Mending Rips in the Sky
About the Title

Mohamed Aden Sheikh quotes, in Chapter Two, a traditional Somali proverb: "Cirtarraray rag waa islikaraa, Taako labadeede!", i.e. when men of good will come together, they become so powerful they can even mend a rip in the sky. The editors thought this proverb would be an appropriate title for this volume of collected essays.

Mending Rips in the Sky

OPTIONS FOR SOMALI COMMUNITIES IN THE 21st CENTURY

Edited by Hussein M. Adam and Richard Ford

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Dedication

to my family

I dedicate this book to my family. My wife, Fadumo M. Abdisalam, has supported me unselfishly during all the years that I served as the Founding President of the Somali Studies International Association (SSIA). My wife and elder children -- Ayaan, Farhan, and Guled -- played critical roles in the management and organization of the Fifth International Congress (December, 1993) as well as the Post-Congress Symposium (June, 1995). The other children -- Ubah, Zahra, and Mohamed -- have also contributed in both practical and emotionally supportive ways. The entire family also deserves my sincere gratitude and deep appreciation for their patience and support during the production of this book.

Hussein M. Adam
Foreword

In December, 1993, the College of the Holy Cross served as host institution to a world-wide group of scholars, ambassadors, political leaders, representatives of international relief and development agencies, and students who gathered on campus to grapple with social, political and economic problems confronting Somalia. They sought to assess the current situation and to suggest possible ways to restore order to that troubled nation and region.

December, 1993 was a contentious time in the life of the Somali people. The United States and the United Nations had intervened. News headlines were reporting the deaths of American soldiers, killed while attempting to keep the peace and provide relief for the suffering Somalis. Across the nation, diverse and strong opinions were voiced on how the US should respond. Should the US presence continue? If so, for how long? If there is to be a withdrawal, how will the US military extricate itself? And if they do depart, what will be left in its place to keep the peace and provide relief?

In the midst of these issues, the Fifth International Congress of the Somali Studies International Association convened. The presence of the Congress made the issues of Somalia come alive on our Holy Cross campus. Our guests rendered the situation in Somalia a real life issue to be studied, assessed, and perhaps in some cases even acted upon.

It was a particularly appropriate time for Holy Cross to confront these and related questions. Why? Because 1993 marked the College's Sesquicentennial Year -- a year when time was taken to reflect on where the College had come from, what it had achieved in its 150 year history, and where it was planning to go in the future. As a highly selective, Jesuit, undergraduate, liberal arts college, Holy Cross remains strongly committed to providing an education for justice. It strives to educate "men and women for others;" men and women who will possess that quality of mind that is reflected in their respect for other points of view, and in their passion for truth; men and women who will bend their energies not to strengthen positions of privilege, but, to the extent possible, reduce privilege in favor of the underprivileged, the truly poor, the truly marginalized peoples of the world. Given these goals, a critical examination of fundamental philosophical and religious questions is
Preface

The grant made by the United States Institute of Peace to help finance the editing and completion of this important book represents one more step in the Institute's journey with Somalia. The initial step was a grant from the Institute, made in 1992 to St. Lawrence University, to finance a conference on the crisis in Somalia. The papers from that conference were later published in a book edited by Ahmed Samatar entitled The Somali Challenge: From Catastrophe to Renewal.

As the Somali crisis worsened, in October, 1992 the Institute organized the first of what became a series of conferences and workshops on Somalia. The Somali Study Group was formed after an initial conference. Over a two year period this Study Group prepared recommendations regarding international intervention in Somalia, as well as ideas about reconstruction and reconciliation. The Study Group was composed of Somali intellectuals and former Somali officials who were then residing in the US. I organized these meetings in collaboration with Ambassador Robert Oakley, former US Ambassador to Somalia and at the time Director of the Institute's Middle East Initiative. My other collaborator and close advisor was Professor Hussein Adam, a co-editor of this volume.

When President Bush made the decision to send US troops to Somalia to assure the safe delivery of humanitarian supplies, he chose Robert Oakley to be his special envoy to Somalia. The Somalia Study Group continued to meet and was able to communicate its recommendations to Ambassador Oakley.

In 1994-95 the Institute published two books that analyzed the UN and American interventions in Somalia. The first was by Ambassador Mohamed Sahnoun, who served as the Special Representative of the UN Secretary General in Somalia in 1992, entitled Somalia: The Missed Opportunities. Ambassador Sahnoun wrote this book while he was a Distinguished Fellow at the Institute. The second was a book by Robert Oakley and his deputy in Somalia, Ambassador John Hirsh, entitled Somalia and Operation Restore Hope. At the time these books were first published, the Institute organized public briefings on lessons learned from international intervention in Somalia.
Mending Rips in the Sky

In 1994 the Institute made a grant to the College of the Holy Cross to enable Hussein Adam to organize and edit some of the most pertinent papers presented at the 1993 meeting of the Somali Studies International Association. The product of that grant is this volume, which represents an important collective statement by Somali and Western intellectuals about the nature of the Somali predicament, as well as thoughts and recommendations regarding Somalia's future.

I wish to commend Hussein Adam, who is currently a Senior Fellow at the US Institute of Peace, and the other contributors to this volume for the important statements that this book makes about Somalia. The US Institute of Peace is proud to have supported and to be associated with this project.

