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Opposing Foreign Intervention's Impact on the Course of Civil Wars: the Ethiopian-Ogaden Civil War, 1976-1980

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Abstract

This paper examines the impact of opposing foreign intervention on the course and nature of warfare in the Ethiopian-Ogaden civil war. The Ogaden war, having been sporadically fought between 1963 and 1988, was one of the longest and bloodiest in the Horn of Africa's turbulent history. It was typical of internal wars having directly or indirectly involved a range of regional and international actors; including the Soviet Union, the United States, Somalia, Cuba, South Yemen, Israel, East Germany and North Korea. This paper is an empirical study of the effect that external actors had on the warfare between the Ethiopian military junta (normally referred to as the *Derg*) and the main Ogaden Somali insurgent group, the Western Somali Liberation Front (WSLF), between 1976 and 1980. The warfare in the Ogaden during this period can be divided into three distinct phases: medium intensity guerrilla warfare (1976-77), conventional warfare (1977-78) and low-intensity guerrilla warfare (1978-80). It is argued that each phase was to a large extent determined by the type and volume of support the *Derg* and WSLF received from international sponsors. Finally, the paper concludes that current theory on foreign intervention, and opposing intervention in particular, fails to capture the true complexity of its impact on warfare in civil wars.

Introduction

Opposing foreign intervention in civil wars has long been a central phenomenon of international politics. As far back as 427 BC, Thucydides wrote of the civil war in Corcyra that: "In peacetime there would have been no excuse and no desire for calling [external powers] in, but in time of war, when each party could always count upon an alliance which would do harm to its opponents and at the same time strengthen its own position, it became a

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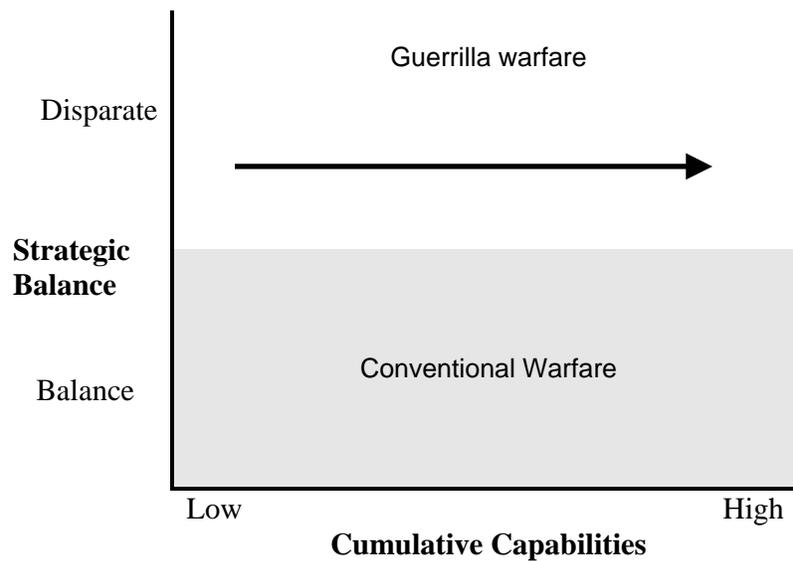
natural thing for anyone who wanted a change of government to call in help from outside” (Thucydides 1972, 242; Price 2001, 6-11). The pressure to enlist assistance from external actors led the two sides, the Commons and the Oligarchs, to request the support of their allies, the Athenians and Spartans respectively. Thucydides’ analysis of the Corcyraean Civil War offers two important insights into the dynamics of civil wars. First, external states are normally only too eager to offer assistance to parties engaged in civil wars (Merom 2001; Levite 1992, 320; Little 1975, 1-11). Second, the Corcyraean Civil War suggests that after one side decides to form an alliance with an outside power, the other will generally follow suit. History has since verified Thucydides’ observations. Since 1945, close to half of all civil wars have experienced opposing foreign interventions (i.e. instances where both the incumbent and insurgent attract outside assistance) (Hironaka 2005, 131).¹ However, the impact of opposing foreign intervention on the course and nature of the warfare in civil wars has largely been overlooked by scholarly research. This paper seeks to redress this paucity through an empirical examination of the impact of opposing intervention on warfare in the Ethiopian-Ogaden civil war.

The form of warfare that emerges in civil wars is largely determined by the balance of capabilities between the belligerents. In other words, the relative strategic balance between the actors will be instrumental in shaping the nature of warfare that develops at a particular time or region in a civil war (Lockyer 2006). For example, two roughly equal sides, each with considerable military capabilities would most likely attempt to defeat the other using conventional warfare. Cases of civil wars that were predominantly fought by conventional warfare include the American, Spanish and Russian civil wars. In contrast, when a weaker actor calculates that its relative military capabilities are insufficient to confront a stronger incumbent in “pitched” battles the actor is likely to adopt guerrilla warfare. The Mujahideen, for example, employed guerrilla warfare against the much stronger incumbent regime of Afghanistan. The more disparate the relative strategic balance between the incumbent and insurgent actor the more likely the pattern of warfare that emerges will be guerrilla and counterinsurgency in nature.

