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THE ROLE OF REGIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL ACTORS IN THE CONFLICT RESOLUTION PROCESS IN AFRICA AND INSIGHTS FROM THE HORN OF AFRICA.

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### **Protagonist, Hostage or Victim?**

The Horn of Africa since Cold War to new world order

*Geography determines as anything else history and the political make-up in the Horn of Africa. Decolonization did not reproduce into sovereignty the colonial partition. However, the double or triple crisis that went to a conclusion in coincidence with the end of bi-polar system re-established the colonial pattern. Both the collapse of state in Somalia and the newly re-launched rivalry between Ethiopia and Eritrea lined along the main cleavages of the international (dis)order. Who dictated the terms? Ethiopia tried to take profit from her historical status to play a major role as a “regional center” accomplishing the requirements of the world hegemonic power. Somalia was involved in a phenomenology tailored on the objectives of war on terror. Despite their claiming to pursue national projects, Horn states, like in the East-West confrontation, pay the price of the enduring asymmetries of the Center-Periphery relationships. The uncertain role of Italy, the former colonial master.*

Cold war, New World Order, Horn of Africa, Crisis.

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The Third World was an important stake of the Cold War (Westad, 2006). The East-West confrontation in the first instance regarded Europe, Germany, Berlin, traversed by the Iron Curtain that Churchill dramatically denounced in 1946 from Missouri (Fleming, 1961). However, in Europe the borders had been sketched at Jalta, and to some extent they were mutually accepted as stable. In the Third World, whose members got independence country by country alongside the process of decolonization after the Second World War, all situations were mobile. The former colonial territories were the theatre where 'free world' and 'international communism' did compete and even wage war without the danger of stirring up the nuclear holocaust. The newly independent nations of Africa, Asia and the Middle East were in principle neither capitalist nor socialist and were looking for progress, aid, and protection. The counterweights typical of the bipolar order allowed them to approach either bloc and even to shift from a bloc to another. The relationships of the Periphery with the powers of the Center were by definition asymmetric, but the South had the chance to take profit from the East-West rivalry. If any for such a reason, the end of the bipolar system deprived the Third World of some opportunities.

Africa didn't skip the burdens of the Cold War and yet no multilateral military pact comparable to NATO, SEATO or Baghdad Pact was exported into the Black Continent. The United States respected the jurisdiction of the European masters. Security, i. e. freedom of access to natural and strategic resources, was trusted to the predominant responsibility of the former colonial powers, namely Britain and France, who were the major allies of the United States in the global system. Only whenever the colonial powers lacked the standard to show up neo-colonial arguments, the United States accomplished a more direct role in Africa too. American interventions in Congo and Angola replaced Belgium and Portugal in dealing with the turmoil in the aftermath of independence. It was above all the case of the Horn, where the main colonial power had been Italy, a middle-sized power with a weak allure at the international scale.

The Horn of Africa – the area that encompasses the present-day states of Ethiopia, Somalia, Eritrea and Djibouti, plus Sudan, which is the link between the proper Horn and the Nile Valley – has been the victim of frequent clashes between the superpowers through the entire period of the Cold War but the initiative was definitely in the hands of the local actors. They propped up first their national causes. The alliances were adjusted to catch the advantages offered by the Great Policy.

Historically, Ethiopia has been the core of the Horn (Levine, 1974). Together with Liberia, Ethiopia was the only one African state which, a part from the five-year parenthesis of Italian occupation ensuing the invasion in 1935, preserved its independence from colonialism. Somalia was born in 1960 as a potential challenger to Ethiopia in the regional

geostrategy not only due to the formation of a national-state that was in fierce contrast with the features of a multinational empire but because Mogadishu was advocating the unification of all the lands inhabited by Somali-speaking people. In order to match Ethiopia, who had a special relationship with the United States and had signed a formal alliance in 1953 by way of a partly classified treaty, Somalia sought the support by the USSR from the very beginning of its tormented story as an independent state. In fact, nobody in the West was eager to sponsor a nation that defied the post-colonial *status quo* in Africa with irredentism and revisionism. Italy too, the former colonial power, refused to provide weapons to Mogadishu failing to abide by her supposedly duty of former colonial metropolis. Pan-Somalism meant putting into question the borders and territory of three or four states in the region starting from the Ethiopian province of Ogaden.

