

THE OGADEN: A MICROCOSM OF GLOBAL CONFLICT

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The British author Salman Rushdie once said: “To be Somali is to be a people united by one language and divided by maps.”¹ Rushdie was referring to the colonization of East Africa by European powers, a process that split the Somali people and created enormous havoc in its wake. After the “Scramble for Africa,” European nations did not respect ethnic and tribal boundaries as they created new states. They divided the region inhabited by the large and geographically dispersed Somali tribe into Italian, British, and French protectorates. After Africa won its independence from Europe, borders were redrawn again. Four nations with significant Somali populations were created: Somalia, Ethiopia, Kenya, and later Djibouti.

Yet independence did not create stability. Within a decade, Somalia’s dictator, Siad Barre, an advocate of Somali pan-nationalism, attempted to unify the five regions that comprised “Greater Somalia.” These included the two former British and Italian protectorates that formed the country of Somalia, the Northern Frontier Districts of Kenya, the former French Somaliland, which became the Republic of Djibouti, and the Ogaden and Haud regions of Ethiopia. Barre’s idea of Somali pan-

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nationalism eventually led to a major war over the Ogaden region with Ethiopia, intense Cold War rivalry between the Soviet Union and the United States, and finally the collapse of Somalia. The Ogaden war not only helped to destroy Somalia, but had brutal repercussions in neighboring countries as well. To this day, guerrilla warfare continues in the Ogaden region, and the Somali Ethiopians of the region continue to suffer tremendously. The historic conflicts over the Ogaden are complex, involving longstanding ethnic rivalries, Asian and European imperialism, Cold War competition, and tribal nationalism. The Ogaden is thus a microcosm of the many forces that have shaped the history of the African continent.

The History of Conflict: 1400-1855

To understand the conflict in the Ogaden during the 20th century, it is necessary to go back to the 15th century, when the Abyssinian Christian Empire, the predecessor of modern day Ethiopia, and the Muslim city-state of Ifat fought periodic wars for control of the Ogaden region.² In the 16th century, the legendary Muslim general Ahmed ibn Ibrahim al Ghazi, or “Ahmed the Left-Handed,” led an offensive that drove the Abyssinians out of the Ogaden. Ahmed the Left-Handed declared a Jihad on the Abyssinian Empire and attempted to convert to Islam the peoples of the lands he conquered. He was assisted by the Ottomans who supplied food and weaponry.³ Yet Ahmed the Left-Handed soon overreached himself, leading his troops deep into Abyssinian territory. There, he was overwhelmed by the forces of the newly-expanded, Portuguese-backed Abyssinian army. Having defeated the armies of Ahmed the Left-Handed, the Abyssinian Empire reclaimed the Ogaden.⁴

The Abyssinians struck a crushing blow against the forces of the Muslim Sultanates and the Ottoman Turks. They became the dominant power in the region. Fighting between the two powers ceased, and Muslim herders, who previously avoided the

Ogaden because of hostilities with the Abyssinians, migrated to the region in large numbers.⁵ Muslim herders began to bring their livestock to the Ogaden for annual pasturage. They migrated in and out of the Ogaden according to rainfall, and combed the region for the most fertile grazing spots. These Muslim herders were ethnic Somalis, and to this day, the region is peopled almost entirely by their descendants.⁶

The Ogaden thus became a land of Muslim Somali herders, a migratory people who followed the predictable patterns of rain and pasturage. According to Dr. Said Samatar, the “pre-colonial Somali lived in a world of egalitarian anarchy.”⁷ Somali nomads have no centralized government, and according to British anthropologist I.M. Lewis, this “lack of formal government and of instituted authority is strongly reflected in their extreme independence and individualism.”⁸ Lewis also noted that the Somali nomad has “an extraordinary sense of superiority as an individual” and believes that he is “subject to no other authority except that of God.”⁹ Various Somali tribes fought wars over territory and cattle, and a delicate power-sharing balance was created to preserve cordial relations between the clans. Fierce clan loyalty and the refusal to accept a centralized Somali government later contributed to the collapse of the Somali state in the 1990s.¹⁰

Between the late 16th century and the early 19th century, the peoples of the Ogaden lived largely in peace. They were relatively unaffected by the struggle between Arab merchants and the indigenous Somali clans for control of East African seaports such as Mogadishu, Bimal, Merka, and Baraawe. As herders, people of the Ogaden did not play a major role in the slave trade, which was the primary cause for conflict between ethnic Somalis and Arab traders.¹¹