David R. Smock
Director of the Grants Program
United States Institute of Peace
Washington, DC

Acknowledgments

This book would not have been possible without the help of many friends and colleagues. There is insufficient space to list all of them here, but the most important include the 400 individuals who participated in the Fifth Congress of the Somali Studies International Association, especially those who prepared and presented papers. The Congress itself was made possible through the generous support of the College of the Holy Cross, which, in 1993, was celebrating its 150th year anniversary. The Congress became part of that celebration, including Holy Cross providing assistance in conference funding, facilities and meeting rooms, and costs of secretarial and logistical assistance.

In addition to Holy Cross financial help, dozens of students served as guides, registration aides, messengers, and computer assistants. Without this abundant support, the conference would not have been possible. Moreover, the administrative officers of the campus including food services, campus police, campus printing, and the office of grant support, under the direction of Professor Charles Weiss, were all of enormous help. In particular, we would like to single out Ms. Joy Bousquet, Secretary of the Mathematics Department, who typed almost every paper submitted as well as conference correspondence. She did all of this over and above her regular duties. Her tireless, rapid, and accurate work made possible distribution of papers at the conference and the follow-up symposium.

We would also like to thank Ms. Jean Evanowski, Secretary to the Department of Political Science, who answered phone calls and coordinated schedules and plans. Another indispensable partner in preparing for the Congress and in producing this book was Ms. Odile Hanson. She translated two of the papers from French into English. In addition, Ms. Tina Chen and Ms. Mary Boliver in the Office of Special Studies, organized funding, managed reservations, and supervised registration.

Beyond the conference was follow-up assistance and publication of this book. The United States Institute of Peace made a grant to cover costs of publication which has been deeply appreciated. At a time when many donor and funding agencies have adopted a "wait and see" attitude on matters relating to Somalia and Somaliland, the USIP has taken strong and bold stands on issues to keep people talking and to seek many
different options to stimulate reconciliation and eventually rehabilitation and reconstruction of the war-torn land.

Also vital to the production of the volume have been staff and graduate students in Clark University’s International Development Program. John King, Becky Turk, David Szczepak, and Femy Pinto—all graduate students, and Liz Owens, Secretary in International Development, provided essential, professional, and timely assistance during the editing and formatting of the publication. Clark also helped with hotel accommodations and costs of preparation of the manuscript. For all of this assistance, we are grateful.

In addition, during the final stages, Jamie Frueh, Research Assistant at the United States Institute of Peace was an enormous asset in proof reading, typing the bibliography, and attending to last minute crises.

One editorial note is also necessary. In bringing symmetry to the chapters, we have tried, in-so-far as possible, to preserve the intentions and style of the author. Some chapters have end notes and bibliography; others do not. Some spellings vary from chapter to chapter, depending on local usage such as khat or qaad or miraa. And many of the spellings in the Somali language vary because of the considerable local variation in dialect, usage, and spelling. Preserving some of the variations, we feel, preserves the essence of the dignity and individuality of Somali society while, at the same time, bringing these differences together under a single cover and in a common purpose. We hope that this theme of diversity within a united front will have some adaptation to Somali society itself.

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CHAPTER THIRTY THREE

Origins and Unfolding of the Civil War in Djibouti

Peter J. Schraeder

I. Introduction

In November, 1991, the outbreak of civil war shattered the metaphor of Djibouti as the "eye of the hurricane" in the Horn of Africa. Amidst growing pressures for democratization and rising popular dissatisfaction with an increasingly authoritarian regime headed by Hassan Gouled Aptidon, the Front pour le Restauration de l'Unité et la Democratie (FRUD -- Front for the Restoration of Unity and Democracy) launched a military offensive that led to the capture and control of a significant portion of national territory. Nineteen months later, a counter-offensive led by the significantly expanded Djiboutian Armed Forces successfully broke the military back of the FRUD and led to the reestablishment of central government control over the majority of its territory.

As is the case with victors in the aftermath of most conflicts, either civil or international, the Gouled regime continues to present a self-serving version of what occurred in Djibouti from November, 1991 to July, 1993. Specifically, the Gouled regime has sought to rewrite history by claiming that the opposition forces simply constituted "bandits" or "terrorists" who at best were engaged in what can be characterized as an "insurrection" or a "rebellion," as opposed to a legitimate opposition
military force that had been involved in a civil war.

What at first glance may seem to constitute a rather innocuous terminological debate has significant international implications, most notably within the economic realm. For example, several companies -- especially those owned by current or past members of the Gouled regime -- are currently seeking insurance payouts from Western-based insurance companies for installations destroyed during the civil war.

If it is determined that a state of civil war existed in Djibouti at the time that these installations were destroyed, some of these insurance companies are not liable and no payments will be made. To the contrary, if what occurred in Djibouti was the act of terrorists or bandits, individuals -- some legitimate and some not -- stand to benefit. Terminology, thus, plays an important role in both the political and economic historiography of Djibouti.

The primary purpose of this paper is to explore the origins and unfolding conflict in Djibouti from 1977 to 1994, with a special focus on explaining why the level of hostilities from November, 1991 to July, 1993 did indeed constitute a civil war in the international legal sense of the term. Nine "war-risk" terms are mentioned throughout the article, particularly within the conclusion, and are based on an analysis of international legal texts and dictionaries. These eight terms include (1) mutiny; (2) sabotage; (3) terrorism; (4) coup d'etat; (5) ethnic conflict; (6) insurrection; (7) rebellion; (8) revolution; and (9) civil war.