In 1970, one year after the army's *coup d'état*, the Government of Somalia adopted 'scientific socialism' as its official doctrine. It was the first African state who proclaimed the intention to push the socialist option beyond the ambit of the 'African socialism' preached by Nkrumah and Sékou Touré, Senghor, Nyerere. Thus, Mogadishu's relation with Moscow was consequently revised under the new circumstances. Nevertheless, a basic misunderstanding continued to undermine the partnership. Breaking up established states was not in line with the current praxis. When Siyad Barre needed its support on the battlefield, Moscow maintained that its obligations did not cover Pan-Somalism and Brezhnev took distances from the Somali invasion of the Ethiopian territory.

The overall crisis of Africa during the 1970s and the 1980s revealed that the Black Continent lacked the requisites to fully enjoy the rewards of interdependence that other developing countries had been after all able to grasp (Clapham, 1996). Italian colonialism was cancelled by a decision taken by the international diplomacy, as a result of Italian defeat in World War II rather than along a proper decolonization process with a confrontation between colonized and colonizers in view of an agreed transfer of power from metropolitan rule to African representatives (Bereket Habte Selassie, 1989). On the whole the former Italian possessions in the Horn were more vulnerable than other African countries to the winds of the uneasy transition to democracy and development. They suffered because of their isolation from financial inputs and technological innovations. Hence, chronic instability and diffuse belligerence (Calchi Novati, 2004). Italian patronage was not a credible shield. Neo-colonialism is a demanding assignment for it implies will and tools to exercise influence over client states in the Periphery without a straight control of the territory. The dismal reality is that Italy did not succeed in establishing the practice of mutual collaboration and complicity that had been normally the outlet of European imperialism and had often proved to be more resilient than direct administration. As the Eritrean scholar Uoldelul Chelati says, "a major regional colonial power [...] evaporated already by 1941 and failed in fulfilling its historical

'mission' of bridging colonized societies to decolonization and achieving either through negotiation or conflict the empowerment of local elites in the post-colonial state" (Uoldelul Chelati Dirar and Calchi Novati, 2003).

As stated by the parameters of decolonization in Africa (Hargreaves, 1996), reaffirmed by the Organization of African Union (OAU) in its very first resolution once founded in Addis Ababa in 1963, any independent state corresponded to a former colonial territory. The pseudo-decolonization that took place in the Horn didn't abide by such a dogma (Poscia, 1989; Taddia, 1990). The two former Italian colonies either lost or changed their own colonial outline; Eritrea, the *colonia primogenita*, was annexed to Ethiopia and Italian Somalia merged with British Somaliland into the new Republic of Somalia with Mogadishu as capital city.

Italy tried to make up for her operative limits as a 'half-power' by multiplying initiatives and courting an assortment of partners at the same time. This strategy led to a number of contradictory aims – Somalia *versus* Ethiopia, self-determination *versus* established state integrity, sympathy for liberation fronts *versus* cooperation with legal or *de facto* governments – that she was in the end unable to reconcile (Calchi Novati, 1994b).

All over the bipolar order Italy was a very exposed outpost of the Western bloc at the periphery of the system. Since the sharp polarization of our domestic political system, heavily conditioned by the international alignments of its main political parties, it was simply not feasible to devise any bipartisan policy in the Horn. The result was a sort of a 'partisan bi-policy'. The policy was partisan; sometimes it was conducted differently by different parties belonging to the same coalition, and even by different factions (*correnti*) of each single party, never mind whether at the government or at the opposition. This odd predicament banned a consistent and affirmative approach to the rights of African nations and the regional equilibrium. Within the binding rules of the East-West confrontation, Italy's presence in the Third World was quite palatable to nationalist forces in Africa. Nationalism in Africa and in the Arab countries had little or nothing to fear from an ex-colonial power deprived of its possessions and without neo-imperial ambitions. Indeed, weakness was a meek but momentous asset, since it helped Italy to act without raising mistrust in the interlocutors. The irony was that the decline of West in a Third World nation – as it occurred in the Horn with Somalia's leaning toward the Soviet Union up to the drafting of a Treaty of Friendship and Co-operation in 1974 or with the military assistance granted to Ethiopia by USSR in 1977 – was likely to boost rather than emasculate Italian political self-promotion as a last resort for Western presence whatsoever. So, the sliding into the 'socialist' camp did not jeopardize, as such, the Italian action in the Horn.