The Colonial Period: 1855-1960

In 1855, the prominent European explorer Richard Burton led an expedition into the Ogaden region. He was the first

European to explore this region of East Africa. Burton considered the natives of the Ogaden to be savage, and attributed their “barbarism” to the great inequality among the Somali clans.¹² The Somali were, he noted, a people “not to be trusted without supervision.”¹³ Burton docked on the island of Berbera off the coast of Somalia in the Gulf of Aden, and immediately recognized the strategic advantages of the island: “Berbera is the true key of the Red Sea, the centre of East African traffic.”¹⁴ This would prove to be central to future struggles in the area.

Soon after his return to England, Burton presented his findings to the European powers that were eager to know more about the mysterious “Dark Continent.” Great Britain took a special interest in the East African coast and was eager to establish a base at Berbera in order to secure the area surrounding the vital Suez Canal.¹⁵ Close to the British colony of India, the Berbera base would allow the British to cement their position in the Middle East and Africa. The British made treaties with many coastal Somali clans, and established a protectorate along the East African coast.¹⁶

Between 1858 and 1900, four nations—Ethiopia, Italy, Britain, and France—divided up Somali territory into five major regions: the Ogaden, Italian Somaliland, British Somaliland Protectorate, British Northern Frontier Districts, and French Somaliland. Each of these nations had strong economic interests in the area. The divided Somalis strongly resisted the foreign powers and their new, seemingly senseless boundaries.¹⁷ Britain moved troops stationed in India to Somalia to quell the disturbances. Violence ensued, and both sides took heavy casualties. Following the invention and use of fighter planes during the Turkish-Italian War of 1911, European air-raids destroyed all major Somali resistance. The Somalis were for a time beaten into subjugation by the superior firepower of the West.

In 1897, Ethiopia and Britain signed the Treaty of London, which “handed over some 25,000 square miles of Western Somali territory—the Ogaden—to Ethiopia.”¹⁸ Ethiopia’s acquisition of the Ogaden posed an immediate problem to the Somali nomads who, according to grazing conditions, made their traditional

migrations in and out of the Ogaden with their cattle. The two powers amended the Treaty of London, allowing Somali herders to graze their livestock in both British and Ethiopian-controlled territories.¹⁹

The British, eager to profit from their holdings, initiated a program in British Somaliland to commercialize cattle production. This program was a direct blow to the Somali herders. According to the anthropologist Mark Bradbury, the program “affected the entire social, economic, and political culture of pastoralists, their livelihood, security of food supplies, and their relationship with the environment.”²⁰ Somali herders were pushed off the land and forced to work the new British cattle ranches. The British initiative did not help the Somali people in any way. The cattle raised were shipped to India, to supply British soldiers with food. The meat was sent to India via the British base at Berbera in the Gulf of Aden. The British essentially destroyed the livelihood of many Somali herders, in order to support their domination of India, a relationship that expressed the nature of empire.²¹

After dividing a single ethnic group united by language and customs, the imperial powers in East Africa forced many Somalis to give up their nomadic existence, and to work for little or no wages under the commission of “interim” governments. While the British exploited Somaliland for its abundant livestock, the Italian government in Southern Somalia generated revenue primarily through the sale of sugar, fruit, and cotton, forcing native people to work on newly established plantations. Both the Italian and British governments encouraged the various Somali clans to become rivals. They provoked clans to war with one another and fueled the slaughter by providing modern European weaponry. Colonialism strengthened clan identification, and intensified antagonism between the clans.

During the 1930s, the colonial powers also fought among themselves over borders. Years of tension culminated in the Italian invasion of Ethiopia in 1935 and the annexation of British Somaliland into Italian Somaliland. Under the fascist government of Benito Mussolini, these new lands formed an expansive Italian-

Somali protectorate.²² The invasion of British Somaliland by Italy was a direct product of the rising hostilities between Italy and Britain that would culminate in World War II. Britain ousted Italy from British Somali territory in 1941, invaded Italian Somaliland and re-conquered the Ogaden region. Britain then united four of the five regions that comprised Greater Somalia: British Somaliland, Italian Somaliland, the Northern Frontier Districts, and the Ogaden region. Britain controlled these regions from 1940 to 1950. Somalis, united for the first time since colonization, began to discuss their own ideals of Somali Pan-nationalism. These ideals would eventually lead to a new round of war and the eventual destruction of the new Somali state.

