

Academic Article

**CHANGING RELATIONS BETWEEN SOMALIA AND ETHIOPIA:
POTENTIAL RISKS ON THE HORIZON**

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Changing Relations between Somalia and Ethiopia: Potential Risks on the Horizon

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Introduction

This article aims to critically analyze the possible implications of any future unification between the two states of Somalia and Ethiopia. This comes at a time of major political transition within Ethiopia, which began at the start of 2018. What emerged was a new leadership with an unprecedented governance style and new political views towards internal and external affairs—a great departure from Ethiopia’s former political scene over the past decades.

Dr. Abiy Ahmed was elected as the prime minister of Ethiopia on April 2, 2018. Since coming to power, Dr. Abiy has put into force a new regional political strategy, which is already having an immediate impact on the political situation of the Horn of Africa. One of the first capitals visited as part of his political campaign was Mogadishu, the capital of Somalia,¹ where he met with Somali president Mohamed Abdullahi Farmajo, with whom he signed a communique². After returning to Addis Ababa, the prime minister delivered a

¹ Bibi lichauco. Ethiopian Airlines to land Mugadishu for first time in four decades. Australia:Foreign Brief Geopolitical Risk Analyses. Accessed on November 2, 2018. <https://www.foreignbrief.com/daily-news/ethiopian-airlines-to-land-in-mogadishu-for-first-time-in-four-decades/>.

² Harun Maruf Hassan. Ethiopia Somalia agree to Strengthen brotherly Relations. Washington: VOA. Last updated on June 16, 2016. <https://www.voanews.com/a/ethiopian-prime-minister-visits-somalia/4441732.html>.

speech to the Ethiopian parliament regarding the significance of this agreement on the future relationship between his country and Somalia. One of the more striking remarks was Abiy's indication that he saw the prospects of the political integration of Ethiopia and Somalia in the future, under a single leadership. In light of this statement, this article will analyze the potential impacts of such a unification on both parties, as well as the region. It argues any attempt at unification by the two states poses more challenges than opportunities, and instead exacerbates the potential conflict.

Background of the argument

On June 16, 2018, the new prime minister of Ethiopia, Dr. Abiy Ahmed, addressed the Ethiopian parliament in regards to his recent discussions with the president of the Federal Government of Somalia, Mohamed Abdullahi Farmaajo.³ Touching upon the major points in the agreed-upon communique that emerged from their discussions, Abiy not only revealed an agreement by Ethiopia to invest in four Somali ports,⁴ but also went further and floated the possibility of future unification of the two countries,⁵ Among the Somali people, these remarks by the PM were greeted by a mixture of worry, doubt and controversy, particularly among Somali government officials, scholars, politicians,⁶

³ Daily # Ethiopia News. "BREAKING Abiy Ahmed's Speech on Somalia & Ethiopia Unity | Africa Unity | United Africa". Filmed [June 2018]. You Tube video, 10:29. Posted [June 16, 2018]. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FBorE2SfMLA>.

⁴ Aggrey Mutambo, "Ethiopia seeks to legitimize port deals with Somalia," Daily Nation, accessed on June 16, 2018. <https://www.nation.co.ke/news/africa/Ethiopia-Somalia-joint-port-deals/1066-4616104-e7g12uz/index.html>.

⁵ Daily # Ethiopia News. "BREAKING Abiy Ahmed's Speech on Somalia & Ethiopia Unity | Africa Unity | United Africa". Filmed [June 2018]. You Tube video, 10:29. Posted [June 16, 2018]. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FBorE2SfMLA>.

⁶ Awil Mohamed, "Shock therapy, suzerainty, hegemony or positive-sum game? Unlocking the implication of Dr. Abiy's strategy towards Somalia," Ummadda Media Online, accessed on August 19, 2018.

civil society representatives, and even ordinary citizens. At the forefront of their analyses and debate were two major questions that this article will seek to tackle. First, what are the likely consequences of such unification for the actors involved, as well as those affected by proxy—i.e. who benefits, and who loses out? Second, can we regard the communique between the two states as proof that Ethiopia is honestly committed to establishing brotherly relations with Somalia, or should we consider this an attempt by a regional hegemon to extend authority over its weaker neighbor?