Foreign intervention, by definition, will introduce new capabilities into the civil war and therefore manipulate the existing balance of capabilities between the actors. The literature gives some reason to suspect that different configurations of foreign intervention will have different effects on the pattern of warfare in civil wars. For instance, Regan has suggested that the effect that opposing foreign intervention has on the warfare in civil wars is different from that of one-sided foreign intervention. Regan has argued that “opposing interventions – unless of dramatically unequal quantities – would tend to maintain the status quo balance of capabilities, albeit at higher absolute levels” (Regan 2002, 63). In other words, it is predicted that unlike one-sided intervention that will manipulate the relative balance between the civil war actors, opposing intervention will hold the *relative* strategic balance steady, while at the same time increasing the *absolute* cumulative capabilities available to the actors. This paper will use Regan’s argument as a hypothesis in the study of the Ethiopian-Ogaden civil war (see Figure 1.1).

¹ Patrick Regan puts the figure lower, at the still significant figure of almost 25 percent (Regan 2000).

Figure 1.1: Hypothesis Opposing Intervention and Warfare in Civil Wars



The recipients in Ethiopian-Ogaden civil war received strikingly similar volumes of assistance – in terms of weapons, troops and financial aid – from their respective external sponsors, making the case a particularly useful example of opposing intervention. Therefore, as the absolute strength of each actor underwent a major change and yet the relative capabilities of each remained constant the hypothesis suggests that the form of warfare should not change over this period. The hypothesis predicts that insurgent actor ought to continue with guerrilla warfare throughout the period “albeit at higher absolute levels.”

From 1976 to 1988, the Western Somali Liberation Front (WSLF) mounted an insurgency against the Amhara dominated military junta, universally known as the *Derg*. However, after 1980, the WSLF operations fell in frequency, size and sophistication to a level that no longer made it a genuine threat to the survival of the incumbent government or the territorial integrity of the Ethiopian state. As such, this study focuses on the four year period from the start of WSLF military operations through to its virtual defeat in 1980. Over this four year period, a wide range of regional and international actors intervened in support of either the incumbent or the insurgent, including the Soviet Union, the United States, Somalia, Cuba, South Yemen, Israel, East Germany and North Korea. However, only the Soviet Union, Cuba and Somalia intervened significantly. The warfare in the Ogaden can be divided into three distinct phases: medium intensity guerrilla warfare (1976-77), conventional warfare (1977-78) and low-intensity guerrilla warfare (1978-80). Each phase of warfare almost perfectly correlates with the volume of foreign intervention in the conflict at the time. Before analyzing each phase of the civil war, the paper begins with a brief background to the rise of Somali nationalism in the Ogaden.

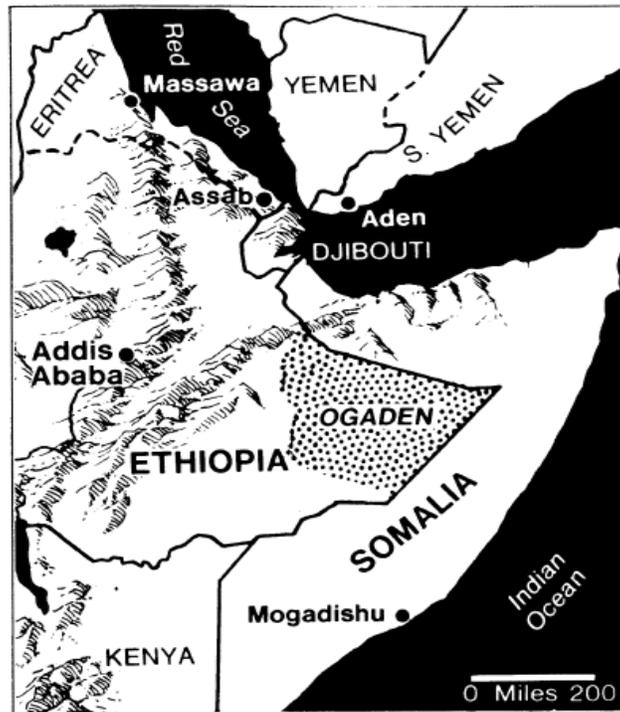
Background to the Conflict

Somali nationalism in Ethiopia

The partition of the Horn of Africa at the twilight of the colonial period saw the establishment of new state borders that did not necessarily trace the boundaries of the Somali nation. In an outcome reminiscent of the process throughout much of the post-colonial world,

ethnic Somalis found themselves living within a number of different states including Kenya, Djibouti and Ethiopia (Laitin 1964). Ethiopia regained sovereignty over the Ogaden (the region that Somali nationalists refer to as “Western Somalia”) from the British in the autumn of 1948.² The region was predominantly flat, dry, pastoral land that had remained virtually untouched by any form of economic, infrastructural, or social development. Besides some scattered areas of rich grazing land, the Ogaden had few forests or natural mineral wealth for potential colonizers to exploit. Consequently, at first, the Ethiopian state had little incentive or opportunity to mobilize the poor and thinly populated region, and largely refrained from introducing tax collection and strong governance (Gorman 1981, 30).

