between Ethiopia and Somalia largely lies along the SRS-Somalia international boundary line, reflecting its colonial legacy. Security imperatives have determined Ethiopia's relationship with its own Somali Region, as well as with neighbouring Somalia (and its sub-regions), for much of the last 35 years. [5] This securitisation has itself been located within a regional and global security assemblage for much of this period, framed by the 'war-on-terror' and other insurgent activities within Ethiopia.[6] As such, Ethiopia has maintained a significant security presence within Somalia's territory and has undertaken multiple small-scale and more significant military incursions. Given this history, which continues through to present-day, the two polities should be analysed as a deeply entangled political-security arena or nexus connecting federal, sub-national and local actors within and between both countries.

Over the last 30–40 years, a transactional logic, characterised as a political marketplace, has evolved in Somalia, in contrast to the Marxist-Leninist party-state system across the border in Ethiopia (although the party-state apparatus manifested differently in core and periphery areas of the country).[7] However, an under-examined feature of this entangled Ethiopia-Somalia arena has been the penetration of a transactional or market logic, which has intensified over the last 10–15 years.

The research for this report is based on 25 interviews conducted by the authors within the scope of the PeaceRep progamme, but also draws on published and unpublished work conducted under its predecessor programme, the Conflict Research Programme (CRP), as well as other studies and assignments that the authors have been involved in. The authors all have a research background in both countries, and across the Somali-speaking Horn of Africa. This report is a preliminary contribution and outline to our argument which will be further developed in a scholarly article.

Recognising the growing influence of market logics in Ethiopia's political and security landscape is critical, including the proliferation of brokers, often with competing interests, who operate both locally (within Ethiopia) and across Somalia's sub-regions. These developments undermine policy coherence and risk entrenching (cross-border) instability.

In this report, we outline the penetration of a market logic within Ethiopia that has intersected with Somalia's much longer standing political marketplace, identifying key junctures in this development. We outline the characteristics of the political marketplace framework in the following section before highlighting key factors in the Ethiopia-Somalia nexus. We then move to the first critical juncture, centred around the regime of the former SRS President, Abdi Mohamed Omar 'Iley', and his positionality within the Tigrayan dominated EPRDF. An outline of the second critical juncture, associated with the arrival of Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed in Ethiopia, follows. Both junctures, while pertinent to Ethiopia and the evolution of the political marketplace there, have had – and will continue to have – implications for relations with Somalia at central and decentralised levels.

Money, Violence and Identity Politics

The political marketplace framework was developed by Alex de Waal based on his experience in the Horn of Africa, and has gained currency in policy and academic circles since.[8] A political marketplace is a framework for understanding the intersection of money, violence and the politics of identity. It concerns the commodification and trading of political relations where public office, political allegiances and political services are bought and sold according to laws of supply and demand. While emphasising its materialist dimensions, violence and the politicisation of identities is part of its explanatory logic, where coercive tools and the mobilisation of identities can work to either support the use of finance as well as resist it. This monetised, transactional politics is said to dominate and undermine institutionalised politics and therefore challenges policy-driven state building agendas.

The political marketplace is based on four factors.[9] The first is political finance, which refers to the political budgets utilised to rent the loyalty of political elites. Finance can come from different sources and is typically associated with little accountability. The level of political finance depends on the price of loyalty, which will depend on market conditions. Political entrepreneurs who operate in the market attempt to control it using different means, which may include coercion, divide-and rule tactics or the mobilisation/politicisation of identities. A second factor concerns control over violence, which may be more centralised or more decentralised. The third factor concerns the 'rules of the game,' or the rules and norms that regulate behaviour in the marketplace, which may depend on formal and informal regulations, access to information and communication. The fourth factor refers to the position and integration of the local or national marketplace into a wider marketplace, whether at regional or global levels. Marketplace managers negotiate both revenue and spending with their financiers and clients. Based on these four factors, different types of political systems can emerge. De Waal further emphasises that understanding the political marketplace requires an 'appreciation of the skills and strategies required to succeed in it', typically embodied by a successful political entrepreneur, whose behaviour reveals how that marketplace works.[10]

In the case of Somalia, the evolution of the political marketplace has been well articulated.[11] The framework has also been applied to specific themes or sectors in Somalia, including the private security and oil/gas sectors.[12] However, although de Waal's initial articulation of the framework was applied to the Horn of Africa, Ethiopia was not considered part of such a system, given the prevailing political regime in the country, although this was questioned at the time.[13] In retrospect, its development was well underway in the centre of its Somali region, but linked to wider networks of power and authority in the country.