II. The Ethnic Dimension of Djiboutian Politics

Djibouti is an ethnically diverse country where population statistics subject to controversy and range from conservative estimates of roughly 330,000 to official Djiboutian government estimates of 520,000. The Afar and Issa peoples comprise the two dominant ethnic groups which historically inhabited the territory. A subgroup of the Somali people, the Issas constitute the largest ethnic group (roughly 33 percent of the population) and inhabit the southern one-third of the country below the Gulf of Tadjoura and east of the Djibouti-Addis Ababa railway. Divided by the arbitrary imposition of colonial borders, the Issa people spill over into both the secessionist Somaliland Republic (the northern portion of Somalia that declared its independence in 1991) and Ethiopia where they number 50,000 and 230,000, respectively.

The Afars, also known as the Danakil, constitute the second largest ethnic group (roughly 20 percent of the population) and inhabit the northern two-thirds of the country above the Gulf of Tadjoura and west of the Djibouti-Addis Ababa railway. Also divided by ill-conceived colonial boundaries, the Afars spill over into the southern portion of the territory controlled by the Republic of Eritrea and extend westward as far as the Ethiopian town of Nazareth in numbers that surpass 600,000. The territory inhabited by the Afar peoples in the Horn of Africa is often referred to as the "Afar triangle."

The remainder of Djibouti's population is divided among five major groups (largely living in Djibouti City) which were not historically indigenous to the area. The Gadaboursis (15 percent) and Issaqs (13.3 percent), also subgroupings of the Somali peoples, migrated from northern Somalia during the twentieth century. They were attracted by work associated with the construction of the Djibouti-Addis Ababa railway and the expansion of the port at Djibouti City. Arabs, particularly Yemenis, constitute a third major group. Largely working in the commercial sector of Djibouti City, they constitute approximately 6 percent of the overall population. A fourth group, comprising approximately 4 percent of the population, includes a large number (roughly 10,000) of French and other European nationals who work at nearly all administrative levels of the Djiboutian government. Of particular significance are the nearly 3,500 French troops and family members (a total of 6,000) maintained by the French government on Djiboutian territory since independence in 1977. Finally, fluctuating numbers of refugees and illegal economic migrants from both Ethiopia and Somalia have periodically comprised upwards of 5-15 percent of the country's population at any given time. This final grouping has strained the limited capacities of the Djiboutian government, contributing to often acrimonious political debates and international controversy.

In addition to sharing a common nomadic tradition that places a high value on livestock and virtues of bravery and individualism, a strong adherence to the Islamic faith, and an oral tradition that holds singers and poets in high esteem, the country's two dominant ethnic groups -- the Afars and the Issas -- have maintained strong social networks that form the basis of everyday life, especially within the rural areas. The Issas maintain an especially egalitarian form of social organization based on clan membership in which all "men" are considered equal, and each has the right to voice his opinion about the affairs of his clan. As such, decisions are arrived at through consensus. The Issas are divided into three major clan families, two of which are further subdivided by several subclans. The Abgal clan family, which accounts for three-quarters of all Issas in the Horn of Africa and two-thirds of those living in Djibouti, includes the following four sub-clans: Yonis-Moussa, Saad-Moussa, Mamassan and Ourweine. The Dalol clan family, which accounts for only one-fourth of all Issas and roughly one-third of those living in
Djibouti, is similarly divided among three sub-clans: the Fourlaba, Horrone, and Walaldon. The Wardick constitutes the final Issa clan family represented in Djibouti, and is believed to be the result of mixed Somali/Afar unions. Although very few in number, the Wardick derive their prestige from the fact that the Ugas, the spiritual leader of the Issa group, is chosen from this clan family.

Despite a similar emphasis on clan membership as the basis for everyday life, the Afar maintain a hierarchical form of social organization that derives from traditional chiefdoms and sultanates, such as the still existing Tadjoura Sultanate. Decisions and debate among the Afars, unlike among the more egalitarian Issas, are more the reserve of recognized leaders and the heads of clans. For example, the sultans of Afar sultanates historically made decisions based on the advice of vizirs and councils composed of the heads of sub-clans and notables. In this regard, there is an important distinction between the so-called "noble" Asaihimera ("red") clans and the lowland Adohimera ("white") clans. Among the five major clans represented in Djibouti are the Adarassoul and the Debele, both of which are prevalent in the Dikhil region; the Adail and Badoita-Mela, which are located in the region of Obock; and the Hassoba, which is representative of the Tadjoura region.

III. Independence and the Creation of the Djiboutian Polity

In a significant change in the pro-Afar policies that dominated French political thinking prior to Djibouti's independence in 1977, the first Djiboutian government of the independence era reflected an important shift in French involvement in internal Djiboutian politics: Hassan Gouled Aptidon, an Issa Somali and leader of the Ligue Populaire Africaine pour l’Indépendance (LPAI - African Popular League for Independence), became the first President of the Republic, and Ahmed Dini, an Afar and Secretary-General of the LPAI, assumed the position of Prime Minister. Similar to actions taken by the majority of African leaders during the post-World War II period, Gouled oversaw the strengthening of a single-party system increasingly subject to his personal control and restrictive of popular debate.

According to the National Mobilization Law passed by the National Assembly in October, 1981, for example, Djibouti officially transformed itself into a single-party political system in which the only legal party prior to 1992 was the state-endorsed Rassemblement Populaire pour le Progrès (RPP - Popular Assembly for Progress). As such, only those politicians approved by the RPP were allowed to present themselves as part of a single-party slate during election periods. It is at least partially (some would say completely) for this reason that Gouled -- the only choice offered to the electorate -- received an overwhelming number of votes cast in presidential elections held in 1981 (84.66 percent) and 1987 (87.42 percent).