In general terms, it seems clear that the foreign policy of Ethiopia's new prime minister marks a major break from those followed by previous administrations, including Somalia, but also Eritrea and elsewhere. This is evident even in the tone and style with which PM Abiy addressed his Somali counterparts. All of the speeches made during Abiy's trip to Mogadishu were beautifully composed and succeeded in touching the hearts of the Somali people, to the extent that they pointed towards a movement away from past animosities and towards renewed friendly relations.⁷ As the PM put it in his speech at the presidential house of Somalia: 'I am not here to laminate the past, but to open a new chapter, a new relationship, a new vision....,' he said.⁸

These statements by the PM can be interpreted as indicating genuine and honest intentions on the part of the new Ethiopian administration to fostering friendly diplomatic relations with the states of the region. This is evident "*Dr. Abiy's sudden readiness to engage the Somali federal government as the absolute sovereign of the country provides Mogadishu with a rare wiggle room and much-needed ammunition to finally repossess power from the clan based*

<https://www.ummaddamedia.com/shock-therapy-suzerainty-hegemony-or-positive-sum-game-unlocking-the-implications-of-dr-abiy-strategy-towards-somalia-awil-ahmed/>.

⁷ Mohamud Hassan. Abiy Effect and the Changing Fortunes in Somalia-Ethiopia Ties Relations. Nairobi: The Star. Accessed on January 13, 2019.
https://www.the-star.co.ke/news/2018/10/27/hassan-abiy-effect-and-the-changing-fortunes-in-somalia-ethiopia-ties_c1840866.

⁸ Akram Video Productio. "WATCH: Dr Abiy Ahmed's Speech in Mogadisho, Somalia with president farmaajo". Filmed [June 2018]. You Tube video, 20:57. Posted [June 2018].
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RhCEUTIWqZw&t=78s>.

regional actors,” as Awil says.⁹ As such, it could be said that never in the recent history of the region has the possibility for the establishment peaceful and cooperative relations between perennial adversaries Ethiopia and Somalia been so great. And if this were to succeed, it would certainly contribute to the stability of the Horn of Africa region as a whole.¹⁰ However, what matters is not ideal political visions among leaders, but the very political and practical nature with which such relations are actually formed. As I will argue below, any possible unification between Ethiopia and Somalia will advantage the former at the expense of the latter, due to the vast imbalances between the two states politically, socially, economically and militarily. What is more, as Ghelawdewos Araia writes the two countries have been enemies ever since Somalia came into existence, and such history cannot be so easily wished away.¹¹

The political incompatibilities of Somalia and Ethiopia

Ever since Somalia emerged alongside Ethiopia as an independent African nation in 1960, the two neighboring countries have never experienced friendly relations, but instead suffered deep enmity and instability.¹² History recounts many turbulent episodes.¹³ with scholars tracing hostile relations between the two nations back to 1520s, when Imam Ahmed Ibin Ibrahim al-Ghazi (also known as Ahmed Guray by Somali people)

⁹ Awil Mohamed, “Shock therapy, suzerainty, hegemony or positive-sum game? Unlocking the implication of Dr. Abiy’s strategy towards Somalia,” Ummadda Media Online, accessed on August 19, 2018.

<https://www.ummaddamedia.com/shock-therapy-suzerainty-hegemony-or-positive-sum-game-unlocking-the-implications-of-dr-abiy-strategy-towards-somalia-awil-ahmed/>.

¹⁰ Awil Mohamed, “Shock therapy, suzerainty, hegemony or positive-sum game? Unlocking the implication of Dr. Abiy’s strategy towards Somalia.”

¹¹ Ghelawdewos Araia PhD., “Understanding the Ethiopian-Somalia Relations & seeking Permanent Solutions to the Conflict in the Horn of Africa” *African Idea*, August 22, 2018, http://www.africanidea.org/ethiopian_somalia.html.

¹² Namhla Matshanda, “Ethiopia is mending relations with its neighbours under its new prime minister, World Economic Forum, last update Nov. 21, 2018, <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2018/11/how-events-in-ethiopia-will-influence-the-horn-of-africa/>

¹³ **ELSA** Gonzalez Aime, “The security Issues Behind the Ethiopian Intervention In Somalia 2006-2009,” in *State and Societal Challenges in the Horn of Africa*, ed. Alexandra Magnolia Dias, (Centro de Estudos Internacionais: Lisboa, 2013), 32.

declared war against Ethiopia.¹⁴ Within the heyday of the post-colonial geopolitical environment, this included the costly and ultimately failed war of expansion by the Somali military regime against Ethiopia in 1977, in which it sought to incorporate the Ogaden into a 'Greater Somalia'.¹⁵