Figure 1.2: Map of the Ogaden



Source: Chaliand 1978, 122

No widespread uprising against Ethiopian rule occurred in 1948, which suggests that any misgivings the Somali population had over the handover from the British to the Ethiopians did not warrant violent resistance (Markakis 1987, 174; Touval 1963, 134). It appears that while Addis Ababa allowed the traditional Ogaden Somali social and political structures to remain in place, and did not collect taxes, the wider population was generally willing to accept the shift in political regime. However, two political forces in the Horn of Africa were to act together to stir Somali nationalist sentiment in Ogaden. The first was the creation of a pan-Somali conscience which was associated with the establishment of the Somali Republic. As 1960 (and the independence of the Somali Republic) approached, a strong sense of Somali identity was stirred across the region (Lewis 1963, 150; Gebru 1991; Sheik-Abdi 1977, 657; Mayall 1990, 60). Second, over the course of the 1950s and 1960s, Addis Ababa had gradually expanded its political and economic involvement in Ogaden. The growth of

² The “Ogaden” region is named after the tribe that has traditionally inhabited the territory. The Ogaden people are apart of the broader Darod family of Somali tribes. Generally in this paper the region will be referred to as the Ogaden while the people will be called the Ogaden Somalis.

state control over what had been for all practical purposes an autonomous region was strongly resented by the local population. These two currents in the relationship between the government and the Ogaden Somalis culminated in the increasing levels of social unrest.

The Ethiopian-Ogaden Civil War

The 1974 Ethiopian revolution unleashed centrifugal forces in the multi-ethnic state. It was not the first time in Ethiopian history that groups within Ethiopia had attempted to exploit the perceived vulnerability of a weak transitional government to begin a nationalist revolt (Gerbu 1985, 77-92; Berhe 2004, 572). However, the insurgencies sparked by the 1974 military coup were unrivalled in Ethiopian history for their intensity, scope and frequency. New insurgencies were organized and old insurgencies intensified in Eritrea, Tigray, Bale and Ogaden. These various nationalist movements were unified only in opposition to the perceived domination of another ethnic group, the Amhara. As one insurgent leader stated:

The Abyssinian State, or if you like, the Ethiopian State, was and is the State of the colonizer, the victor or the ruler. As such it has been, and still is solely serving the interests of its founders – the Abyssinians or the Amhara to be more exact. The fact that there was transfer of leadership from Menelik to Haile Selassie, to the present military rulers does not make any difference...” (Selassie 1990, 132).

The fact that 109 of the *Derg*'s 123 member General Assembly and 14 of the 16 members of the Central Committee were Amhara was not lost on Ethiopia's marginalized ethnic groups (Firebrace 1982, 88; Schwab 1985, 55). Although most nationalist movements shared a general resentment towards the central government, it is here that most similarities end. The different national fronts had an array of political objectives ranging from independence, revolution, national autonomy and irredentism. The Somali irredentists of Ogaden were unique among the Ethiopian insurgent groups for they alone had a foreign power directly supporting their military operations by providing troops, weapons, training and supplies.

The WSLF owed much of its fighting capabilities to support it received from Somalia. The inclusion of all lands occupied by ethnic Somalis was a founding principle of the newly independent state. This objective, above all, meant the transfer of sovereignty of the Ogaden region from Ethiopia to Somalia. As such, Mogadishu was forthcoming with military aid and financial assistance to the Ogaden Somali irredentist movement, support that in 1977 was expanded to direct military involvement in the civil war.

The *Derg*, on the other hand, owed much of its continued effectiveness to Soviet and Cuban support. Until 1976, the United States had been the leading guarantor of Ethiopian security. Beginning in 1954, Ethiopia had been one of the United States' closest allies in Africa. However, the new Ethiopian President, Mengistu Haile Mariam, believed the United States was not willing to support the massive expansion of the Ethiopian armed forces that the *Derg* deemed necessary for winning the civil war. As such, in one of the greatest reshuffles of Cold War alignments, Ethiopia dramatically jumped into the Soviet sphere while the Somali Republic swapped to the United States. Beginning in 1976, the Soviet Union began to cement its new relationship with Addis Ababa by commencing arms shipments, officer exchange programs, and financial aid. These efforts peaked after the Somali forces directly intervened in the Ethiopian-Ogaden civil war in 1977-78.

Phase One: Guerrilla and Counterinsurgency Warfare, 1976-1977

The civil war in the Ogaden region grew in scale, ferocity and geographical location over the initial years of the insurrection. From humble beginnings in 1976, the WSLF developed into one of the largest and most capable insurgent movements in Africa. The rapid rise of the WSLF owed a great deal to the logistical support provided by Somalia. Although, in the first phase the WSLF expanded in size and capability the insurgent actor never reached a comparable military balance with the central government. The *Derg*, armed with sophisticated American and Soviet weapons, including tanks, artillery and aircraft, completely outmatched the guerrilla fighters. Any concentrated formations of insurgents were easy targets for the Ethiopian army and air force. As such, the first phase of the civil war was characterized by guerrilla and counterinsurgency warfare in which the incumbent came to control all the major towns in the province while the insurgents increasingly came to have free rein over the vast rural expanses of eastern Ethiopia.