The Office of the President was further strengthened by the fact that Djibouti's army and security forces fall under the direct control of the president as commander-in-chief. Throughout the 1980s, the Djiboutian National Army numbered approximately 2,600 soldiers, including a 900-strong infantry commando regiment, a 200-strong armored company, an 800-strong frontier commando unit, and a 300-strong gendarmerie force. In addition, internal security forces numbered approximately 1,400, inclusive of 1,200 members of the National Security Force. These Djiboutian forces were buttressed by nearly 3,500 French soldiers stationed throughout the country who fell under the command of the Commanding Officer of French Forces in Djibouti. Although the majority (2,757) of these soldiers were associated with the French Army, including the 13th Demi-Brigade of the French Foreign Legion, the French Air Force (840 personnel) and Navy (134 personnel) also were represented. Djibouti permits the existence of one of the few remaining French bases on African soil.

Gouled's power was further strengthened by a political system that prior to 1992 lacked a formal constitution. As a result, the functioning of the system was based on a series of ad hoc rulings issued by the Office of the President, as well as laws passed by the sixty-five-member National Assembly -- a body presided over by a prime minister who, in turn, was appointed by the president. Yet despite his far-reaching powers, Gouled consistently sought to craft a ruling coalition inclusive of all groups but which nonetheless ensured control by the Issa ethnic group. In an unwritten power-sharing agreement worked out prior to independence and maintained ever since, the office of the president was occupied by an Issa and the office of prime minister was occupied by an Afar. Afar politicians who have occupied the office of prime minister include Ahmed Dini (1977-78), Abdallah M. Kamil (1978), and Barkat Gourad Hamadou (1978-present).

Gouled's desire to maintain an ethnic balance in politics also played a role in elections governing membership in the National Assembly. Under another power-sharing agreement worked out prior to independence, the sixty-five-seat National Assembly was divided along ethnic lines. Whereas Issas and others of Somali origin (Gadaboursis and Isawaq) were guaranteed a plurality of thirty-three seats, the Afars were apportioned the slightly smaller number of thirty seats. (The Arab portion of the population was guaranteed two seats.) A major complaint of Afar
opposition candidates concerning this arrangement was that the single slate of candidates presented to the public was chosen and approved by the Issa-dominated RPP, ensuring the selection of Afar candidates who potentially were more beholden to Gouled than to their own people. In any case, the slate of candidates presented to the voting public in the 1982 and 1987 legislative elections were overwhelmingly approved by margins of 90 and 87 percent, respectively.

An important aspect of Djibouti’s political system has been the often disruptive impact of external, and particularly regional events. This problem stems from the simple fact that, while many Djiboutian Afars feel a special affinity for their counterparts in Ethiopia, as well as often strong feelings for and against the central governments that have held power in Addis Ababa, many Djiboutian nationals with ethnic ties to Somalia historically have been captivated by the thought of Djibouti becoming part of a “Greater Somalia” in which all Somalis in the Horn of Africa would become part of a Somali state. During the 1977–78 Ogaden War between Ethiopia and Somalia, for example, these affinities were manifested by Djiboutian nationals taking arms against each other through clandestine movements supported by both Ethiopia and Somalia.

In a more recent manifestation of this phenomenon, the civil conflict between the (now deposed) government of Mohammed Siyad Barre and a host of guerrilla movements committed to his overthrow spilled over during 1989 and 1990 into the Djiboutian capital. Violent ethnic fighting broke out in Balbala, a large shanty town on the outskirts of Djibouti City, between the Gadaboursi and Issa communities. This conflict occurred because Gadaboursis living in Somalia, who tended to side with the Siad government and were recruited to serve in the Somali military, had taken part in repression targeted against Issas in northern Somalia who, in turn, tended to support the Somali National Movement (SNM), a guerrilla movement which was seeking to overthrow the Somali government. In all such cases, Gouled has not hesitated to exert pressure on targeted ethnic groups considered to be a threat to the security of the state.

Despite Gouled’s efforts to maintain some degree of ethnic balance within the government, the Afars increasingly felt slighted by a regime in which the Issas dominated the civil service, the armed forces and the RPP. Issa domination was favored by the simple fact that they constitute the largest ethnic group and that their power base, Djibouti City, remains the political and economic center of the country. As a result, many Afars felt that those among them, such as Prime Minister Hamadou, who have accepted positions with the Gouled government, were corrupt and inept officials who merely serve as “window dressing” for an Issa-dominated government rather than serving the legitimate needs of their own people.

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Afar dissatisfaction increasingly was transformed into a guerrilla insurgency or “rebellion” whose goal was to overthrow the Gouled regime by force. For example, in 1979 the leaders of two Ethiopian-supported guerrilla movements -- the “Mouvement Populaire de Libération” (MPL -- Popular Movement of Liberation) and the “Union Nationale pour l’Indépendance” (UNI -- National Union for Independence) -- created a joint military organization, the “Front Démocratique pour la Libération de Djibouti” (FDLD -- Democratic Front for the Liberation of Djibouti). In the political realm, former Prime Minister Ahmed Dini attempted to break the monopoly of the ruling RPP in 1981 by forming the “Parti Populaire Djiboutien” (PPD -- Djiboutian Popular Party), an opposition political party which was quickly outlawed by the Gouled regime. The net result of more vocal Afar opposition was an escalating cycle of violence in which military attacks by Afar guerrillas was countered by government repression, particularly within the northern Afar-inhabited territories.