Geography determines politics more than anything else in the ancient and recent history of the Horn of Africa. The balance of power in the region that comprises the modern states of Ethiopia, Eritrea, Somalia and Djibouti – plus Sudan, the link between the proper Horn and the Nile Valley – shows a complex multi-faceted picture with a number of inter-linkages. The Horn has suffered from belligerence and permanent instability due to the unresolved conflicts between the groups that for reasons of nationality, linguistic and cultural affiliation, social status, etc. hold dominant positions and the groups that, for the same reasons but with inverse results, are or feel excluded, exploited or marginalized. The imperial control has intermittently been challenged by local resistance and opposition movements, committed in their own ways to create kingdoms and identities suitable to the characteristics and expectations of the subordinated groups. In our case-study, the ‘center-periphery’ scheme can be verified at three levels: the domestic cleavages, the regional rivalry, and the international tensions.

A first level of contrast involves those powers which have demonstrated their ability to control the human and physical pattern and on the other side the socio-political structures that did not have full access to sovereignty and resources. The ancient empires were replaced by modern states that, in turn, used their might to the detriment of ‘un-historical’ nations with neither territory nor sovereignty. The past myths were revived so as to keep internal unity and hegemony on the surrounding areas. The populations which have been, over time, absorbed through cooptation and coercion are treated like a sort of ‘periphery’ within the states. The movements of resistance and opposition to the most influential powers brought about dynamics in pursuit of administrations and identities more suitable to the characteristics and expectations of the subordinated groups. The wars, both infra and inter-state, were in essence a continuation of politics by other means. The texture of internal relations, based more on hostility than cooperation, has endured throughout the Horn’s history. It remained more or less intact even when the Horn fell under the rule or the threat of outside forces during the colonial era and in the years of the Cold War. The Horn proved to be one of the most troublesome battlegrounds in the struggle between East and West to control the Third World.

The second dimension of unrest in the Horn regards the conflicts at the regional level. The populations and states in the Horn compete against each other well more than confronting the foreign powers. The stakes at the heart of this conflict include land, water, ports and economic resources, but also non-material goods such as sovereignty, the institutional pattern, and hegemony. Traditions of statehood differ greatly from country to country and ruling governments fear that the presence of rival models could imperil their very existence (Calchi Novati, 1994a).

The third level of tension or belligerence refers to the repercussions of great policy and the transposition of international conflicts into the Horn. In this context, the *Scramble for Africa* played a special role, engaging half a dozen European powers in the second half of the XIX century. The colonial period in the Horn – 1869 to 1941 – marked the peak of outright interference by the external forces, eager to seize the local riches and strategic assets. In spite of all the characteristics of a foreign intrusion, colonialism differed in the fact that it exercised a direct jurisdiction overseas from within. The main colonial powers in the Horn were Italy and Britain. France established her own possession – the Somali Coast around the city-port of Djibouti – and broadly challenged the exclusive influence of Italy and Britain without competing for confining territories.

With the advent of colonialism, a minority of a different cultural and religious origin forcefully established itself in the Horn, tampering with the already existing territorial and national assets. The metropolitan ‘center’ exploits labor in the form of *corvées*, serfdom or slavery and takes control of natural resources for further capitalist development. Italy sought to occupy the land in order to establish settlers, while the principal objective of England was control of water: the Nile basin and the routes to India through the Suez Canal, the Red Sea and the Indian Ocean. The previous system of domination and subordination between states and between the various groups within them was definitively altered. By way of institutional and productive transformation, colonialism redesigned the political, economic and cultural environment. Colonialism was perceived and accepted in different ways by various groups along their position in the power ladder, ranging from resistance to complicity and collaboration. European nations exploited local contrasts in order to accomplish their plans. For this reason they supported those elements which might have facilitated their expansion and power by promising the marginalized peoples to subvert their status of subjugation.

Colonialism did not destroy the pre-existing ideologies, but, imposing a technologically and politically superior authority on previously unknown cultural and institutional paradigms, it severely twisted out internal dynamics. The outcomes of the colonial predicament were shaped by factors as time, density, political designs, and the presence of settlers. Italian colonialism was labeled ‘demographic colonialism’, but, after all, settlers in the Horn were a tiny minority with respect to the local population. The case of Libya was quite different.

The colonial interlude was decisive in the formation of states and nations. The form of administration introduced by the European powers displaced or transformed the local order. The colonial management of land and resources was more efficient but aggravated and intensified the chronic instability due to protest against the occupation, loss of sovereignty, and the expropriation of goods. Sometimes the resistance ‘escalated’ into an all-out war.