Changing Camps: Early Soviet intervention in the Ethiopian civil war

Ethiopian foreign relations underwent a radical realignment following Mengistu's seizure of power. The United States had been the major provider of arms, equipment, and military training to the forces of Emperor Haile Selassie. Between 1950 and 1973 the United States spent some \$161 million in military aid to Ethiopia that, in 1966, even included the relatively advanced F-5 fighter-bombers (Lefebvre 1991, 111-130; Agyeman-Duah 1986, 289). The United States military aid to Ethiopia represented 82 percent of its total aid to Africa. These high levels of assistance from the United States allowed the Emperor to maintain a regular army of approximately 40,000 soldiers. The final break in Ethiopian-American relations occurred in April 1977, when Mengistu – having been seduced by Soviet promises of more military aid than the United States was willing to provide – dramatically switched camps.

Shortly after the revolution, Ethiopia began receiving military aid from the Soviet Union. Reportedly the Ethiopians not only received T-34, T-54, and T-55 tanks and armoured personnel carriers but also equipment Moscow reserved for close allies including SAM-7 anti-aircraft missiles, Mi-8 helicopters and self-propelled guns (Ayood 1980, 19). Nevertheless, the initial volume of assistance from the Soviet Union and eastern European states was modest. In 1976, the *Derg* received only \$18 million – a figure that was eclipsed by the United States residual arms transfer of \$103 million (SIPRI 2006). However, the initial Soviet supplies were not a true indication of Moscow's commitment to its relationship with Addis Ababa. But the USSR could not afford to send additional aid while its superpower rival was still in the process of supplying the arms that had been agreed to with Ethiopia in previously signed contracts.

The beginnings of Somali intervention

Besides captured and stolen equipment, the arms pipelines running between the Somali border towns and the WSLF guerrilla units operating inside Ethiopia were the Front's sole source of weapons and equipment. With no other foreign source of military aid, the WSLF's war effort was heavily dependent upon Mogadishu. Initially, Somalia sent significant quantities of rifles (mostly Soviet supplied Kalashnikovs), rocket-propelled grenades and land-mines. However, from early in the civil war Somali army officers were also reported to be advising, and in some cases directly leading, WSLF guerrilla units. The Somali regular soldiers removed their Somalia National Army (SNA) insignias to disguise themselves as WSLF members.

Somalia's support for the WSLF grew in proportion with the insurgency's successes. It seems that as reports of WSLF victories increasingly made their way back to President Siyaad in Mogadishu, so did his confidence in supporting the insurgents. Training camps were built on the Somali side of the border specifically to train new WSLF recruits. Recruits graduating from the Somali army ran programs were then armed by Mogadishu and sent back across the border to fight in the Ogaden.

Medium intensity guerrilla warfare

The WSLF political leadership was mostly in self-imposed exile, generally in Mogadishu, in 1974 when the Ethiopian revolution propelled the *Derg* into power. These events apparently caught the WSLF by surprise. Whereas most other insurgent actors in Ethiopia began, reignited, or intensified their military efforts in 1974-75, the WSLF were not prepared to begin the military dimension of its campaign until 1976. Nevertheless, the WSLF was eager to exploit the confusion in Addis Ababa, and in the early months of 1976 the WSLF steadily stepped up its attacks in the Ogaden, Bale and Sidamo (Korn 1986, 24). At this early stage, the best sources available have estimated that the WSLF guerrillas only numbered between 3,000 to 5,000 (Gorman 1981, 62). However, bolstered by support from the population they were able to move freely around the region further galvanizing civilians' collaboration in their cause. Due to Somali assistance the insurgents, although small in number, was well organized, trained, armed and, above all else, was coalesced under a single unified political and military command.

The WSLF challenge of expanding its size was helped by the large number of Ogaden Somali refugees in Somalia. The 1974 drought in eastern Ethiopia, had forced large numbers of the scattered nomadic population of the Ogaden to migrate over the border into Somalia and concentrated around food distribution centres. The Somali famine-relief camps facilitated recruitment into the WSLF. As the refugees were already inside Somalia, the difficult and dangerous logistical problem of moving large numbers of new recruits to training camps across the border in the Republic was moderated (Patman 1990, 157). Mogadishu played a central role in training these recruits, many of whom were (before Somalia's spilt with the Soviet Union in 1977) also sent abroad to the Soviet Union, Cuba and North Korea for specialist training (Ottaway 1982, 83). Refugees and other Ogaden Somali volunteers, after being armed, trained and organized into guerrilla units begun to stream back across the border into Ethiopia. By the end of 1976, the size of the WSLF guerrilla force operating in Ogaden was estimated by the Ethiopian government to be 30,000, with an additional 6,000 Somali observers (Ottaway 1978, 209).

The first months of 1977 marked a turning point for the WSLF. The frequency, size and effectiveness of the WSLF raids against government installations increased. Targets of the WSLF guerrilla included key transportation routes, Ethiopian army convoys, police stations, and even fixed army positions (Patman 1990, 209). At this precise time, the first journalistic dispatches from the Horn began mentioning the presence of up to 1,500 Somali regulars operating in Ethiopia (Ottaway 1978, 209). Reports of Somali participation in the conflict became more frequent as the intensity of the conflict increased. Although the Somali Republic had been steadily supplying and training the WSLF (a point Mogadishu had never denied) the reports in February were the first to cite Somali units directly involved in supporting the WSLF. From February until the full Somali invasion in July, the WSLF guerrillas captured village after village in the Ogaden. The available information supports the WSLF claim that not long into 1977 they had effectively wrestled 60 percent of the disputed

territory away from the Ethiopian government's control (Porter 1984, 184). The Ethiopian army had become largely confined to the garrison towns of Jijiga, Gode, Warder, Degehabour, Kebridehar and further south in Dolo, Ginir, Goba, Neghelli and Shakisso (Gilkes 1991, 722).