Independence

After World War II, a strong movement for independence developed in Somalia, especially in the South, led by powerful Somali political parties such as the southern Somali Youth League (SYL) and the northern Somali National League (SNL).²³ Both parties worked in conjunction with the United Nations to establish a temporary Italian trusteeship of Southern Somalia which would oversee the creation of an authentic Somali government within ten years. In the late 1940s, Britain began withdrawing from Somalia. In 1954, it ceded the Ogaden and Haud regions of Western Somalia to the Ethiopian government. Yet, colonialism left a lasting imprint on Somalia. It caused a massive rift in the Somali state by encouraging rivalry between the different Somali clans, it drastically altered the economic livelihoods of many Somalis, and it exploited the country's resources and people. By the 1950s, Somalis were tired of being treated as savages, and many wanted a complete break from Europe.

The southern-based Somali Youth League party promoted Somali pan-nationalism, the idea that all Somali people should be united within an autonomous Somali nation. The centerpiece of the flag created by the SYL after independence in 1960 was a star

with five points, each point representing a region of “Greater Somalia.” In 1960, under UN supervision, British and Italian Somalilands united to form the autonomous Republic of Somalia. The Somali Youth League and the Somali National League led a joint coalition to rule the country, but the SYL retained a majority in the British-style parliament. The prime minister, Abdirashad Ali Sharmake, was selected from the Somali Youth League, and Aadan Abdulle Osmaan Daar, the president, was selected from the Somali National League.²⁴

The Ethiopian government was deeply disturbed by the potential challenge posed by the unification and independence of the European Somali protectorates. Angered by the rapid departure of the Europeans, Ethiopia reacted coldly to the Republic of Somalia. Four years prior to Somali independence, Haile Selassie, the ruler of Ethiopia, delivered a speech addressed to the people of the Ogaden: “We remind you that all of you are by race, colour, blood, and custom, members of the great Ethiopian family. And as to the rumors of a ‘Greater Somalia,’ we consider that all Somali peoples are economically linked with Ethiopia, and therefore, we do not believe that such a state can be viable standing alone, separated from Ethiopia.”²⁵ Somali nationalists criticized Ethiopia as “the Christian Colossus to the North” and as a “black colonialist power.”²⁶ In 1960, Ethiopia terminated grazing rights in the Ogaden, nullifying the Treaty of London that had permitted Somali herders to move freely in and out of the region. Relations between Somalia and Ethiopia quickly deteriorated. The termination of grazing rights was not only a blow to Somali pan-nationalism, but to the very livelihood of Somali herders. It led to the brief but bitter Ogaden War of 1964, a series of inconclusive skirmishes between Somali and Ethiopian troops along the border. Ethiopia retained formal control of the Ogaden.²⁷

In 1967, Abdirashad Ali Sharmake was granted a second term as prime minister of the Republic of Somalia. He in turn appointed northerner Mohamed Ibrahim Egal as the president. The government had a difficult time appeasing the multitude of Somali clans and factions, and in 1969, Sharmake was assassinated

by a “disgruntled” soldier belonging to the Majerteen Clan.²⁸ Six days later, Siad Barre, the commander of the army of Somalia and member of the Somali Youth League, overthrew the government in a *coup d’etat*. Barre nullified the constitution and declared himself the leader of Somalia.

Cold War Politics in Somalia

In 1960, the Soviet Union expressed interest in becoming an ally of Somalia. The USSR portrayed itself as Africa’s “most loyal and unselfish friend and ally,” and criticized previous imperialist states for infringing upon Somalia’s right to “natural sovereignty.”²⁹ Both the United States and the Soviet Union had contributed aid to Somalia after its independence. By 1962, Premier Shermake had “received credit commitments totaling \$56,200,000” from the USSR and \$11,000,000 from the United States.³⁰ On November 10, 1963, Somalia rejected further U.S. aid, and accepted an arms deal with the Soviet Union.³¹ The Soviets agreed to help fund a Somali national army, which would be used to defend Somali interests in its “border disputes.” Somalia spurned U.S. offerings because of heavy American involvement in Ethiopia and a more attractive military aid package from the Soviets.³²