Although the Gouled regime was able to stifle Afar demands for greater political power within the political system during the immediate post-independence era, the end of the Cold War and the decline of single-party rule in both Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union, led to growing pressures for multiparty politics throughout Africa, inclusive of Djibouti, by the end of the 1980s. The most notable aspect of this trend was growing dissatisfaction within Gouled’s own ethnic group over the authoritarian nature of single-party rule in Djibouti. For example, Mohamed Moussa Kahin, former director of planning and economic adviser to Gouled, clandestinely formed the “Mouvement pour l’Unité et la Démocratie” (MUD -- Movement for Unity and Democracy), an organization committed to the introduction of a multiparty political system. Kahin’s actions especially were significant as he represented the first senior member of Gouled’s ethnic group (Issa) and clan (Mamassan) to break openly with the government. Similarly, Aden Robleh Awaleh, an Issa of the Yonis-Moussa clan who fled Djibouti in order to avoid life imprisonment amidst charges of having fostered political destabilization, formed the “Mouvement Nationale Djiboutien pour l’Instauration de la Démocratie” (MNDID -- Djiboutian National Movement for the Installation of Democracy). Finally, in a move designed to unify the opposition in its quest for a multiparty political system, both the Issa-based MNDID and the Afar-based FDLD formed a joint organization known as the “Union des Mouvements Démocratiques” (UMD -- Union of Democratic Movements) in January, 1990. The UMD claimed that it was seeking to “unite all ethnic groups and different political persuasions within the country” so as “to put an end to the chaotic situation which the people of Djibouti are in due to their tribal and obscurantist regime.”
Rather than entertaining the idea of multiparty politics, however, the Gouled regime increasingly resorted to authoritarian tactics at the beginning of the 1980s to silence opponents. As documented in its first major report related to Djibouti, Amnesty International concluded in July, 1991 that various methods of torture were being employed by the security forces against a variety of opposition figures. After the October, 1990 terrorist bombing of the Café de Paris in which a French child was killed and fourteen people were injured, over 200 members of the Gadaboursi ethnic group were arrested and tortured. Similarly, in the aftermath of a military attack against a government military barracks in Tadjoura, hundreds of Afars were arrested and tortured after being charged with seeking to overthrow the government. Among the most prominent of those arrested was Ali Aref Bourhan, a member of the Hassoba sub-clan from Tadjoura who was one of the French-favored leaders of the territory prior to 1977. "The government said 11 years ago that torture would be stopped, but the evidence shows that it is still happening," Amnesty International declared on November 6, 1991. "We're again calling on the government to urgently tackle both the problem of torture and other human rights issues."

IV. The Djiboutian Civil War

Rising frustrations within the Afar community reached a turning point in November, 1991 when the "Front pour la Restauration de l'Unité et la Démocratie" (FRUD -- Front for the Restoration of Unity and Democracy), a military force of approximately 3,000 guerrilla fighters primarily from the Afar ethnic group, launched a sustained military offensive that eventually captured all the major areas in the north except for the towns of Tadjoura and Obock. Signalling the end of Djibouti's special status as the "eye of the hurricane" in the Horn of Africa, the offensive was initiated by Afar leaders calling for the removal of the Gouled regime and the installation of a multiparty political system. Indeed, the military leaders of the FRUD undoubtedly sought to duplicate the outcomes of civil wars in neighboring Somalia and Ethiopia which had led to the overthrow of the Siyad and Mengistu regimes during the first half of 1991. As for the Djiboutian government, it declared a state of emergency, arrested hundreds of Afars in the northern region, ordered the mobilization of the entire population, and, most important, invoked a Franco-Djiboutian defense treaty signed in 1977 that provided for French aid in the event that Djibouti was threatened with "external" aggression.

An extremely controversial aspect of the Gouled government's position was whether the military operations of the FRUD constituted illegitimate external aggression or legitimate internally based military operations -- the implications of which would determine the legality of French intervention under the Franco-Djiboutian defense treaty. The Gouled government predictably accused the FRUD of being an externally based (i.e., illegitimate) invasion force which was threatening Djibouti's sovereignty. Similarly, the FRUD predictably replied that it constituted an internally based (i.e., legitimate) military force deserving of the status of belligerency. As a result, whereas the Djiboutian government demanded swift intervention on the part of France to contain FRUD military advances, the FRUD requested French military restraint, as well as humanitarian aid and possible mediation between the two sides of the conflict.

As is the case in any politically charged debate when military forces are clashing on the battlefield, both sides of the argument contained some element of truth. In support of the argument that the FRUD constituted an indigenous military organization as opposed to a foreign invading force, it is clear that the leadership of the FRUD was composed primarily of disaffected members of the Afar community from within Djibouti (although, as was noted above, leaders within the Issa community also became critical of the Gouled regime). For example, the first president of the FRUD was Mohamed Adoyta Youssouf, an Afar who served as the secretary general of the FDLR and was a member of the executive committee of the MPL. Similarly, the first spokesperson of the FRUD in Djibouti City was Abbate Ebo Adou, a medical practitioner and veteran Afar opposition figure. Moreover, the FRUD enjoyed widespread popular support within the Afar-inhabited areas of northern Djibouti -- especially among disaffected youth more prone to seek redress by military means.