During 1977 the WSLF increased the tempo of its operations. In early July the fighting escalated sharply with the WSLF expanding its area of operations to include targets on the outmost boundary of the territory it claimed. On 14 July 1977 fighting erupted at the strategically important train junction at Dire Dawa. The railway linked Addis Ababa with the Djibouti and from there the outside world. The track was vital to the Ethiopian economy as it carried an estimated sixty percent of Ethiopia's exports and imports (Anonymous 1977b, 2), and a successful attack would interrupt military supplies coming from overseas to Addis Ababa. Fighting lasted two to three days with heavy casualties being suffered by both sides (Anonymous 1977b, 2). The WSLF was able to blow up the two railway bridges on either side of the city however, as is typical of guerrilla forces, they lacked the offensive capabilities to capture the fortified town.

Phase Two: Conventional Warfare, 1977-1978

On the whole, the WSLF during the guerrilla phase of the conflict did not have the heavy weapons required to breach the defences of the Ethiopian garrisons, and contented themselves with preventing the Ethiopian soldiers from venturing out of their strongholds to patrol. However, the invasion by the Somali regular army in July changed this dynamic and many garrisons, including the airfield at Gode, quickly fell to the invaders. It seemed likely that the insurgents, with the addition of direct Somali assistance, would succeed in annexing the Ogaden region into the Somali Republic. Massive Soviet and Cuban intervention, however, swung the balance of forces in the Ogaden theatre back in favour of the incumbent. This phase saw both the incumbent and insurgent receive comparable levels of assistance from their respective external supporters. The course of the civil war during this phase underwent revolutionary transformation. The WSLF's tactics, unit formations and general conduct evolved into patterns characteristic of conventional warfare. In response, the incumbent ceased counterinsurgency operations against the WSLF and engaged them in major conventional confrontations before eventually defeating the insurgents at Harar and Jijiga.

Although the SNA's direct intervention greatly increased the capabilities of the WSLF its strength was not on parity with Ethiopian government. Conventional warfare favours the side with the greater military resources and so, after the initial impetus of the Somali invasion fizzled and the conflict became one of attrition, the *Derg* held the military advantage.

Direct Soviet Union and Cuban intervention

In mid-1977, the Ethiopian Foreign minister visited Moscow and Havana in a successful attempt to persuade these states to send troops in a repeat of the Soviet and Cuban intervention in Angola (Ayood 1980, 157). On 26 November 1977, an emergency airlift began originating in the Soviet Union and destined for Addis Ababa. Several An-22 and Tu-76 transport aircraft logged over 200 return flights to Ethiopia and still, transport aircraft had to be borrowed from eastern European states because the superpower's own air force did not possess the huge number of aircraft required for such a mammoth operation (Porter 1984, 201). Reports tell of flights in early January leaving every 20 minutes from their bases at Tbilisi, north of the Black Sea. However, it was the seallift that accounted for the majority (an

estimated 75 percent) of the military aid sent by the USSR. Between June 1977 and July 1978 over 35 freighters made the journey from the Black Sea, via the Turkish Straits and Suez Canal, to eventually arrive at the Eritrean ports (then part of Ethiopia) of Assab or Massawa. The unloaded vehicles and weapons then hurriedly dashed through Eritrea and Tigray (two provinces combating powerful insurgents themselves) to join the fight in the Ogaden (Porter 1984, 202).

In total, Moscow sent an estimated 1,000 Soviet military advisors along with some 300 T-54/T-54 main battle tanks, over 300 artillery pieces, and thousands of small arms (Porter 1984, 200; Darnton 1978, 1). In addition, Cuba supplied 15,000 troops which were heavily involved in fighting against the combined WSLF and SNA invasion (Darnton 1978, A3).

The Somali invasion

The invasion consisted of 35,000 SNA regulars, 250 tanks (most with 250-mm cannons), 300 armoured personnel carriers, 200 pieces of mobile artillery and supported by the Somali air force (Marcus 1994, 196-197). The invasion also included an additional 15,000 WSLF fighters that had crossed into Somalia to participate in the assault. The skill and organization Somali advance, under the leadership of the SNA General Amantar, greatly impressed American military observers (Laitin 1979, 166). Although the Somali invasion involved almost twice as many SNA soldiers than supplied to Addis Ababa, the quantity of equipment was comparable.

The major flaw in the Somali invasion was not the lack of troops and equipment, but the fragility of its logistical lines of communication. By the time the invading forces reached the outskirts of Harar in November, the Somali logistical lines stretched back over 225km across the border to the northern Somali city of Hargeisa. Neglected by consecutive Ethiopian governments, the Ogaden region had few roads linking the major cities that could facilitate the easy movement of supplies. Besides the obvious quantitative impact the lack of supplies had on the Somali forces at the front, there were reportedly also important negative effects on the morale of the Somali forces (Watson 1986, 167).