Background

Ethiopia and Somalia have an extremely long international border, the result of the colonial division of the Somali populated sub-region between the colonial powers of Ethiopia, France, Great Britain and Italy.[14] There is a long history of violence and conflict across these borders, with the Ethiopia-Somalia War (1977–78) marking one major episode, which took place in the context of the Cold War. The sudden switch of alliance by the USSR from Somalia to Ethiopia marked a major turning point in the war, to the disadvantage of Somalia's President, Mohamed Siad Barre, whose defeat marked the beginning of the end of his regime.[15] Many Somalis from the SRS were displaced to Somalia as a result of this war, and incorporated into Somalia as refugees and citizens.[16]

The end of the Cold War saw the removal of the Marxist-Leninist military junta in Ethiopia and the rise of a Tigrayan-led and dominated government, while at the same time the state of Somalia collapsed and civil war ensued.[17] Somaliland and Puntland emerged from this context in the 1990s, the former declaring itself an independent republic in 1993, with Puntland formally established in 1998 as an autonomous region.[18] Somaliland and Puntland required conducive relations with a much more powerful Ethiopia to maintain their own stability and autonomy, and both formed informal alliances.[19]

The emergence of Al Itihad Al Islamia (AIAI) and the Ogaden National Liberation Front (ONLF) in the SRS – initially as political parties but then as insurgent groups – contributed to the securitisation of relations between Ethiopia's ruling party and the SRS. As a result, the SRS, like other border regions, fell under the authority of the Ministry of Internal Affairs rather than under developmental line ministries.

The insurgent threats to Ethiopia informed relations with Somaliland and Puntland.[20] The first President of Puntland, Abdullahi Yusuf, was a fervent anti-Islamist figure and an ex-colonel in the Said Barre government. Prior to the establishment of Puntland proper in 1998, Yusuf had collaborated with Ethiopia in order to fight AIAI in Bosasso in 1993.[21] Ethiopia had to ensure that insurgent groups could not act easily from across the border. Concerning Somaliland, Prime Minister Meles Zenawi of Ethiopia and President Igal of Somaliland reportedly made a 'gentleman's agreement' in order to support their respective positions.[22]

Another significant event in this cross-border entanglement occurred in 1997, when Ethiopia supported the Rahanweyn Resistance Army (RRA) against the occupying forces of the 'warlord' – and clan militia – Hussein Aideed.[23] This remains a profoundly important development in Somalia's recent history as it enabled a structurally marginalised population group – the Rahanweyn or Mirifle – to oust powerful elements of the Haber Gedir clan. At a similar time, Ethiopia along with its local Somali allies crushed the remaining AIAI forces in northern Gedo, forcing the group to give up its arms.[24] Following the interventions in the 1990s, Ethiopia has maintained cooperative relations with Somaliland and Puntland while retaining a military presence in Bay, Bakool and Gedo regions of southern Somalia, thereby contributing to the security of its border region.

Having established these relations and security presence, the period from 1997 to 2006 in Somalia was one of relative peace, described as a time of 'no war, no peace'. The northern regions of Somaliland and Puntland evolved as relatively stable regions and were presented by some as potential 'building blocks' of a future state.[25] Ethiopia supported this 'building blocks' approach for some years.[26] Many Somalis saw this approach as a means for Ethiopia to maintain Somalia as a fragmented political entity, therefore weakening its potential threat and support for irridentist elements in the SRS.

While there was an absence of large-scale violence in central and southern parts of Somalia during the late 1990s and early 2000s, political order and authority was highly localised. From 2000, beginning with the Djibouti-sponsored Arta process, a series of national level peace conferences took place regarding Somalia.[27] Ethiopia was an active player in these processes, incentivised by its own security concerns and priorities. However, alongside the national peacebuilding process, local Islamic courts were developing as forms of political order, bringing together businesspeople, clan elders and religious leaders in response to the high costs, unpredictability and violence of Somalia's 'warlords'.[28] These initially separate initiatives came together under the umbrella of the Islamic Courts Union (ICU) in 2006. With widespread public support, they quickly expanded across most of southern and central Somalia.[29]

This development, framed by the early years of the 'war-on-terror' and bellicose elements in the ICU, soon led to a military response in the form of an invasion of Ethiopian forces (tacitly supported by the US), which splintered the ICU.[30] Abdullahi Yusuf, President of the Transitional National Government (TNG) at the time and a fervent anti-Islamist figure and long-standing ally of Ethiopia, supported this response. The military action succeeded in retaking Mogadishu from the ICU, but led to the emergence of the militant Islamist group, Al Harakat Al Shabaab in 2007/8.[31]

This brief history provides an overview of the Ethiopia-Somalia nexus before turning back to developments in the SRS, Ethiopia.