When Barre seized power, he implemented a socialist program in Somalia, and nationalized industry. Somalia began receiving aid from the Soviet Union, which was eager to support a socialist government and develop its power base in Africa. Barre was a strong proponent of Somali pan-nationalism. He advocated the slogan of the SYL: “Unity for all Somali Territories,” and regarded the United States as an imperialist power who continued the dominance of Western European colonizers, those who had previously destroyed “Greater Somalia.” The USSR urged Barre to expel the Americans from Somalia and to declare their allegiance to the USSR. The U.S. embassy in Mogadishu was shut down, and American diplomats were sent home. Somalia became part of the “Third World Communist Bloc” along with the People’s Democratic Republic of Yemen, North Korea, and Cuba.³³

By the mid 1970s, the Soviet Union began an ambitious project to unite the Horn of Africa under a common socialist front. It initiated diplomatic talks with Ethiopia, where a revolutionary socialist named Haile Mariam Mengistu had just overthrown King Haile Selassie. Soviet overtures to Ethiopia, however, greatly angered Somali leaders, who had fought Ethiopia for years for control of the Ogaden. Half a million Somalis lived in the Ogaden, and constituted over one-fifth of the entire Somali population in East Africa.³⁴ Tensions between Ethiopia and Somalia peaked in 1975, when a drought devastated the Ogaden region, killing thousands. The Ethiopian government, occupied with quelling violent uprisings in the rebellious province of Eritrea, neglected the worsening food crisis. The Somali government provided the bulk of the aid to the starving nomads in the Ogaden region, whose livestock had been nearly wiped out by the lack of pasture.³⁵ Eritrea proved to be uncontrollable, and according to Omar Saeed Ali, a member of the Central Committee of the Liberation Front for the Somali Coast, "Ethiopia has lost face in Eritrea, and will most likely take a hard line in securing the territory of the Ogaden."³⁶

In 1977, the USSR set up a diplomatic meeting between Ethiopia and Somalia to decide the fate of the Horn of Africa. Mengistu and Barre immediately deadlocked on the issue of control of the Ogaden, and the proceedings came to a halt. Shortly after the meeting, Barre announced that there was "little hope for a possible reconciliation" between the two countries. Fidel Castro visited Somalia a few weeks after the meeting in an attempt to broker peace, but Somalia continued to insist that the Ogaden people should have the right to self-determination. Castro derided his hosts, and showed his obvious support of Ethiopia by "showering Mengistu with praise."³⁷ The Soviets also criticized Barre and his administration for destroying the prospect of a common socialist front in East Africa. Barre asked the Soviets to declare their allegiance to the Somali state, and nullify their "Friendship Treaty" with Ethiopia. The Soviets responded by strengthening their treaty with Mengistu's regime, increasing their financial support, and importing Soviet weaponry into Ethio-

pia.³⁸ The Soviets had chosen sides, abandoning Somalia in favor of Ethiopia.

On November 18, 1977 the Somali Mission at the United Nations issued the following statement: "The Soviet Union has unilaterally violated the letter and spirit of the Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation of 11 July 1977. The Somali government had no choice but to declare the Treaty invalid; revoke the land and naval facilities accorded to the Soviet Union; ask all Soviet military experts or civilian technical staff to leave the Somali Democratic Republic; ask for a mutual reduction of embassy staffs in Mogadishu and Moscow and to sever diplomatic relations with Cuba." Somali relations deteriorated with Kenya, whose leaders opted to support Ethiopian claims to the Ogaden, and refused to acknowledge "Greater Somalia." Kenyans were apprehensive that Somalia's next political maneuver might be to reclaim Somali lands in Northern Kenya, the Northern Frontier Districts.³⁹

Somalia wanted the people of the Ogaden to have the right to self-determination, to decide if they wanted to belong to Somalia or Ethiopia. Somalia acknowledged this "self-determination" in Djibouti by respecting a referendum that showed that over 95 percent of the inhabitants of Djibouti preferred to acquire independence rather than become a province in Northern Somalia.⁴⁰ Many Somalis did not share the patriotic fervor whipped up by the Barre administration, but they did oppose Ethiopian policy in the Ogaden. A Somali official living in the Ogaden announced: "The people should be allowed to decide for themselves to which country they wish to belong. If they opt for Ethiopia then we will withdraw our claims to the Ogaden. If they opt for Somalia we will welcome them."⁴¹