From that time onwards, the two countries sought to destabilize each other through proxy conflict and support for each other's armed opposition forces, but, following the collapse of the Somali central government in 1991, Ethiopia was given freer rein to intervene in Somalia's political affairs. The most prominent example is the invasion Ethiopia undertook in Somalia between 2006 and 2009, when Ethiopia sent troops into Somalia to topple the Islamic Courts Union that was spreading what was perceived as a religious form of authority throughout the country. Both the Somali people and Ethiopians claim to possess the Ogaden (Hawd and Reserve Area), which currently is considered Ethiopian territory under international law, which was the source of the above-mentioned conflict in the mid-1970s. Their ongoing dispute over these borders indicates and defines their hostile relations.¹⁶

The two states have followed two different historical trajectories since the end of the colonial period, but particularly for the last three decades. Ethiopia is strong and centralized state (despite its federal structure) that has adopted and been performing functional statehood and governance, while Somalia has suffered through anarchy for the past three decades.¹⁷ Ethiopia's stability has allowed for it to develop institutionally, militarily and economically, adopting 'a planned economy' with an annual economic growth rate of 10.3% in 2015,¹⁸ as reported by the World Bank, while Somalia lingers

¹⁴ Ghelawdewos Araia PhD., "Understanding the Ethiopian-Somalia Relations & seeking Permanent Solutions to the Conflict in the Horn of Africa" *African Idea*, August 22, 2018, http://www.africanidea.org/ethiopian_somalia.html.

¹⁵ 'Ibid'.

¹⁶ Napoleon A. Bamfo, "Ethiopia's invasion of Somalia in 2006" *African Journal of Political Science and International Relations*, Vol. 4(2), no. 6CF25F040663 (2010):56.

¹⁷ Ghelawdewos Araia PhD, "Understanding the Ethiopian-Somalia Relations & seeking Permanent Solutions to the Conflict in the Horn of Africa" *African Idea*, August 22, 2018, http://www.africanidea.org/ethiopian_somalia.html.

¹⁸ . World Bank Group. *Fourth Ethiopia Economic Update: Overcoming Constraints in the Manufacturing Sector*. Washington, DC: World Bank Group, 2015. Accessed on September 11, 2018.

behind with a paltry growth rate of 2.5%.¹⁹ Additionally, the difference in population size between the two nations can be seen as a very telling indicator of the imbalance in power. Ethiopia, Africa's second most populous country, boasts a population of 99.4 million,²⁰ alone making up 8.3% of the population of Africa, thus outnumbering Somalia's estimated 12.3 million people by a factor of eight.²¹

Somalia is, in effect, a collapsed state which is rebuilding. Currently, its government is still grappling with efforts to merely consolidate control of the capital city of Mogadishu, and, when it comes to the building of institutions and legal frameworks, everything has had to begin from zero since the federal government was inaugurated in 2012.²² Unlike Ethiopia's heavily planned economy, Somalia remains a highly 'informal economy' due to the absence of national central governance.²³ In short, Somalia in reality continues to be politically anarchic, experiencing poor governance (or, in many places, its absence), poverty, economic stagnation and clan conflict,²⁴ while Ethiopia has been enjoying peace, growth and development across most livelihood and institutional indicators.²⁵

<http://hdl.handle.net/10986/22802>

¹⁹ John Randa and Catherine Ngumbau. *Somalia Economic Update, July 2017: Mobilizing Domestic Revenue to Rebuild Somalia*. Nairobi: World Bank Group, 2017. Accessed September 11, 2018. <http://hdl.handle.net/10986/28112>.

²⁰ 'Ibid'

²¹ Economic Commission for Africa. *The Demographic African of African Country*. Addis Ababa: United Nation Economic Commission for Africa, 2015. Accessed on September 12, 2018.; UNFPA. Population Estimation Survey 2014. Nairobi: UNFPA Somalia, 2014. Accessed on September 12, 2018. <https://somalia.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/pub-pdf/Population-Estimation-Survey-of-Somalia-PESS-2013-2014.pdf>

²² Ahmed Ali Kheyre M. PhD, "Somalia: an overview of the history and current situation," *Research Gate*, SSRN Electronic Journal, (April 2016):1-2. 10.2139/ssrn.2771125.