Critical Juncture 1: The Abdi 'Iley' Years (2010–2018)

The period between 2010 and 2018, and our first critical juncture, is that of the time of former President Abdi Mohamed Omar 'Iley'. Abdi Mohamed Omar (known as Abdi 'Iley') took full control of the financial resources and coercive power available to him as President of the SRS, including deepening and extending his networks and relationships with the military and intelligence elements of the EPRDF. His power grew over time and was mobilised domestically as well as across the Somali-speaking border regions (as well as the diaspora), coinciding with the establishment of the federal system and federal member states in Somalia. His reign also coincided with the weakening of the party-state apparatus in Ethiopia.

Abdi 'Iley' was appointed President of the SRS in 2010, following his tenure as SRS security head of the Ethiopian intelligence services. A primary rationale behind his appointment was his positioning as an Ogaden figure responsible for eliminating the ONLF. His appointment followed the infamous 2007 attack on a Chinese-run oilfield in Obole, 75 miles from the SRS capital Jijiga, close to the Somali border.[32]

Window of Optimism

For a brief period, Iley's appointment was associated with a window of optimism for many Somalis in the SRS, particularly those who did not support the ONLF. His appointment coincided with Ethiopia's decentralisation process, which saw significant developmental investment across the country, including in the SRS. A long-neglected region, new roads, hospitals and a university were established in the SRS. However, this honeymoon period was accompanied by considerable violence against the ONLF (and its sympathisers) and an increasingly brutal and repressive authority.[33]

Control of Violence

Abdi Mohamed Omar 'Iley' was initially appointed as the Director of the Office of Security of the SRS where he oversaw the creation of the Special Police (Liyu Police), a paramilitary force. The Liyu Police consisted of a force of up to 9,000 men under the direct control of the President. They underwent training and operated within a strict hierarchy and a defined chain of command.

The Obole attack was the final catalyst for the creation of this force. Prior to Iley's appointment, the Ethiopian National Defence Force (ENDF) were the main military actor charged with securing the Ethiopia-Somalia international border, as well as fighting the ONLF. The creation of the Liyu Police allowed the Ethiopian federal government and military to delegate what had become an onerous security task in a vast and harsh environment, thereby reducing casualties and transferring responsibility to the Liyu Police, while at the same time using the region's budget to pay for it. Iley's relentless pursuit of the ONLF gave him further credibility and power within the Ethiopian security establishment.

The Liyu Police played an important role in securing the border between Ethiopia and Somalia, particularly along key trade routes. As such they became a key way of capturing and monopolising the rents associated with formal and informal trade,[34] which formed an important part of Iley's political budget. The ENDF maintained bases throughout the SRS, particularly in main towns, but became less active over time as the Liyu Police became the major security actor in the region.

Prior to the appointment of Abdi Iley, the federal military also played an important role in the region's administration in Jijiga (the capital) and at district/woreda levels, as part of the security-driven control required under the EPRDF. However, as Iley's power grew, he established strong relations at more senior levels within the military establishment, and so was able to cut out the rest of the military – the lower ranks – from influence (and access to money).

As Abdi Iley's position (and resources) grew, he deepened his relationship with the military and other Tigrayan elites. Thus, he was able to use his influence in Addis Ababa to ward off any scrutiny from the Federal Government. In his later years, he was even able to defy the incumbent Ethiopian Prime Minister on different occasions with the support of the military. He was also able to ban federal intelligence services from working in the SRS, creating his own intelligence service. Iley's power increased tremendously after the death of Prime Minister Meles Zenawi in 2012, as all of Ethiopia's regional states gained more autonomy from the centre within a weakening federal system.