WSLF switch to conventional warfare

On 18 June, the first small numbers of regular SNA units began moving over the border into the Ogaden. The WSLF quickly joined with the SNA troops and began the push towards the major government controlled garrison towns (Gilkes 1991, 722). From the earliest contact with the SNA forces, the WSLF style of warfare began to radically change. Falling into formation behind the advancing SNA columns of armour, the WSLF were largely incorporated into the Somali order-of-battle, fighting alongside the regular soldiers of the Somali Republic. As discussed, the WSLF's raid on Dire Dara on 14 July had been classically guerrilla in character. The insurgents had attacked key railway bridges before hurriedly withdrawing before the Ethiopian forces could mount a counterattack. However, the second assault, which also included a SNA brigade almost, captured the important garrison city. The most telling change in the WSLF behaviour was the reaction of the attackers after the assault was repelled. Instead of dispersing, the WSLF and SNA withdrew to the surrounding hills where they dug-in and from fixed positions set about shelling the city with artillery and mortars.

The Somali forces found the initial stages of the invasion of Ethiopia relatively easy going. The guerrilla force had captured most towns in the Ogaden region as far north as Dire Dawa. Faced by regular Somali units the few thousand Ethiopian soldiers in scattered garrisons throughout the territory were totally overwhelmed. It is reported that by 3 August the guerrillas had control over every town in the region except for three: Dire Dawa, Harar and Jijiga. However, the triad of towns represented the most important political, economic and population centres in the Ogaden. Even more importantly, the towns were along the major northern road leading from Somali to the Addis Ababa and therefore their capture was strategically crucial for the Somali war plan. The *Derg* was equally aware of the strategic value of these towns' and consequently extensively fortified them with Ethiopian regular and militia units.

In early February 1978, under the direction of a Soviet three-star general, named Vasili Petrov, and two Soviet brigadier-generals the Ethiopian counteroffensive built momentum. From this point onwards the war tilted decisively Ethiopia's favour. There had been roughly 2,000 Cuban troops fighting alongside the Ethiopian army, however, in early February the number leapt to over 11,000, many of whom had been flown in from Angola by Ethiopian airlines and then rushed to the front in order to help maintain the impetus of the counteroffensive. By early March, Cuban strength in Ethiopia had grown to 15,000 in addition to 1,500 Soviet advisors (Porter 1984, 204).

The most decisive battle of the war occurred at the strategically important town of Jijiga. The third largest city in the Ogaden, Jijiga was the gateway from the eastern highlands to the western plateaus, had changed hands twice before finally falling to the Somalis on 2 September 1977. To the west of the town Ethiopian armour, infantry and the Cuban contingent steadily began crossing the Ahmar Mountains between Jijiga and the Somali border. Western sources reported that roughly 75,000 Ethiopian and 7,000 Cuban soldiers were involved in the operation (Kaufman 1978, A4). Meanwhile, giant Soviet Mi-6 transport helicopters airlifted Ethiopian and Cuban tanks (two at a time) around the back the Somali defences to the other side of the mountains. The logistical triumph succeeded in both bypassing the heavily fortified Somali defences at the Gara Marada Pass while simultaneously encircling the majority of the WSLF and SNA forces in the mountains. What ensued was the largest and most decisive conventional confrontation of the war. The Somali forces – trapped, outnumbered and outgunned – suffered horrific casualties, which included the annihilation of an entire armour brigade (Porter 1984, 186). Jijiga fell to the Ethiopian forces on 5 March 1978.

The routed SNA and WSLF forces that were able to escaped Jijiga fled in disorder back over the Somali border. Except for two distant and isolated towns in southeast, every city in Ogaden was back in the hands of Addis Ababa within a week of Jijiga. On 9 March, hostilities between Ethiopia and Somalia ended with President Siyaad's public declaration that all SNA forces would be withdrawn from Ethiopian territory (Porter 1984, 186).

Phase Three: Reversion Back to Guerrilla Warfare, 1979-1980

The civil war, however, did not end with the SNA defeat at Jijiga. After a respite the WSLF renewed its military campaign against the Ethiopian central government. The continuation of the war prompted the Soviet Union to continue its substantial military aid to the incumbent regime. The WSLF did not fair as well with its international supporter. Mogadishu was still smarting from its comprehensive defeat in 1978 at the hands of the Ethiopian army. Somalia

had become disenchanted with the pan-Somali ideals that were so strong in the fervour of independence. Support for the WSLF persisted, but at a much reduced overall level. In sum, the incumbent found itself in the strongest position it had to that point in the civil war, while the WSLF was found itself in its weakest. The warfare during this period reflected this new strategic reality with the insurgent reverting to guerrilla warfare.