Colonialism as such, without meaningful distinction from one power to another, stressed the importance of ethnicity since in a situation where a foreign culture is imposed, coupled with political dominance and expropriation of resources, clan and familial allegiances are the most immediate means of survival. While the curbed and harassed rulers defend, on principle, their power and national liberty, colonialism can help the losers of the past to surpass their position of inferiority. Indeed, subordinated groups are driven to ease the penetration of colonialism in the hopes to get rid of their old masters. The colonial experience left a lasting legacy either by separating subject peoples from the ruling centers and thus liberated them from traditional obligations or by confirming pre-existing relations of domination.

Ethiopia and Sudan bravely counteracted colonial imperialism thanks to their political and military might; the reformers who governed Ethiopia in the second half of the XIX century (the emperors Tewodros and Menelik) and the Mahdist state in Sudan achieved their own designs for centralization of power in the fissures left by the colonial partition of Africa carried out by the European powers. Italy mobilized the subject peoples against Ethiopia, who suffered her expansion and occupation, and in some way legitimized the separateness of Eritrea and the would-be requests of the Somalis. Similarly, in Sudan the British occupation complicated the relationship between the Southern Black peoples and the Arab-Muslim power seated in the North. Also in the ensuing periods, Ethiopia and Sudan staunchly stood up for the *status quo* and by contrast Eritrea and Somalia – Eritrea for a long time as a liberation movement, Somalia since the Pan-Somali ideology – embraced revisionist policies.

Outside influence was also manifested by an interaction of local actors and powers and superpowers that, differently from the colonial powers, did not seek direct control or sovereignty in the Horn. Such was the case for the Arab states – commencing from Sudan, the closest Arab state to the Horn. And such was the case for the superpowers during the Cold War. The peculiarity was that the Horn's nations succeeded in exploiting the East-West confrontation to prop up their own national causes – Ethiopia defended the integrity of the state with the help of the United States (Marcus, 1983), Somalia relied on Soviet Union for recovering the Somali lands claimed by Mogadishu – rather than deliver their territories and resources at service of global stakes.

In the aftermath of the revolution which ousted the monarchy and abolished feudalism in Ethiopia, Somalia made a forcing to implement the longstanding Pan-Somali dream and invaded the Ethiopian territory – nominally, to back the Somali-speaking tribes in Ogaden and the struggle of the Western Somalia Liberation Front. Insofar, the military treaty that linked USA and Ethiopia had not yet been repudiated but American Government was keeping Ethiopia at a distance because of the radical course inaugurated by the military regime. Somali President Mohammed Siyad Barre hurried up to Moscow to press the

Kremlin to deliver the assistance apparently promised by the Friendship and Cooperation Treaty of 1974. Brezhnev – in vacation in a Black Sea resort – did not even receive him, rebuffing his hopes. The sanctity of the borders was an established principle in the bipolar order. USA and USSR wholly agreed to prevent conquests and secessions.

Ethiopia was put by the Carter administration into the American 'black list' of countries responsible with nasty violations of human rights. The military base of Kagnew Station was no more essential to U. S. strategy as in the past. That base had been for many years the main prize of the good relations between the United States and Ethiopia. It was a pillar in the American system of international communications thanks to the altitude and the latitude of Asmara. In the 1970s it became obsolete because of the development of satellite intelligence and the creation of the huge base of Diego Garcia in the Indian Ocean. So, the U.S. was ready to leave Ethiopia to her own destiny. Mengistu Haile Mariam, the Red Negus, who has won a bloody feud at the top of Derg (Council or Committee in amharic, as the military junta was commonly called), did not hesitate to solicit military aid from USSR in order to reinstate the weapons which came from the West. The Soviet advisors moved from Mogadishu to Addis Ababa. A process of de-alignment and re-alignment took place in the space of a few months. Somalia was strongly pushed to attack Ethiopia from a sort of *ante litteram* Islamic 'camp', then composed by the Shah's Iran, Saudi Arabia, and Egypt, that wanted to chase the 'communists' out of the Horn. The local actors had proved once more to be able to maintain firmly the initiative in their hands. As far as Somalia, the result of the maneuver was disappointing. U. S. subordinated its military support to the withdrawal of the last soldier of the Somali army from the Ethiopian territory. Siyad Barre had lost his major partner without a prompt and totally satisfactory replacement (Farer, 1979; Korn, 1986).