In the period leading up to the change of regime and the rise of Oromo figures in Ethiopia, the Liyu Police not only targeted the ONLF but were part of a conflict with the Oromo. This conflict aimed at destabilising Oromo political mobilisation, which threatened Tigrayan interests and power within the EPRDF.[35]

Political Finance

Iley's control of the Liyu Police empowered him within the security establishment in Ethiopia, which was dominated by Tigrayan figures. This coercive power was reinforced by the monetary resources he was able to command, particularly through control over import licenses for goods entering via Berbera port in Somaliland. The Berbera Corridor is a major trade artery between the Red Sea coast and markets in Somaliland, Somalia and Ethiopia.[36] Iley was able to obtain licenses for the tax-free import of food items, beverages and construction materials for himself and his family. Prior to Iley's appointment, many different actors and networks were involved in a large cross-border 'contraband' trade system.[37]

Under the decentralisation drive at the time, the SRS received a significant budget from the Federal Government, which Abdi Iley also controlled. This budget included contracts for infrastructure development and other services, which Iley offered to close allies, including Somali and some Tigrayan-owned companies. This budget was estimated at two billion birr at the time.

Other than oil and gas, the major asset of the SRS is livestock. An estimated 50% of the considerable livestock exported through Berbera and Bosasso ports in Somaliland comes from the SRS.[38] This trade is associated with large and growing markets in the Gulf, including the Hajj pilgrimage to Saudi Arabia.[39] This informal trading economy came under the control of a small group of traders associated with the President.[40] The trade of the stimulant known as qat was another lucrative area that the President was able to exert control over.[41]

These sources of revenue provided Iley with a large political budget to use at his discretion. As de Waal suggests, the political entrepreneur must be skilled in utilising the resources available to him. One of Iley's key strengths was his ability to utilise these financial resources to maintain, deepen and extend his personal networks within the primarily Tigrayan-led military and intelligence system. Iley's pre-existing relationships from his military/intelligence background and appointment as president meant that he was well connected to prominent figures. Furthermore, the low levels of pay within the broader Ethiopian civil service – maintained through strict party discipline – stood in sharp contrast with the money that Iley was able to disburse. Following the death of Meles Zenawi, EPRDF party discipline slowly eroded, and the military became increasingly powerful compared to political leadership.

Cross-border Influence

The growing power of the SRS president was also evident in foreign and cross-border relations, particularly in relation to Somali-speaking regions, as the SRS borders Djibouti and Somaliland to the north and all of Somalia's Federal Member States (FMS). The Liyu Police became one of the arms of Iley's pan-regional reach and were able to carry out operations in different parts of Somalia during the course of his reign,[42] including against Al Shabaab and clan militias or around the control of trade. Clans in these border areas were previously accustomed to dealing with Ethiopia's federal military. Clan representatives were known to pay Ethiopian soldiers to gain access to Ethiopian territory for water or grazing. However, the Liyu Police closed the borders, often dividing clans who were present on both sides. For example, the Liyu Police harassed Isaaq traders, reflecting the tensions between Somaliland and the SRS during the period of Iley's rule.[43] While the Isaaq had previously attained prominent positions within the SRS and federal government, under Iley they were marginalised.[44]

Iley's regional reach also extended to the establishment of Jubbaland and particularly Ahmed Mohamed Islam (Madobe's) rise to President.[45] Like Iley, Madobe is from the Mohamed Zubhir sub-clan of the Ogaden. Iley used his influence to support Madobe's leadership ambitions,[46] reportedly facilitating connections between Madobe and the Ethiopian political and security establishment. He also used this support to garner favour among Mohamed Zubhir elders, appealing to clan solidarity and parochialism. Cooperative relations were maintained between the two leaders until Iley's arrest in 2018. Iley was ultimately a pro-EPRDF appointee, who had become a very powerful and brutal figure in his own right. Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed's rise to power ultimately led to Iley's arrest and downfall in August 2018.[47]

Critical Juncture 2: From Monopolisation to Decentralisation

The second critical juncture we identify is associated with the change of the Ethiopian regime at both the federal and regional levels. The rise of Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed in Addis Ababa was soon followed by the 2018 jailing of Abdi 'Iley' in the SRS, which was enormously consequential.[48] These developments marked the end of a Tigrayan dominance within the political and military establishment of Ethiopia, which later led to the war in Tigray and high levels of violence in many parts of the Ethiopian highlands.[49] Iley's position, as we have indicated, was deeply intertwined with his Tigrayan alliances, and so the loss of Tigrayan power also undermined Iley's status.