Despite significant levels of elite and popular support for the FRUD within Djibouti, it is also clear that at least a portion (exact figures are unobtainable) of the roughly 3,000 guerrillas came from Afar-inhabited territories of both Ethiopia and Eritrea. This situation was at least partially due to the large numbers of government troops, refugees, and, most significant, light arms and weaponry that streamed into Djibouti in the aftermath of Mengistu's overthrow in May, 1991. It is important to note, however, the difference between the movement across borders of guerrilla fighters based on ethnicity and the provision of aid by external governments or movements. In this regard, if one attempted to find a basis for the argument that the FRUD was an externally supplied invasion force, one immediately ran into the dilemma of actually finding a foreign power which was seeking to overthrow the Gouled government by military means.
An obvious turn to the Afar Liberation Front (ALF) based in Ethiopia was problematic because one of the sporadically stated platforms of this group -- the creation of a secessionist "greater Afar" country out of portions of present-day Djibouti, Ethiopia, and Eritrea -- ran counter to the FRUD's repeatedly stated goal of maintaining the territorial integrity of Djibouti. Sporadic tension between the goals of Afar leadership in Ethiopia and Djibouti had been fueled by the fact that many of the FRUD leadership perceived the ALF as constituting a largely backward, traditionalist, and illiterate organization led by corrupt, self-serving politicians, such as Sultan Ali Mirah, the ALF leader who originally was placed in power by Ethiopian leader Haile Selassie. Moreover, it has been argued that the FRUD leadership was concerned that the creation of a "greater Afar" country would lead to financial demands from the impoverished Afar-inhabited areas of Ethiopia and Eritrea, thereby contributing to the decline of resources, and thus of the standard of living, available to Afar leaders and their respective constituencies in Djibouti. "The FRUD leadership is used to access to hospitals where one can get care, schools where people get taught, and telephones that work, and they don't want to lose that," explained Gérard Fournier, an analyst associated with the Paris-based Centre de Recherches Africaines. "There is a strong sense among the FRUD leadership that an independent Afar country would be a financial basket case and, fully cognizant of the dire straits in which Djibouti's neighbors find themselves, that the proper course is to seek change within the existing boundaries of Djibouti."

Other regional actors were also unlikely proponents of a FRUD military victory. Both Eritrea (governed by the Eritrean People's Liberation Front -- EPLF) and the guerrilla leadership of Ethiopia (subsumed under the banner of the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front -- EPRDF) opposed a FRUD military victory due to a concern that overturning the Gouled government would strengthen separatist Afar movements within their territories. The secessionist Somaliland Republic was similarly opposed to the FRUD due to a desire to maintain a working relationship with the Gouled regime. Finally, despite the fact that Yemen allowed the FRUD to establish an office in the capital, Sanaa, Yemeni leaders did not favor a military solution, and instead offered to serve as neutral mediators between the FRUD and the Gouled regime. In short, the Djiboutian civil war initially was an internal conflict in which an internally-based leadership lacked external military patrons, but nonetheless, enjoyed the support of an undetermined number of migratory soldiers and a ready supply of light weapons from black markets in neighboring Somalia, Eritrea, and Ethiopia.

It is the latter interpretation of the civil war which initially guided French foreign policy toward the Gouled regime and created somewhat of a crisis for Franco-Djiboutian relations. In the early stages of the FRUD offensive, French officials strongly tied to the Socialist Party, such as Ministre Délégué des Affaires Étrangères Alain Vivien, emphasized that French military forces would not become involved in what was perceived in Paris as an internal civil war between the Gouled government and the Afar opposition. France instead offered to act as a neutral mediator in negotiations, ideally leading to the creation of a multiparty political system. This demand of the opposition was also the growing preference of French specialists increasingly weary with the corrupt and authoritarian practices of the Gouled regime. In order to achieve such an outcome, it was believed that, as part of a general cease-fire arrangement, the FRUD had to renounce the achievement of its aims by military means, at the same time that the Gouled government had to recognize the FRUD as a legitimate politico-military force. In essence, France was de facto recognizing the belligerency status of the FRUD -- i.e., that a situation of civil war existed in the country, and only an even-handed policy could peacefully resolve the conflict (thereby protecting French interests in the region). Although French policy became less neutral and more explicitly pro-Gouled in February, 1992 when French troops were ordered into Dikhil to prevent the advancing FRUD military forces from occupying the town and opening a major southern front (the net result of which might have been a FRUD victory in the civil war), the French continued to pressure the Gouled regime to seek a negotiated end to the civil war and to fashion a more inclusive multiparty political system.

Initially unwilling to heed French overtures and compromise with the FRUD opposition, the Gouled regime instead sought to bolster the Djiboutian Armed Forces and achieve a military victory by reportedly recruiting trained guerrilla fighters among the Issa populations residing in Ethiopia and Somalia, as well as some former Issaa fighters from the SNM. One outcome of this general trend toward the militarization of policy was a massacre in the Arhiba district of Djibouti City in which at least thirty were killed and eighty were reportedly wounded by government security forces on December 18, 1991. "According to eyewitness reports," noted an Amnesty International report of the incident, "the security forces rounded-up over 100 people in searches and identity checks before dawn and then shot people who refused orders to enter trucks to be driven away or who tried to escape." "One Afar member of the security forces was apparently executed himself," the report continued, "when he refused to fire on fleeing civilians."