Over the end of the Cold War, Soviet Union, later on Russia, completely moved out from the African theatre. The new Russian leadership reckoned the disproportionate exposition in Angola and in the Horn was a major cause of the collapse of Soviet Union and Socialism. Zbigniew Brzezinski, the advisor of President Carter for National Security, summed up a predominant view by saying that "détente is buried in the sands of Ogaden". Perhaps this assumption was an exaggeration. Nevertheless, the Russian-Cuban intervention in Ethiopia with troops, heavy weapons and large-scale military assistance was the second big effort brought about in Africa by Brezhnev after the intervention in Angola in 1975 and perhaps such a challenge was too much for U. S. susceptibility. In 1960, the radical experiment attempted by Patrice Lumumba after the independence of Belgian Congo hoping to rely on Soviet coverage was badly wrecked and Lumumba himself was assassinated by his enemies. Soviet Union demonstrated to be completely powerless in the absence of a suitable apparatus to a long-distance military operation. The fact that fifteen years later the Soviet Union successfully supported Agostinho Neto in halting the offensive of



Zaire and the South African expeditionary force revealed that the balance of power in the former colonial world underwent a profound transformation.

The entire scenario in the Horn abruptly changed in 1991 following a political earthquake with three main effects: a) the breakdown and dismemberment of Somalia since the warlords who fought a civil war against Siyad Barre once his regime was overthrown kept a firm, exclusive control of their respective tribal areas instead of building up a national government; b) the full independence of Eritrea under the leadership of the Eritrean People's Liberation Front (EPLF) engaged in a 30-year war of liberation/secession from Ethiopia; c) the introduction in Ethiopia by the post-Derg regime, a coalition of parties dominated by the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF), of a form of federalism and decentralization on a regional and ethnic basis. Ethiopia's new Constitution opens with the striking words 'We, the Nations, Nationalities and Peoples of Ethiopia' and provides for the right to self-determination up to secession of the various groups. The military triumph of both EPLF and TPLF was facilitated by an adjustment of their alliances abjuring Marxism-Leninism and calling on West's benevolence. Israel as well endorsed the birth of an Eritrean independent nation once granted that the former Italian colony would not become an Arab or Islamic state.

Italy could be proud of a posthumous and unexpected success, since fifty years or so after losing her possessions in the Horn, the mark of colonialism re-emerged in force overcoming the Great Tradition of the Empire and Pan-Somalism. In fact, the division of Somalia into two different states according to the colonial boundaries, and the secession of Eritrea from Ethiopia, reproduced the geopolitics of the Scramble. Colonialism strikingly confirmed its function as unbeatable 'state maker' (Calchi Novati, 2009). Nevertheless, Italian policy in the Horn had always privileged 'statehood' and the state shattered against the rock-hard realities of civil wars. Quite oddly, those who gained were the two movements-parties, the EPLF in Eritrea and the TPLF in Ethiopia, that Italy's policy had neglected more. The flight of Siyad Barre from Mogadishu in January 1991 was the last act of a regime that Italy had tried tirelessly for over twenty years to preserve as a token of stability. The influence of Italy did not recover its past records. The Somali National University – the jewel of Italian technical assistance – was destroyed and vandalized during the onslaught of the militias. Italy supplied political and economic aid to Siyad Barre besieged in Villa Somalia as long as possible. Aghast and bitter, a number of Italian expatriates watched as passive bystanders the final battle for the control of the capital city of the former colony. The Italian embassy in Mogadishu was the last one to be evacuated – a sign of responsibility, perhaps, and a strong demonstration of Italy's will to stay on, but at the same time, above all in the perception of Siyad's enemies, the proof of a special relationship with the dying regime.

Due to her long state tradition, Ethiopia was supposed to be very different from Somalia, a *parvenu* in the family of states in the Horn. In fact, in 1991, Addis Ababa fell, under roughly equivalent circumstances as Mogadishu, but with less bloodshed and without such a rout of the central authority. To the dismay of Italian efforts deployed in order to remain close to any government in Addis Ababa, the United States and not Italy played a leading role in the last days of the fighting that caused the end of Mengistu regime and the escape abroad by plane of the Red Negus. The new Government sanctioned the independence of Eritrea giving up the embattled province and the access to the sea, a historical post for any Ethiopian government. The two liberation movements ganged up against the Derg. The independence of Eritrea, which crowned a long and controversial struggle (Alemseged Abbay, 1998; Cliffe and Davidson, 1994; Jordan Gebre-Medhin, 1989; Okbazghi Yohannes, 1991; Papstein, 1991; Pateman, 1998; Pool, 2001; Redie Bereketeab, 2000; Ruth Iyob, 1995; Tesfatsion Medhanie, 1986), was unanimously approved both by the United Nations and the Organization of African Union. At least in the Horn, the inviolability of the colonial and de-colonial boundaries was put aside – though Eritrea was a very special case since it had been a colonial territory separated from Ethiopia up to World War II (Eyassu Gayim, 1993).