²³ Napoleon A. Bamfo, "Ethiopia's invasion of Somalia in 2006" *African Journal of Political Science and International Relations Vol. 4(2)*, pp. 055-065, (2010):56.

²⁴ Index Mundi. Ethiopia vs. Somalia. Charlotte: Index Mundi online. Accessed on January 18, 2019. <https://www.indexmundi.com/factbook/compare/ethiopia.somalia>.

²⁵ The World Bank. The world bank in Ethiopia: Overview. Washington: World Bank, 2019. Accessed on January 22, 2019. <https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/ethiopia/overview>.

Nevertheless, Ethiopia has in recent years experienced some cracks in its governmental edifice, and has yet to address certain fundamental development challenges, such as in the areas of employment and poverty reduction. Therefore, if unification and integration were to happen, Ethiopia would struggle to cope with the incorporation of such a dysfunctional polity as Somalia, where both the government and society have suffered extreme levels of destruction, where the meaning of nationhood and governance remains highly contested and in need of rehabilitation, and where high levels of unemployment exist. At the same time, if the two countries agreed to fully unite and create a singular state, Ethiopia's power and demographic advantages mentioned above would allow it to dominate its Somali counterparts, leading to the Ethiopianization of these populations and the absorption of the Somali state.²⁶ Within this hierarchical and imbalanced system, the Somali people would lose effective ownership of their coastal areas, and especially their ports, while all the best employment opportunities would be taken by Ethiopians. At stake would not only be the share of economic spoils, but the very integrity of the Somali political identity itself.

As the experience of the Somali region of Ethiopia has shown, Somalis and Ethiopians facing seemingly insurmountable obstacles to living together successfully and peacefully in one country. Taking into consideration the situation of Ethiopia's various ethnic groups more generally, we find a situation of recurrent conflict, dispute and tension, especially between the Somali and Oromia regions²⁷. Here, volatile relations have only been exacerbated by recent political changes, both those at the end of the former PM's tenure, when protests erupted and spread into interethnic conflict displacing around 1 million people, and upon the ascension of Abiy Ahmed in 2018, when leadership transformation upset existing political arrangements and stoked fear.²⁸ This included the

²⁶ Awil Mohamed, "Shock therapy, suzerainty, hegemony or positive-sum game? Unlocking the implication of Dr. Abiy's strategy towards Somalia," Ummadda Media Online, accessed on August 19, 2018. <https://www.ummaddamedia.com/shock-therapy-suzerainty-hegemony-or-positive-sum-game-unlocking-the-implications-of-dr-abiy-s-strategy-towards-somalia-awil-ahmed/>.

²⁷ Tadesse, Bamlaku & Gelaw, Fekadu, "The Sources of Ethnic Strives and Tensions among the Issa-Somali and Ittu -Oromo Pastoral Communities of Eastern Ethiopia," (2013):1.

²⁸ OCHA. Ethiopia: Conflict displacement Situation. (New York: Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, accessed on August 28, 2018).

reported violent killing of around 40 Somali civilian business owners in the Oromia region in September, in which those committing the vicious murders unashamedly danced over the bodies—thus speaking to the embodied animosities that still simmer among populations that have been living side by side for hundreds of years without integrating.²⁹ The unification of two previously separate countries would represent a systemic political shock of far greater magnitude and significance, meaning that it would be hard to imagine an Ethiopian-Somali federation leading to anything but conflict.

The Somali Region of Ethiopia (the Ogaden) is thus a major test case for the possibility of any unification of the two countries and its likely implications, according to a Chatham House report, there remains deep discontent among influential parts of the Somali population with the idea of being part of the Ethiopian state, to the extent that the ONLF, a liberation movement, continues to fight for the freedom of the region.³⁰

This conflict is the result of an unresolved historical grievance, in which the British Empire ceded the Ogaden region to Ethiopia in 1954, against the wishes of the local population.³¹ When Somalia became independent, the Ogaden thus became part of a border dispute, with successive Somali states seeking to regain the territory from Ethiopian possession.³² Exemplary of this sentiment of Aden Abdullah Osman, Somalia's former president, who in 1963 remarked 'Ethiopia has taken possession of a large portion of Somali territory without the consent and against the wishes of the inhabitants.'³³ It is

https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/ethiopia-_conflict_displacement_situation_report_0.pdf

²⁹ Faisal Roble, "Roots to the Somali Massacre: Challenging False Narrative," *Wardheernews*, last modified September 27, 2017. <http://www.wardheernews.com/roots-to-the-somali-massacre-challenging-false-narrative/>

³⁰ Healy Sally. *Conflict in the Ogaden and Its Regional Dimension*. London: *Chatham House*, 2007. Accessed on August 28, 2018. <https://www.chathamhouse.org/sites/default/files/public/Research/Africa/310807ogaden.pdf>

³¹ Ibrahim Rashid, *Last Century & the History of Somalia* (Nairobi: SCRIBD, 2011), 22.