In 1976, widespread violence erupted in the Ogaden as Barre financed Somali guerillas to attack Ethiopians. The Somali government officially declared war on Ethiopia in 1977. Somalia sent thousands of soldiers into the Ogaden and quickly captured large amounts of Ethiopian territory. Somali forces struck so quickly that "by mid-September 1977, Ethiopia conceded that 90 percent of the Ogaden was in Somali hands."⁴² Somali weaponry

was primarily composed of pre-1977 Soviet donations, including over “250 medium-armor tanks and more than 300 armored personal carriers.”⁴³ Somali troops attacked the major outpost of Ethiopian forces in the Ogaden at the city of Harer, but failed to dislodge the troops from the city. The Ethiopian army regrouped, and with the help of 11,000 Cuban troops and Soviet aircraft and artillery, counterattacked, driving Somali forces from many of Ogaden’s major towns and cities. Somali forces were seriously weakened by this counterattack. In March, 1978, Somalia recalled the national army from the Ogaden.⁴⁴ It had lost “nearly 8,000 soldiers, three-fourths of its armored units, and more than half of the Somali Air Force.”⁴⁵

In 1976, two years before Somalia’s disastrous defeat, the United States and Saudi Arabia had offered Barre \$400 million in military aid in exchange for his pledge to reject the USSR and socialism. The United States did not support Somalia’s aspiration to reunite “Greater Somalia,” but was willing to compete with the USSR for the strategic military base at Berbera in the Gulf of Aden. According to Richard Burton, who first claimed the base for Britain in 1855, “This harbor has been coveted by many a foreign conqueror.”⁴⁶ The base was invaluable to the United States because of its close proximity to Afghanistan and the oil fields of the Middle East.⁴⁷ The United States wanted to use Somalia as a base for a “Gulf Buildup” in the Middle East. The Soviet Union previously controlled the base, but when their treaty with Somalia was annulled, the base was ceded to the Americans.⁴⁸ Many American diplomats regarded the Cold War conflict in East Africa as frivolous, as an unimportant contest for dominance, but Zbigniew Brzezinski, the national security advisor to the Carter administration, sought to counter Soviet influence in Africa at every turn. The Cold War conflict in Somalia escalated tensions between the Superpowers and many considered it “the death of D t te.” Brzezinski summed up his views on the conflict in the Horn of Africa by stating: “SALT lies buried in the sands of the Ogaden.”⁴⁹

The Disastrous Effects of the Ogaden War

From 1977 to 1988, Somalia received nearly \$884 million in U.S. aid, most of which was sent immediately after the Ogaden War of 1978.⁵⁰ Yet the people of Somalia remained destitute. Hassan Mohammed, a Somali college student now living in Washington D.C. stated that: “He [Barre] was very corrupt. The people of Somalia never benefited from the international aid. It all went to Barre’s family and clan (Marehan).”⁵¹

The Ogaden War re-ignited clan warfare in Somalia. In the months following the War, northern clans which had not initially supported the war felt as though they had been betrayed by Barre. They believed that he had squandered vast sums of money on a fruitless war. Somali pan-nationalism quickly evaporated. Enraged members of the Northern Somali Majerteen Clan organized a coup to overthrow Barre, but it was quickly suppressed. In response, Barre commissioned militias to destroy Majerteen villages, to pillage their goods, kill their men, and rape their women. These militias, known as “Red Hats,” destroyed hundreds of Majerteen drinking wells, causing thousands of people and cattle to die of thirst.⁵² A Majerteen poet, describing the effects of Barre’s vicious reprisals, wrote:

It may be the Lord’s ordained will that the Majerteen should be
consumed like honey,

Like the wild berries in the Plain of Doo’An, the Majerteen have been
universally (and greedily) devoured,

Every hungry man in the land desires to bite off a piece of flesh from
the prostrated body of the Majerteens.

These weeping orphans, these widowed Majerteen wives, despoiled
and stripped of their herds,

Whose beloved fathers have been wantonly slaughtered,

Humans cannot but accept their mortality, decreed as it is by the
inflexible law of Allah,

What is hard to accept is the gloating of the oppressor over the
scattered Majerteen corpses,

And they've been heinously massacred as if they did not belong to the family of Muslims,

Did not Mr. Barre—everywhere—mercilessly rain mortar shells and bullets on the Majerteens?⁵³