Continued Soviet invention

The Soviet Union, along with the other major foreign supporters of the *Derg*, believed the repulsion of the Somali regular army and the regular formations of the WSLF signalled the end of the Ethiopian civil war in the Ogaden theatre. The level of foreign assistance to Addis Ababa in 1979 reflects this optimistic view. The volume of foreign support dived from \$917 million in 1978 to a mere \$112 million in 1979 (SIPRI 2006). However, in the face of continued fighting in Ethiopia, Soviet and Eastern European arms transfers more than tripled in 1980 and continued to rise until the mid-1980s when abruptly Ethiopia became a victim of *Perestroika*. Although the volume of external assistance to the Ethiopia dipped in 1979, the temporary loss of foreign military aid had no real impact upon the Ethiopian government's massive expansion of its army. The army, in 1975 and before Soviet intervention, was roughly 50,000 strong. Yet, with foreign weapons, money and training the army had rapidly increased to 225,000 in 1977 and by 1979 had numbered 250,000 men (US Arms Control and Disarmament Agency 1982). The level of external intervention was sufficient to maintain the Ethiopian army's military dominance over all the insurgent groups active in the country.

Somali disengagement from the Ethiopian-Ogaden civil war

Following the Somali defeat in 1978 Mogadishu continued, if nominally, to sponsor the WSLF's military operations in the Ogaden (Lewis 1989, 576). The balance of power in the Horn of Africa had decisively shifted towards Ethiopia. As such, Mogadishu was reluctant to continue direct military support for the irredentist cause. The Somali assistance to the guerrillas began to be scaled back to only include indirect military and economic assistance. Economically, Somalia continued to supply some food to the WSLF, but most of their logistics had to be obtained from the sympathetic, or intimidated, civilian population or captured from the Ethiopian forces. Wren reports that following a night raid by the WSLF on an Ethiopian military convoy, the malnourished guerrillas immediately sat down to devour the captured rations (Wren 1980, A2). This suggests that supplies were becoming more difficult to acquire from Mogadishu than they had been in previous years.

Low intensity guerrilla warfare

Following the defeat of the Somali regular army's invasion of the Ogaden, the balance of capabilities between the belligerents dramatically shifted back in favour of the incumbent. Although the WSLF continued their campaign against Addis Ababa, they had suffered a traumatic shock at the hands of the Ethiopian, Russian, and Cuban soldiers. Most of the surviving WSLF members withdrew with the Somali forces back across the border in order to recuperate (Wiberg 1979, 191). Others, however, simply returned to the relative safety of their villages in the Ogaden. In response to the falling levels of guerrilla activity, several Ethiopian regular and militia units were redeployed north to the Eritrean and Tigrayan fronts. Government forces in the region probably fell to around 60,000 Ethiopian and 12,000 Cuban soldiers (Jaynes 1979, E3).

When in 1980 the WSLF returned in small numbers, the response of the central government was fast and decisive. The incumbent's counterinsurgency campaign had two main thrusts.

The first was a classic isolation strategy, while the second was aimed at the eradication of the guerrilla fighters.

The rural population had “helped the rebels, willingly or under duress, by providing sustenance, shelter and intelligence information” (Gebru 2002, 470). The isolation of the insurgents from the population of the Ogaden became the incumbent’s most pressing strategic objective. Mengistu took two different approaches to the isolation of the WSLF. The first method involved coercively encouraging the Ogaden Somali population to migrate over the border into Somalia. In 1980, (before the Soviets had begun employing a similar strategy in Afghanistan) Somalia had the largest population of refugees of any single country. There were 700,000 Ogaden Somalis living in refugee camps and approximately another 600,000 living elsewhere in Somalia (Moseley 1980, A1). The second strategy aimed to resettle the remaining civilian population in the areas where the WSLF was still active into fortified villages. The “villagization” program enabled the government to tightly control the movement of the population and thereby denying access to the guerrillas.

The second dimension to the government’s counterinsurgency strategy was designed to militarily confront and destroy the guerrilla bands. The largest and most successful eradication operations was coded named “Lash”. Its aim was to, in conjunction with the isolation strategy, militarily apply pressure on the WSLF guerrillas. According to Gebru, six divisions representing roughly 60,000 soldiers were involved in the massive offensive. Besides the main striking forces, there were also two divisions already assigned to in the region, air support flying from Dire Dawa, thousands of militiamen, and the Cuban tank and mechanized brigades based at Jijiga (Gebru 2002, 471). The standard tactics in the operation were for the Ethiopian army after “stationing troops near the border to block suspected entry and exit points” would mobilize multiple columns of troops and with the support of armour and helicopters comb the area pushing the guerrillas into prepared ambushes (Gebru 2002, 471). The few WSLF members that escaped across to the border were no longer safe even there. The second element of the Ethiopian eradication strategy was to sponsor an opposing guerrilla force inside of Somalia. In 1979, some disgruntled former Somali army officers formed the Somali Salvation Democratic Front (SSDF). The only fixed installations operated by the WSLF were inside Somalia, and therefore protected from Addis Ababa by Somali sovereignty. However, these logistical targets, which had previously been impervious to attack, now came under assault from the Somali insurgent group. The SSDF also frequently crossed the border into Ethiopia to help their allies hunt down the WSLF.