In the so-called New World Order proclaimed by U. S. President George Bush senior in 1990, the Horn has been affected by external tensions even more sternly than in Cold War times (Calchi Novati, 2004). Africa was pointed out by Bush as a main issue of U. S. foreign policy after the end of the Communist threat because of its immense reservoir of energy, minerals, and strategic assets, all of them indispensable for further development and security of the U. S. and its allies (Volman, 1993). The Horn has been the sole African theatre of a major military intervention without the protection that had been ensured by the East-West dualism. Somalia showed to be very sensitive to the contagion of the instability that characterized the international system in the new situation and straightly became a target of the war on terror declared by George W. Bush after the Twin Towers catastrophe. On its hand, the Ethiopian Government led by Meles Zenawi was ready to play the Big Game siding the American pre-emptive action against any symptom of Islamic upsurge in Somalia. The Horn has been ever conceived by the superpowers, and especially by the United States, as an appendix of the Middle East. In February 1945, President Roosevelt returning from Jalta received Emperor Haile Selassie in Egypt and in the same occasion he met the King of Egypt and the King of Saudi Arabia stressing the connection between Ethiopia, with her Christian court, and the Arab world. (Calchi Novati, 1988). Thus, in the post-bipolar order the Horn has been charged with the same questions that afflict the Middle East, i. e. the security of Israel, oil, Islam. Israel, in fact, has played a primary role in the Horn and in Sudan, sustaining and arming anti-Arab and anti-Muslim forces.

While Somalia was ravaged by civil war, in a crescendo of anarchy and famine, the U. S. – and, later on, the U. N. – carried out the operation that was unwisely named ‘Restore Hope’. The interdictions of the Cold War balance were over. For the first time, former colonial powers and superpowers had the possibility to undertake a direct intervention in Africa against the will of the country concerned. Italy had the advantage to be acquainted with the terrain better than other nations and was invited, like Britain, to dispatch troops.

Strictly speaking, Somalia does not fit the region that has hosted the major wars after the end of bipolarism. Yet Somalia had a common fate with the Greater Middle East, the Balkans, and Central Asia. In a U. S. Senate hearing in 1999, General Normam Schwartzkopf explained why the area that contains the Suez Canal in the north and the Babel-Mandeb in the south was so crucial for the West’s defense plans. In a column contributed to the ‘Washington Post’ in the post-Twin Towers political climate, Susan Rice – the former Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs in the Democratic Administration, who later on has been appointed by Obama as the U. S. ambassador to the United Nations – wrote: “If Americas has to win, and not just to fight, the war on terror, it cannot consider Africa as separated from the comprehensive global war”.

The objectives of the ill-conceived and worse-performed Restore Hope Operation, launched by Bush in December 1992, were confused and not stated in advance. The United Nations joined the operation in 1993 taking the lead. Italy sent troops keeping an autonomous line of conduct (Loi, 2004). The Italian command frequently clashed with the destructive policy of the U. S. contingent, which focused over Mohammed Farah Aidid, the troublesome warlord that the American Government, for a while, addressed as its main enemy. The battle in October 1993, in which 18 American rangers and hundreds, perhaps thousands, of Somalis died, during a raid of the American troops in order to catch or kill Aidid, raised an enormous impression in America, and compelled the United States to close up Restore Hope. The episode was illustrated by Riddell Scott’s movie *Black Hawk Down*. Only a few months later Aidid was rehabilitated by the American authorities and amicably traveled together with the U. S. special envoy on an American aircraft to Addis Ababa for talks with his Somali counterparts. The international force was withdrawn by March 1995, ostensibly without any positive outcome. The peak of the famine was over but Somalia was to pieces all the same and anarchy was even worse as before.

The disgraceful experience in Somalia suggested some generals of the Pentagon the necessity of a comprehensive reassessment of the agenda of military multilateral operations. No more interventions abroad under the aegis of a foreign command – included United Nations. No more operations without acknowledgeable and predefined aims. No more nation-building missions in backward and divided countries (Clark and Herbst, 1997).