In the early 1980s, nearly 400,000 refugees fled the war-torn, drought-ridden lands of the Ogaden to Somalia and Northern Kenya. The refugees were accompanied by militias that had been funded by the Somali government during the Ogaden War. The soldiers often ransacked villages in search of food and expelled people from their homes to create housing for the swarms of homeless refugees. In the Northern Frontier Districts of Kenya, conflicts between Ogadeni militiamen and Boran tribesmen intensified following the Ogaden War.⁵⁴ The Boran people and Somalis living in the region had fought over land for centuries, but after the Ogaden War, Somali militiamen wielded automatic weapons. Massacres of Borans became more frequent, but only one massacre, the Malka Daka Massacre, received broad publicity in Kenya. Boran victims of the raiding Somali tribe recounted the event: “The leader of the raiding party, which came on camels and was armed with spears, clubs, and automatic rifles, made a speech: ‘This is Somali land. Your animals will never graze here again. We are well-armed. If you are not, that is your problem. You women can go and report to the authorities. We are ready for them.’” Fifteen Boran herdsmen, who had been tied up, were then clubbed in the head and speared repeatedly in the stomach. The tongues of two were cut out. One herdsman screamed and was shot. The bodies were burned with charcoal from the fires that had previously been used to cook lunch. The raiders left with 2,000 goats and the clothing of the women they allowed to live.⁵⁵

The early 1980s witnessed a massive migration of Somalis to the United States. Following the end of the Ogaden War, wealthier Somalis often chose to leave their country, migrating to a neighboring East African country, the United States, or Europe. In 1989, the government of Kenya created a program to screen Somalis as a result of a refugee migration into Northern and Central Kenya. Every ethnic Somali living in Kenya was required to prove their Kenyan citizenship. Those who did not comply with

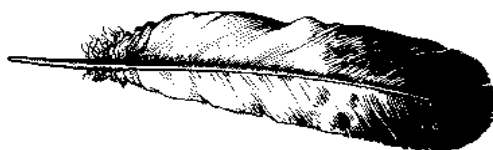
the program were then incarcerated or deported.⁵⁶ According to Neil Henry, a journalist for the *Washington Post*: “The identification process, in which Somali citizens are now required to carry pink ID cards distinguishing them from all other Kenyans, has been compared by critics to the passbook system long enforced in South Africa and even to screening of Jewish citizens in Nazi Germany.”⁵⁷ The refugee crisis caused by the Ogaden War has had a disastrous effect on East Africa.

During his reign as dictator, Barre shrewdly subdued clan rivalry using the ideal of Somali pan-nationalism. By the late 1980s, however, clan rivalry reached new heights. The clans united in one effort only: to expel Siad Barre. Three main opposition groups came together to oust him: the United Somali Congress, headed by the Hawiye Clan; the Somali Patriotic Movement, headed by the Ogadeni Clan; and the Somali National Movement, headed by the Isaak clan.⁵⁸ By 1989, United States funding had dropped to less than \$9 million annually.⁵⁹ The Soviet Union was falling apart, and both super-powers now considered East Africa unimportant. By 1991, with international aid to Somalia nearly depleted, Barre left Somalia in a caravan of tanks for Kenya. Once Barre was gone, the opposing factions were left to squabble for power. The Hawiye Clan seized power in southern Somalia and the Isaak and Ogadeni Clans took power in the north. There was no central authority left to unite them.⁶⁰

To this day, Somalia does not have a government. The United States was unable to oust Hawiye warlord Mohammed Farrah Aidid in 1992. The United Nations mission Operation Restore Hope proved fruitless when UN workers were unable to distribute food to the people of Mogadishu. Since the ouster of Barre, famine and drought have continued to plague Somalia. The Ogaden region has been the hardest hit; nearly 50 Somalis in the Ogaden region die each day because of hunger or malnutrition.⁶¹ The United Nations Commission for Refugees estimates that half of the children living in famine-struck refugee camps will die before they reach the age of five.⁶²

The Lessons of the Ogaden

For hundreds of years, Somalia and the people of the Ogaden have been subjected to the interests of greater powers. In the 15th century, the Abyssinian Christians battled the Muslim City-State of Ifat, each aided by their respective religious allies, the Portuguese and the Ottoman Turks. In the 19th century, Great Britain, Italy, France, and Ethiopia seized portions of Somalia and exploited each in their own interests. The Italian fascists fought the British over Somalia during World War II. The United States and the Soviet Union quickly took the places of the European colonial powers during the Cold War. Today, Somalia is a broken nation. Its people are starving, it has no central government, and it is ruled by warring clans. Many Americans do not even know where the Ogaden region is. Yet the lessons of Somali history are global. Imperial domination brings neither peace nor prosperity to conquered lands and people. And the attempt to unite a people along purely ethnic lines can only result in greater bloodshed and repression.



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