³² Napoleon A. Bamfo, "Ethiopia's invasion of Somalia in 2006" *African Journal of Political Science and International Relations Vol. 4(2)*, pp. 055-065, (2010):56-57.

³³ Daniel Kendie, "Towards Resolving the Ethiopia-Somalia Disputes," W Westren Machigan University, (8-2007):2.

this region that caused the war that broke between Somalia and Ethiopia in 1977.³⁴ Therefore, it is not wise and rational for the Ethiopian leader Abiy to simply say 'Somalia and Ethiopia can be united.'

The possibility of exacerbating conflict between ethnic groups not only haunts local politics, but also risks undermining the peace and security of the entire Horn of African region. Drastic integration and the ethnic tension and nationalism that it creates may very well cause the new Ethiopian empire to collapse, as its ethnic divisions are already causing instability. Whatever positive thinking and beautiful words towards the idea of unification that the PM may currently harbor, such as those anticipating the possibility of closer ties, brotherly affection, and respect, what history has taught us is that opposite is more often the case—namely, conflict, warfare, genocide, and national destruction.

Case in point here is the former Yugoslavia. Yugoslavia was created in 1918 under the banner of 'Brotherhood and Unity', seeking to bring together the Southern Slavs of Europe—the Serbs, Croats and Slovenes—plus Bosnia & Herzegovina, Montenegro and Macedonia.³⁵ While the project was disrupted by the second world war, its reestablishment as the Socialist Federal of Yugoslavia in 1945 was accompanied by more intense efforts to unify nations and peoples, out of the vision that such divisions could be transcended. After the death of the country's most influential leader, Josip Tito, in 1980, the weaknesses of the project became apparent, and the state began to collapse. Ethnic tension rose and the state disintegrated through the onset of fighting, which erupted into an all-out civil war which lasted three years and claimed the lives of 600,000 Bosnians, 25,000 Serbian Bosnians and 8,000 Croats.³⁶ Such a cautionary tale is useful for Ethiopia, where although an act of unification may get off the ground through the charismatic

³⁴ Napoleon A. Bamfo, "Ethiopia's invasion of Somalia in 2006" *African Journal of Political Science and International Relations* Vol. 4(2), pp. 055-065, February 2010 (2010):57.

³⁵ Natilie M Small, "The Kingdom of the Serbs, Croats and Slovenes is founded 1919," *Thenagain*, 2016.
<http://www.thenagain.info/WebChron/ EastEurope/ Yugo King dom. CP.html>).

³⁶ Simon Andrew, "The death of Tito: The death of Yugoslavia," *The View East*, July 27, 2011, <https://thevieweast.wordpress.com/2011/07/27/the-death-of-tito-the-death-of-yugoslavia>.

leadership of Abiy Ahmed, the fate of this union may become so tied to the personality of its creator that it might collapse afterwards.

A major cause behind the dispute was a rise in ethno-nationalism, which Dejan Marolov attributes to what he calls historical “conditionality.’ The different ethnic groups of Yugoslavia were originally from two different empires with different civilizations: those in the south from the Ottoman Empire and those in the north from Austro-Hungarian Empire. It is also important to note that these people believed in different religions, namely Catholicism, Orthodox Christianity and Islam.³⁷ Even amongst the southern communities, divisions within the same (Slavic) ethnic groups occurred as a result of differences in religion and/or language between the Serbs, Croats and Slovenes.³⁸

Tone Zwaan (2012) sums up the ethnic nature of the Yugoslav conflict as follows: ‘Serbs fighting Muslim Bosnians and Croats, Croats fighting Serbs and Muslim Bosnians, Muslim Bosnians fighting Croats and Serbs’. Such ethnic divisions and the conflict it created calls for national self-determination for the various communities of 24 million people living in Yugoslavia. In the end, those people who came together in search of the dream of brotherhood and unity found themselves divided into seven independent states—the six pre-Yugoslavia nations of Serbia, Croatia, Slovenia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro and Macedonia, as well as Kosovo, which seceded from Serbia.³⁹ Ethiopia, with a population of 90 million, in a region where the ethnic politics are some of the most complex and fractious in the world, seems even more likely than Yugoslavia, with its 24 million people, to collapse as a result of such social factors.