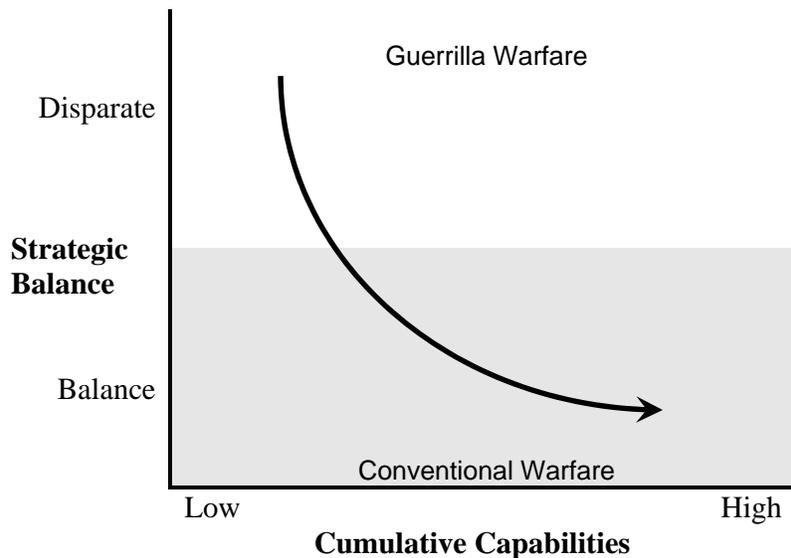
The WSLF military campaign progressively began to taper out during the early 1980s. Without substantial military aid the guerrilla campaign continued to be a pest to the central government but hardly a serious threat to the regimes’ existence or the territorial integrity of the state. With the exception of two peaks in intensity, that roughly corresponded with Ethiopian and Somali border clashes in 1980 and 1982, the WSLF campaign on the whole began to lose momentum (Korn 1986, 76). The April 1988 peace accord between Presidents Mengistu and Siyaad included the provision which put a complete end to the sponsorship of each others insurgent groups (Marcus 1994, 212; Lewis 1989, 576).

Conclusion: Opposing Intervention’s Effect on Warfare in Civil Wars

Throughout the civil war, the overall balance of capabilities in the Ogaden remained overwhelmingly in Ethiopia’s favour. However, the direct military intervention by the Somali National Army gave the WSLF guerrillas the confidence to adopt conventional tactics and

reconfigure its military formations into regular units. In the one year period between 1977 and 1978 both the incumbent and insurgent forces received comparable absolute volume of foreign intervention. On the one hand, the *Derg* received over 400 armoured vehicles from the Soviet Union, while on the other, the Somali intervention in support of the WSLF included some 250 tanks and 300 APCs. Our hypothesis predicted that this opposing intervention should maintain the current balance of forces except at much greater levels. However, the result of opposing intervention was not to hold the current balance steady while increasingly the intensity, but rather to alter the balance of capabilities by making the insurgent disproportionately more potent (see, figure 1.3).

Figure 1.3: Opposing Intervention's Effect on Warfare in the Ethiopian-Ogaden Civil War (From phase one to phase two)



To illustrate this effect, imagine a situation where one million dollars is won by both a pauper and a billionaire. It is easy to imagine that the effect of this windfall on the behaviour and social standing of the pauper will be greater than that of the billionaire. Perhaps the new millionaire will even consider himself the social equal of the billionaire, even though in reality the relative disparity in wealth has remained unchanged. Essentially, this was the effect of opposing foreign intervention on the actors in the Ethiopian-Ogaden civil war. The WSLF remained weaker – in exactly the same proportion – relative to the *Derg*, however it perceived itself to be in a position to transform itself from a guerrilla force into a regular army. It transformed its structure and strategy to resemble that of the Somali national army and played a key role in all the major battles during the positional warfare phase of the conflict.

Or picture more practical example where 10,000 modern rocket launchers are simultaneously supplied to the United States-Iraqi government and the Iraqi insurgents. These weapons would probably only have a marginal effect on the United States' overall capabilities and virtually no effect on its conduct of the war. However, this influx of weapons would probably have a major impact on the capabilities of the insurgent forces, instantly transforming them into a much more deadly adversary.

The reasoning behind the hypothesis is sound; however, it must undergo some modification. The Ethiopian-Ogaden civil war shows that equal absolute volumes of assistance will have a greater effect on the weaker side than the more powerful one. Therefore, for opposing intervention to maintain the status quo balance of capabilities the intervention must be unequal in favour of the more powerful actor. For example, if both sides *double* their military capabilities, then the status quo military balance will survive, but at greater absolute levels. The important consideration is the percentage of the cumulated capabilities within the civil war state that each actor possesses. Allowing for this insight, it therefore makes theoretical sense why the strategic balance between the Ethiopian government and the WSLF seems to have narrowed when substantial absolute levels of assistance were received during the Ethiopian-Ogaden civil war.

Finally, the policy implications of this research are also important. The opposing intervention in the Ethiopian-Ogaden civil war supports Byman's assertion that assistance "is usually most valuable early in a campaign, when it can prove central in establishing the insurgent group's viability and thus enhancing its longevity" (Byman 2001, 10). This being the case, it will be more effective for foreign third parties to attempt to stop the insurgents' arms pipeline than it will be for the same foreign power to simply give the incumbent more weapons. This research suggests that the volume of resources received by the incumbent is not as important as the absolute amount obtained by the insurgent. Suffocating the insurgent is more important than feeding the incumbent.

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