The Arhiba massacre served as a significant turning point in the Djiboutian civil war in two major respects. First, less than twenty-four
hours after it occurred, Gouled for the first time announced his willingness to entertain the idea of establishing some sort of multiparty political system. Toward this end, the president charged a committee with preparing the country’s first post-independence constitution that would be submitted to a popular referendum as soon as six months after completion. Although opposition figures rightfully questioned whether this simply constituted a delaying tactic -- Gouled announced, for example, that such a referendum could only be held after the “foreign” invaders had withdrawn from Djibouti -- the actions of the regime nonetheless opened up a process of political reform which could prove increasingly difficult for the Gouled regime to control in the long term.

A second major outcome of the Ahiba massacre was growing dissonance at the highest levels of the Gouled regime. For example, in an effort clearly designed to cause a crisis of governance, the minister of health, Mohamed Djama Elabe, accused his government of being incapable of solving the country’s ills, denounced the “war logic” that seemed to prevail at the highest levels of the Gouled regime, and resigned his post. He subsequently formed a political organization, the "Mouvement pour la Paix et la Réconciliation" (MPR -- Movement for Peace and Reconciliation), that rejected the militancy of both the Gouled regime and the FRUD, and sought instead to build a trans-ethnic opposition coalition. Elabe’s resignation carried a lot of weight due to his status as France’s favored candidate to succeed Gouled as president of Djibouti. (A member of the Fourlaba subclan of the Issa ethnic group, Elabe is well respected among the Afar, and therefore is potentially capable of building a coalition that could transcend ethnic lines.) However, the mass resignations that were expected to follow that of Elabe did not materialize, although the prestige of the Gouled government obviously had been challenged and even weakened.

The combination of military pressure from the FRUD, political pressure from the civilian opposition, and diplomatic pressure from France led the Gouled regime to undertake a process of political reform designed to seek an accommodation with the Afar opposition. In response to a FRUD declaration on February 28, 1992, which established a unilateral cease-fire and underscored a commitment to French mediation, for example, the Gouled regime the very next day released from detention Dr. Abatte, the former spokesperson of the FRUD, and partially lifted an economic blockade of the north, as witnessed by the reestablishment of sea transport connecting Djibouti City with Obock and Tadjoura. On April 6, 1992, Gouled announced the outlines of a draft constitution that eventually provided for administrative decentralization, freedom of the press, the protection of human rights, and the creation of a multiparty political system that would be limited to no more than four political parties. Following the Djiboutian Council of Ministers’ passage on April 23 of a limited amnesty for those who had participated in acts against the government since November, 1991 (the beginning of the FRUD military offensive), the proposed constitution was presented to the voters in the form of a referendum on September 4. According to the government, over 96 percent of those taking part in the referendum (roughly 75 percent of all registered voters) voted in favor of adopting the new constitution.

This process of reform was significantly marred, however, due to the refusal of the Gouled regime to do no more than what critics perceived as the cosmetic “patching up” of a “dictatorial and tribal-based regime.” One of the earliest complaints of critics revolved around Gouled’s clear intention to design the constitution and carry out the referendum process with little if any input from either the civilian or armed opposition groups in Djibouti. As a result, a variety of opposition figures met in Paris from June 20 to 24, 1992, to create an umbrella organization, the "Front Uni de l’Opposition Djiboutienne" (FUOD -- United Front of Djiboutian Opposition), that could mount a trans-ethnic challenge to the Gouled regime. Among those organizations which participated in the June meeting were the FRUD as led by former Prime Minister Ahmed Dini; the trans-ethnic MRP as led by Elabe, one of the strongest Issa contenders for future presidential elections; the "Union Démocratique Djiboutienne" (UDD -- Djiboutian Democratic Union), a Gadaboursi movement represented by Mohamed Moussa Aïnache; the "Mouvement National Djiboutien" (MND -- Djiboutian National Movement), an Issa organization represented by Sallah Mahmoud; the "Front des Forces Démocratiques" (FFD -- Front of Democratic Forces), an Issa-based grouping represented by Omar Elmi Kairhe; the largely Arab-based "Mouvement pour le Salut et la Reconstruction" (MSR -- Movement for Safety and Reconstruction) headed by Galal Abdourahman; and the Djiboutian human rights organization, "Association pour la Défense des Droits de l’Homme et de la Liberté (ADDHL -- Association for the Defense of Human Rights and Liberty).

The so-called "Paris Accords" which emerged from the June, 1992 meeting outlined a variety of opposition demands that seriously called into question the reform process initiated by the Gouled regime. Most significantly, the accords called for the creation of a transitional government that would be led by a prime minister chosen from the ranks of the opposition -- a proposal immediately dismissed by President Gouled. In terms of Gouled’s proposed constitution, the opposition was particularly concerned that the executive branch of government remained far too strong. Specifically, neither the office of the prime minister nor the
legislature were endowed with any special prerogatives, such as oversight of presidential appointments at the cabinet level, that would allow them to significantly question or oversee executive branch policies. As a result of these concerns, approximately 50 percent of Djibouti’s voting-age population headed the demands of the FRUD, the FUOD, and the legislative opposition, and boycotted the referendum. In short, a significant portion of the opposition firmly believed that participation in a referendum on a constitution “prepared and approved by the President alone, without any discussion with anyone else” in essence constituted a “vote for his [Gouled’s] dictatorship.”