Since 11/9 President Bush Jr. scrutinized Somalia for a possible collusion with Al-Qaeda and the terrorist network of fundamentalist Islam. Al-Ittihad, a religious group widely involved in charity activities all over the country, was accused to be a terrorist organization and Somalia was suspected to offer sanctuaries to Islamic terrorism. The properties of Barakat, a big banking and telecom company that managed most of the formal and informal business in Somalia and within the Somali diaspora in America and in the Gulf, were frozen, allegedly for hidden links to Al-Qaeda. On the eve of the strike against the regime in Kabul after the Twin Towers facts, the American press recommended the Administration to mind 'Somali lesson' but to some extent U. S. embarked in the same mistakes already committed in Somalia. Somalia was identified as a possible outlet for the surviving Taleban and Al-Qaeda forces fleeing Afghanistan. In fact, the political, religious and ecological pattern of Somalia can remind Afghanistan's framework: a territory mainly scrub and desert, a weak central government, sectarianism, illicit trade, and a booming expansion of political Islam. After 11/9 enforcing law and controlling the territory is by far more important than providing flexible and easy access to investments and goods. The void of power in Somalia would be no more tolerable both to the United States and Ethiopia (International Crisis Group, 2008).

Like in other comparable situations (i.e. in the transition of Algeria from the one-party state to a multiparty system), violence became an integrant part of the growth of Islamist instances. In Somalia, jihadism seemed a way to get rid of fragmentation, anarchy, and instability. Islamic Courts – which so far had managed local power and traditional law in the interstices of the warlords' jurisdiction – formed their own militia and in June 2006 took the power in Mogadishu without any serious resistance. In the immediate, Islamist appeal was very strong: rule and order, and charitable welfare for everybody. The re-unification assured by Muslim ideology was a good alternative to the split in struggling clans. The Muslim movement got the genius of the so-called 'little solutions for big problems' and that was enough for the Somali population after so many years of despair and bad governance. Also in Somalia, however, the Kingdom of God – the project of a policy capable to renovate the human beings on behalf of a superior morality – was not on hand. After the initial mass support, harsh measures and abuses in the name of a rigid orthodoxy spread out mixed feelings and a square discontent.

Ethiopia saw in the access to power of the Union of Islamic Courts the long-awaited justification to intensify its pressure on the borders of Somalia. It was essential for Meles to eradicate the menace represented by political Islam at the borders, not only as a possible drive to rebellion of the Somali majority in Ogaden but also as an incentive that might galvanize the Muslim community living in Ethiopia (more or less 50% of the entire population). Finally, at the end of 2006 Meles started on the military invasion and occupation, or semi-occupation, of Somalia, toppling the Islamist government and literally transporting a

complacent President and his ministers to Mogadishu on the Ethiopian tanks. From the inception, the President of the Transitional Federal Government (TFG), Abdoulahi Yusuf, was considered pro-Ethiopian, and his appointment had been enthusiastically welcomed by Addis Ababa. Nobody supported Somalia. One more evidence that the post-bipolar system was intimately different from the bipolar system. For sure, the new order doesn't warrant the rights of a peripheral country under attack whether the aggressor enjoys the favors of the United States. As a matter of fact, Ethiopia was backed, encouraged or condoned by the American Administration.

The initiative taken by Meles was another fair illustration of how in the Horn local actors redefine the meaning of international strategies in pursuit of national interests. However, whereas in the Cold War times the Horn's states were careful to uphold their reasons first and to take profit from the USA-USSR rivalry in order to accomplish them with the help of a superpower, Ethiopia tried to anticipate the wishes of the only one superpower fighting her small 'war on terror'. Such mix of national and global concerns proved to be a misstep. Ethiopia underestimated the hostility of the Somalis to any foreign interference and was drawn into a game beyond the range of her limited means. Nationalism, Islamic revivalism, and the local branch of Al-Qaeda coalesced against the TFG, installed and protected by the Ethiopian troops, giving way to the hardliners. Despite its original endorsement by international diplomacy (IGAD-Inter-Governmental Authority for Development had mediated the negotiations which brought to the setting up of Transitional Federal Government in 2004), now most Somalis viewed the Government just a stooge of Somalia's historical enemy.

Ethiopia envisaged two purposes which were intrinsically contradictory: carving out a corridor through the Somali territory to ensure an access to the seaside for her export-import trade by-passing the Eritrean ports, un-accessible after the Eritrea-Ethiopia war of 1998-2000, and preventing any threat of destabilization across the Somali borders. Meles has to choose between safety and expansionism. The latter – a direct or indirect control of parts of the Somali territory – implies a Somalia with no central authority. But an impotent Somalia would be doomed to offer an easy 'haven' to terrorists. A supplementary nuisance derives from the regional alignments. Ethiopia has always been put, conventionally, in the anti-Arab or anti-Muslim camp. Egypt – in its capacity of Muslim state – is, in a way, the warrant of the independence of Somalia. Although Ethiopia is a valuable and appreciated ally, in case of a bid Egypt would be undoubtedly a priority in the American strategy.