The gradual loosening of the party–state apparatus, which had been underway for several years, alongside the emergence of an increasingly corrupt and transactional political culture in Ethiopia, meant that while transactional logics would persist after regime change, their organisation would shift with the emergence of new actors. Rather than continue his predecessor's monopolisation of the security and economic sectors, the new president of the SRS, Mustafa Omer, opened up the economy and political space in the region.[50] The Liyu Police were (partially) disbanded as part of this new regime and the ENDF reassumed their role within the SRS.

Centrally, the Ethiopian Prime Minister signalled a different, brotherly relationship between the Ethiopian central state and its Somali citizens (and Somalis in general), drawing on his own Oromo identity and proximity to the Somalis. This discursive and symbolic shift was a notable departure from an antagonistic set of juxtapositions between the Somalis of the periphery and the 'highlanders' of the centre who had been dominant historically.[51]

Control of Violence

A number of factors help explain the changed security picture in the SRS. While Iley was allowed to use the Liyu Police as his personal paramilitary, fully backed by the ruling regime (certainly within its security establishment), this has not been the case for the new President, Mustafa Omer. A peace agreement signed between the SRS regional government and the ONLF on 21 October 2018 changed the security context and removed one of the key rationales for the Liyu Police.[52] Furthermore, Omer wanted to signal a changed political culture and was mindful not to use security forces in the same brutal way as Iley, despite having the authority to do so.

It is notable that the SRS has seen several years of relative peace since this change of leadership, with conflict and violence focused around the northern and central regions of Ethiopia.[53] In the SRS, the ENDF have resumed their role as the primary security actor in the international border regions and in Somalia itself.

Given the changed political and security landscape within Ethiopia, where attention (and violence) is now focused on other regions, as well as the peace agreement with the ONLF, President Omer is a far less powerful figure in the SRS than Abdi Iley was. In the absence of an armed insurgency and conflict, this reflects the central government's longstanding approach to governing the SRS as a security frontier, framed as a problem to be controlled or managed. The authority of the federal government's regional representative – the SRS president – has historically depended on their capacity to contain the SRS. Moreover, President Omer does not have the same access to personal financial resources to spend on the Liyu Police that Iley had previously during his monopolistic power.

Political Budget

Iley's comprehensive control of the economy – both formal and informal – was also largely reversed under the new President. However, this opening up has also come with few checks and balances, and pervasive corruption. President Omer has openly acknowledged these practices. A common perspective in the region is that while corruption was centralised under Iley, it is now decentralised but practiced by all. For example, the major government contracts are now more widely distributed, with Omer recognising the need to distribute resources both to strengthen his patronage networks and to ensure his political survival.

That said, the incumbent President and his allies do have access to political finance and use this to develop and maintain alliances in the evolving and unstable Ethiopian political system. However, the finance involved is much more modest than was previously the case.

Cross-border Implications

As the regimes in Addis Ababa and the SRS have changed, so has the nature of the political-security entanglement with Somalia and the Somali regions and polities across the border. Two periods are discussed in the following section.

Farmajo and the Tripartite Alliance (2017–2022)

When Ethiopian Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed and the SRS President, Mustafa Omer, came to power, they established strong relations with the incumbent President in Somalia, Mohamed Abdi 'Farmajo'. Omer had already developed ties to the ruling cabal in Mogadishu, where he had been based when working for the UN, immediately before his move to the SRS.[54] A tripartite relationship formed, which included the Prime Minister of Ethiopia, President of Somalia and President of Eritrea, with all three positioned as authoritarian leaders within their respective countries.[55]

Farmajo's centralising ambitions in Somalia were reflected in the 2018–2020 FMS elections. Whereas Ethiopia under the EPRDF had supported Madobe's presidency in Jubbaland, the new regimes in Ethiopia and Mogadishu took a different direction. The first FMS election under Farmajo took place in Southwest State (SWS), where Ethiopian security presence and history is strong. Given the relative weakness of SWS within Somalia's federal system, Mogadishu was able to install its preferred presidential candidate using political finance and the coercive support of federal and Ethiopian forces.[56]

Elections in Jubbaland followed, with President Madobe fully aware of the determination and tactics Mogadishu (with Ethiopian support) would likely adopt. Ultimately, in spite of the Federal Government of Somalia's considerable efforts to undermine Madobe, his own coercive capacity and strategic relations with Kenya allowed him to counter central influence, enabling him to control the election process and outcome to secure his own advantage and re-election.[57] Ethiopia remained a significant actor in Somalia's political marketplace, though relations were largely confined to the respective political centres. Farmajo's regime, with the backing of Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed, was able to leverage the ENDF to support its objectives. Initially, this was further enabled by the new SRS leadership's existing relationship with the FGS is Somalia.[58]