The constitutional referendum and the legislative and presidential elections were neither free nor fair. Rather, they were intended to provide the appearance of democracy, while ensuring the maintenance of the political status quo. Significantly marred by electoral fraud and another FRUD-inspired boycott that was headed by approximately 50 percent of the voting-age population (primarily within the Afar community), these electoral contests not surprisingly led to victory for the ruling RPP and President Gouled. Held on December 18, 1992, the legislative elections resulted in a complete sweep of all sixty-five seats of the National Assembly by Gouled’s ruling RPP party (which obtained 72 percent of the popular vote). In the presidential elections held on May 7, 1993, Gouled emerged victorious with 60.71 percent of the popular vote. The remainder of the votes were split primarily among the candidates of two Issa-based opposition parties legalized by the Gouled regime: Mohamed Djama Elabe, an Issa who heads the Party of Democratic Renewal (PRD -- receiving 22.03 percent of the votes), and Aden Robleh Awaleh, an Issa who heads the Democratic National Party (PND -- receiving 12.29 percent of the vote).

As predicted by most foreign observers, Gouled’s ephemeral “victory” at both the legislative and presidential levels was followed by a government military offensive in July, 1993 that severely damaged the military integrity and effectiveness of the FRUD as a unified military force. Having quintupled in force size of approximately 15,000 troops (at the expense of the government incurring huge budget deficits and foreign debts), the Djiboutian Armed Forces not only retook the major towns held by the FRUD in the northern portion of the country, but also overran the two main rebel bases of Randa and Assa Geya. This successful military operation marked the end of the Djiboutian civil war as the scattered remnants of the FRUD were forced to return to the hit-and-run tactics of a guerrilla insurgency.

The FRUD’s defeat in the face of overwhelming military force also led to the splintering of the political opposition to the Gouled regime.

First, a second meeting of the FUOD in Addis Ababa from January 19 to 23, 1994, that called for the “continuation and reinforcement of armed conflict,” was not attended by the leadership of the two Issa-dominated opposition political parties (the PND and the PRD), suggesting a growing split between the Issas and the other ethnic groups within the country, most notably the Afar (although Isaoq, Arab, and Gadabouri parties supported the declaration of continued armed conflict). Second, and more damaging to the FRUD military effort, is a growing split among the Afar opposition. Specifically, Afar faction leader Ougourehe Kifleh Ahmed not only opened up separate peace talks with the Gouled regime, but successfully forced a reshuffling of the FRUD’s executive committee at the beginning of July, 1994. This led to the marginalization of the old leadership, most notably ex-President Ahmed Dini, who were attempting to maintain their control over the organization from exile in Ethiopia.

V. The Djiboutian Civil War in Perspective

The preceding analysis clearly demonstrates that Djibouti was engulfed in civil war during a twenty-one-month period from November, 1991 to July, 1993. Unlike more limited forms of civil conflict, most notably ethnic conflict, insurrection, or rebellion (also referred to as guerrilla insurgency), the Djiboutian civil war reached a level of intensity equivalent to conflicts between states; two major armies -- at their height surpassing 3,000 soldiers for the FRUD and over 15,000 soldiers for the government forces -- opposed each other over an extended period of time in a country whose population figures range only from 330,000 to 520,000. Indeed, although one can argue that ethnicity played a major role in this conflict (i.e., an Afar-dominated FRUD opposing an Issa dominated government) the guerrilla forces of the FRUD were nonetheless supported by other ethnic groups in the country, just as the government forces recruited from among non-issa clans and ethnicities. Equally important, the FRUD established an effective government and military organization that controlled more than 50 percent of Djibouti’s territory at the height of its political and military operations. In this regard, it was only the movement of French military forces into the town of Dikhil that prevented the FRUD from opening a major southern front which potentially would have led to the defeat of the Djiboutian Armed Forces and the overthrow of the Gouled regime. The creation of a buffer zone in essence bought the Gouled regime the precious commodity of time that enabled it to quintuple the size of its military forces and enact minor political reforms, both of which contributed to the military defeat of FRUD forces in set battles and the splintering of the political coalition
that once supported the overthrow of the Gouled regime through military means. As was the case during the period immediately preceding the FRUD offensive of November, 1991, the post-July, 1993 period is marked by a lesser form of conflict known as rebellion in which guerrilla bands control little territory and are forced to adopt hit-and-run tactics.

The deployment of French military forces to Dikhil further underscores that civil wars are rarely decided solely by indigenous forces. Indeed, when the FRUD attempted to expand military operations into southwestern Djibouti, French mediator Paul Dijoud, Directeur des Affaires Africaines et Malgaches within the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs, announced that victory by military means was “futile” and that a “peace mission” of French troops was positioning itself within the region to ensure the maintenance of the status quo. Yet despite its unwillingness to permit the military overthrow of the Gouled regime, the French government nonetheless accorded the FRUD military forces a certain level of legitimacy by de facto recognizing that a state of belligerency existed. Specifically, pressure was placed upon the Gouled regime to recognize the legitimacy of the FRUD, and to undertake a process of political reform designed to seek a negotiated end to the civil war. However, an unwillingness to allow the FRUD to capitalize on its military momentum ensured an initial military stalemate in the Djiboutian civil war that ultimately facilitated a military victory by government forces resupplied from abroad. Indeed, unlike its initial reaction to the outbreak of civil war in Djibouti (i.e., non-military involvement in an internal conflict), as of this writing it appears that the French government is going to err on the side of supporting the Gouled regime as long as President Gouled continues to make some effort at seeking a political compromise with opposition forces within the country. Regardless of French policy, however, continued intransigence on the part of Gouled to allow for the creation of a truly free and fair democratic system simply delays the potential emergence of another civil war that may be even bloodier and more costly than that of the November, 1991-July, 1993 period.