After a short but promising honeymoon (Amare Tekle, 1994), local, regional, and international factors triggered in May 1998 another conflict in the Horn, between Eritrea and Ethiopia, nominally for a boundary controversy (Abbink, 2001 and 2003). The *casus belli* was

above all the locality of Badme, held by the Ethiopians and claimed by the Eritreans. Unlike most of African wars, it was an 'inter-state' war, not an 'infra state' one. Italy felt some responsibility because the border had been traced when she was the colonial power both in Ethiopia and Eritrea (Guazzini, 1999). Unluckily the records issued by the Istituto Geografico Militare in Florence were not decisive as the border followed different tracks in the maps available in its archives (Ciampi, 2001). The usual ambivalence of the Italian Government, that did not choose quite clearly between the two belligerents maintaining to be equidistant (or equi-near), thwarted its attempts to manage an effective mediation.

Anyway, the war, beyond the pretext of the sovereignty on some square miles of stones and dry rivers, regarded resources (transit trade, use of ports, etc.) and immaterial goods as supremacy at the regional and international level (Uoldelul Chelati Dirar, 1999; Tekeste Negash and Tronvoll, 2000). Post-independence revisionism in Asmara has been smashing up the equilibrium all over the Horn in an essentially anti-Ethiopian rationale (Tefatsion Medhanie, 1994). Revisionism is typical of diasporic nations (Ruth Lyob, 2000). We have already mentioned the case of Somalia. Eritrea too watches her controversial nationalism. On the contrary, Ethiopia champions as always the *status quo* in terms of both territory and influence. To great dismay of Meles, Eritrea pushed her revisionism up to bandwagon with the Islamic movement in Somalia sheltering the most radical wing – an unholy alliance since the Government in Eritrea is strictly Christian and has on its turn marginalized the pro-Moslem party, overwhelmed in the civil war fought in parallel to the secession/liberation war against Ethiopia.

Arguing from another perspective, the 1998 war was just one round in the competition between the two rivals to test their credibility and demonstrate who could or should better provide 'praetorians' for U. S. operations in the region that stretches from North Africa to the Indian Ocean. The juxtaposition between the adamant resistance to colonialism of the Ethiopians and the connivance with Italy's aggressions of the Eritreans through mass enrollment in the colonial troops (*ascari*) in 1896 and furthermore in 1935 has been a permanent component of the political discourse in the Horn marking the chasm between the two peoples and the two countries (Le Houérou, 2000). In the post-bipolar system, in Africa as in the Periphery at large, even competitors and rivals are compelled to please the same possible allies at the international level. Eritrea has some good reason to complain that the Ethiopian Government refused to implement the verdict pronounced by the international Commission charged to define the contested frontier (De Guttry, Post and Venturini, 2009). The Commission gave satisfaction to Asmara just in the crucial area of Badme. Yet Isaias Afewerki recognizes that the Americans are the only ones who may persuade Meles to change his mind.

The structure of the international system is in perpetual evolution and American willpower alone doesn't suffice to resolve the imbalance. A multipolar world that would place many players on equal footing still belongs to the rhetoric. Nonetheless, the rising power of China can re-open the game, also in the Horn. Insofar, the concurrency of China with the Western powers has been mainly confined to aid and investments. China prefers not to toughen the clash with the U. S. in view of boosting the G2 for the government of the world.

In the current system the integrity of the African states is not protected like in the Cold War order of the past. In the Horn the territorial *status quo* has been already altered (Eritrea, Somaliland). The next challenge regards the future of Sudan, on the eve of a referendum with an exit option of the Southern provinces. The dismemberment of Sudan and even more of Congo, another country whose unity is at risk, should be a more dreadful precedent for the entire continent.

Starting from the Horn and the trans-Saharan region, Africa is going to be attracted more and more into the Arab world and thus into the post-Cold War global confrontation. Humanitarian aid dispensed by the Muslim brotherhoods substitutes everywhere the Western NGOs in retreat. Islamism represents an important factor of aggregation and change for societies which live a season of distress and demise. Radical Islam is mooted as a possible comprehensive ideology of mobilization, if any as the last reprisal of a world that realizes its unavoidable defeat in the confront with the victorious West (Roy, 1992). (Roy, 1992), although Islam as such proved to be unable to successfully tackle the substantive matters of development, democracy, and modernization.

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