A Reversal under Hassan Sheikh Mohamud (2022–Present)

An authoritarian turn by the Farmajo regime in Mogadishu led to strong resistance from various opposition groups and eventually the election of Hassan Sheikh Mohamud (HSM) as President in early 2022. The previous Ethiopia-Somalia alignment was immediately reversed and tensions between the two countries soon developed. These tensions escalated when Somaliland and Ethiopia signed an MoU purporting to see Ethiopia recognise Somaliland in exchange for access to the sea.[59]

The antagonistic relations between the two leaders carry important implications for Somalia, given the presence of the Ethiopian military on Somali territory – both as part of peacekeeping forces, but also in border areas where Ethiopian forces have long been present. The response from Mogadishu was to create new alliances, including with Egypt, and threatening to expel Ethiopian forces from Somalia completely.[60]

While relations between the respective capitals reflect one aspect of the Ethiopia-Somalia entanglement, relationships at the local level, where Ethiopian forces and Somali political entrepreneurs co-exist, capture another layer of interaction. Since the 2018 change of regime in Ethiopia, this is increasingly incoherent, with multiple actors and transactional exchanges that are not necessarily aligned with official policy positions. In recent years, there have been several examples of political entrepreneurs in the border areas of Somalia turning to Somali and Ethiopian counterparts within Ethiopia in an attempt to mobilise support for their respective local political contests. In doing so, they attempt to use their own political finance to pay for support. Few of these interactions have been publicly documented, although one example was reported in the Hirshabelle border area.[61] These relationships, often facilitated by brokers, also take place within Ethiopia as competing political actors in the SRS attempt to leverage federal counterparts against their Somali competitors, using political finance.

Conclusions

Ethiopia and Somalia have been deeply entangled in political and security terms since the early 1990s as the rise – and later demise – of the EPRDF in Ethiopia took place alongside the collapse and fragmentation of political order in Somalia. This entanglement was initially determined by Ethiopia's framing of its own Somali Regional State and Somalia itself primarily in security terms. It was also informed by the party-state discipline and strategic coherence of Ethiopia.

The above analysis describes the penetration of a market logic that has developed within this landscape, centred on the Somali-speaking regions of the Horn of Africa but that extends deeper into Ethiopia's political and security networks. We highlighted two critical junctures in the development of this transactional logic and political marketplace. The first reflects a monopolistic actor and political system in the SRS, closely networked with Ethiopia's Tigrayan-led political – particularly military – system. This arrangement was overturned in 2018, and while a transactional logic has continued, it now operates in a more decentralised political system with a different set of actors.

These developments have important implications for the understanding of political and security dynamics in the Ethiopia-Somalia nexus, as well as for the implementation of policy, particularly by Ethiopia. These different junctures in Ethiopia have had profound implications for Ethiopia-Somalia relations at the national and sub-national levels. Today, Somalia's core-periphery relations continue to be shaped by Ethiopian engagement, albeit differently than before.

Endnotes

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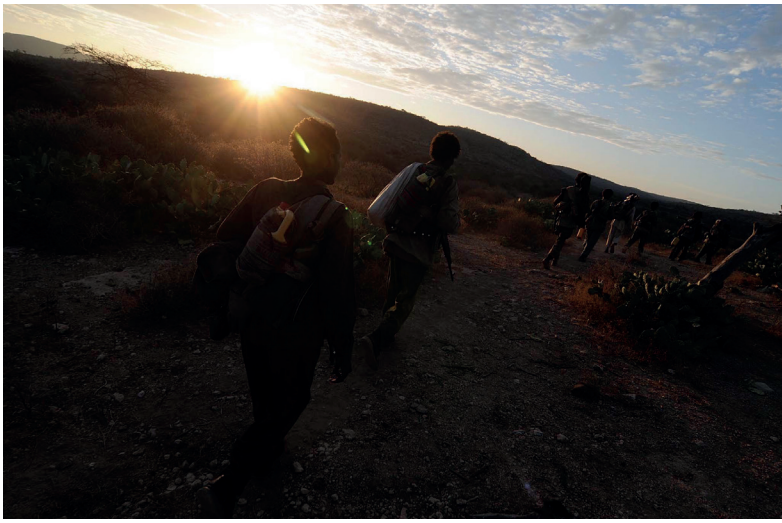

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