As with Yugoslavia, Sudan has gone through a similar ethnically-charged division. What was once a single state as recent ago as seven years, is now divided into two countries, the Republic of South Sudan and the Republic of the Sudan, following South

³⁷ Dejan Marolov, “The Reasons for the Collapse of Yugoslavia,” *International Journal of Sciences: Basic and Applied Research (IJSBAR)* 12, no. 1, (2013): 252.

³⁸ Elizabeth Caliendo, “The Kingdom of the Serbs, Croats and Slovenes is Founded in 19,” Webchron, last modified November 18, 2018, <http://www.thenagain.info/WebChron/EastEurope/YugoKingdom.CP.html>.

³⁹ Tone Zwaan, “Crises and Genocide in Yugoslavia 1985-1995,” in *The Holocaust and Other Genocides*, ed. Barbara Boender (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2012), 122-136.

Sudan's withdrawal from Sudan in 2011.⁴⁰ This also has its basis in history. Sudan's northern population experienced a divergence as early as the 7th century, when Muslim Turko-Egypt created a demographic and religious shift in which the population became more Arabized, and where much of the population were converted to Islam. By the 14th century, the northern Sudanese had been largely transformed Muslim Arabs, whereas what is today South Sudan remained outside of such changes, as a mostly African and Christian society.⁴¹

When it comes to more recent history, the north and south, which achieved independence as part of a single nation-state, experienced a tumultuous relationship, full of conflict and resistance. Within the post-colonial set-up, the north dominated the south politically, economically, and socio-culturally, and used this dominance to put pressure on the south as a form of control. For example, in 1994, the northern-led government in Khartoum bombed southern land, resulting in the death of hundreds of people and displacing hundreds of thousands more.⁴² Therefore, apart from the other precipitating causes of the violent separation of northern and southern Sudan, including external interference and resource conflict, this paper argues that there is deep cause: 'clash of civilizations' as a historical conditionality. This paradigm, which is the result of a cleavage between irreconcilable cultural and religious identities,⁴³ can make integration between communities within a singular political system all but impossible.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this analysis has argued that any possible unification between Somalia and Ethiopia is highly likely to worsen the situation of both countries. In both the

⁴⁰ Marina Ottaway and Mai El-Sadany, "Sudan: From Conflict to Conflict," *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*, last modified May 16, 2012, <http://carnegieendowment.org/2012/05/16/sudan-from-conflict-to-conflict-pub-48140>.

⁴¹ Girma Kebbede, "Sudan: The North-South Conflict in Historical Perspective," *Contributions in Black Studies*, 15, no. 3, (1997): 1.

⁴² Girma Kebbede, "Sudan: The North-South Conflict in Historical Perspective," *Contributions in Black Studies*, 15, no. 3, (1997): 1.

⁴³ Giorgio Musso, "From one Sudan to two Sudan," *ISPI*, no. 40, (2011):26.

former Yugoslavia and the previously united Sudan, religious and ethnic differences proved too insurmountable and divisive to allow the countries to integrate politically, economically, and socially. Instead, these differences served as a basis for violent ethno-nationalist political mobilization in which many lives were lost and secession became the only option. For Ethiopia, which claims Christianity as its dominant religion, to blindly unite with the almost exclusively Muslim population of Somalia, without taking into account the fate of similar attempts at unification, and without properly factoring in the history of hostility and war between the two populations, can only be seen as a political gamble or folly with very small odds of success, and great potential for violent failure.

Therefore, in this author's opinion, there is no better choice for Somalia than to remain independent from Ethiopia, and to enjoy the sovereignty that it has fought to maintain. Somalia has been paralyzed enough by state failure and clan conflict over the past 28 years as it is—and simply being incorporated into another state will not solve these problems, but will only add more political obstacles. Uniting with Ethiopia will merely increase the radicalization of ethnicity and religion, leading to a new kind of conflict with ethnicity at its heart, making it all the more difficult to bring lasting peace, stability and statehood to Somalia again. What Somalia needs is the true freedom and local leadership to undergo the long and arduous indigenous processes of nation-building and institutional development, not dependent subordination to a larger power.

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