4. INSURRECTION AND INVASION IN THE SOUTHEAST, 1962-78

Introduction

Wars have been fought continually in southeast Ethiopia for as long as in Eritrea. The two principal subjugated peoples of the region -- the Oromo and the ethnic Somali inhabitants of the Ogaden -- have been staging insurrections more or less continually since the early 1960s. The first phase of the wars lasted until 1977, with the government utilizing a set of counter-insurgency strategies familiar from Eritrea, though arguably more successfully. The second phase was a large-scale conventional war which began when the Somali army invaded the Ogaden in July 1977, concluding when the Ethiopian army defeated that invasion in March 1978. A protracted third phased began after that victory, with a return to counter-insurgency warfare; that is the subject of the following chapter.

Southeast Ethiopia consists of well-watered highland areas, largely inhabited by Oromo people, who practice a mix of agriculture and livestock raising, and drier lowlands, known as the Ogaden. The Ogaden is inhabited by ethnic Somalis belonging to 12 different clans, among whom the Ogaden clan is numerically dominant. Other important clans include the Issa, to the north of the Harerghe highlands, and the Isaaq, who inhabit the Haud reserve, an area adjacent to northern Somalia.[1] The Somalis are largely pastoral nomads. The population of the Ogaden itself is about one million; the surrounding Oromo areas contain a much larger number of people.

At Independence in 1960, the Somali government laid claim to the Ogaden and adjoining Oromo areas in the Bale and Harerghe highlands.

The Conquest of the Oromo and the Ogaden Somali

Between 1886 and 1889, the Emperor Menelik conquered the independent Oromo states of Arsi and Bale, and occupied the trading city of Harer, which is a holy city for Moslems. Menelik then laid claim to the vast desert area of the Ogaden.[2] This claim was recognized by the European powers in 1910, though effective occupation of the area was not attempted until after the Second World War.

[1] Until 1960 known as British Somaliland; in 1991 the Somali National Movement, controlling the area, unilaterally declared independence and named it the Republic of Somaliland.

[2] This claim was made with Italian encouragement, partly in order to prevent the British annexing the area to British-occupied northern Somaliland.

Amhara domination followed. In the context of southern Ethiopia, the term "Amhara" needs to be treated with care. While the Amhara who came to the south as conquerors originated from all parts of the northern highlands, all came as vassals of the specifically Shewan Amhara state. Local people, whatever their origins, were also able to assimilate into the Amhara class, by virtue of marriage, or adopting the religion, language and cultural traits of the Amhara. A social anthropologist working in the neighboring province of Arsi noted that for the indigenous Oromo "'Amhara' and 'self-satisfied dominant elite' have become convergent categories."[3]

In the highland areas of the southeast, Amhara neftegna were given grants of land, with accompanying rights to extract produce from the local population. The indigenous peoples were unhappy with the loss of their independence and with the new burdens imposed upon them by their Amhara overlords, and armed resistance was frequent. The Italian conquest of 1935 came as a liberation from Amhara rule for many inhabitants of the southeast; and after Haile Selassie was restored there was intermittent armed resistance against the re-imposition of the hated land tenure and taxation systems, notably in Harerghe in 1942, 1947/8 and 1955.

When Somalia gained its independence in 1960, there was agitation in the Ogaden ("western Somalia") for independence, or for separation from Ethiopia to join the Somali state. The Somali government set up the Western Somali Liberation Front (WSLF) in that year. There was a revolt in the Ogaden in 1963-4, which was put down with customary brutality (see below).

The late 1960s and early 1970s saw the growth of an Oromo nationalist movement. This was first expressed through traditional-style shifta rebellion in Bale and Harerghe, and in the creation of Oromo community associations among groups in Shewa, Wollega and Arsi.

The 1960s Rebellion in Highland Bale

The rebellion in Bale was the outcome of the systematically brutal subjugation of an indigenous population by a ruling class of armed settlers drawn largely from the Shewan Amhara. John Markakis has written of the conditions preceding the revolt:

> The legal exactions of the state and the landlords were compounded by a host of illegal impositions levied by the ruling class on the peasantry, usually associated with matters related to land. Land measurement, classification, registration, inheritance, litigation and so on were matters that could be concluded only through the payment of enforced bribes to a series of officials, and were subject to the risk of fraud in the process. Tax payment itself required the running of a gauntlet manned by officials who had to be bribed to conclude the transaction properly. Venality, the hallmark of Ethiopian

[3] Paul Baxter, "Ethiopia's Unacknowledged Problem: The Oromo," African Affairs, 77, (1978), pp. 283-96.

> officialdom throughout the empire, reached its apogee in the conquered areas of the south, where the hapless peasantry had no recourse against it. Northern officials serving in the south hoped to amass a small fortune during their tour of duty, and to acquire land through grant, purchase or other means. The scale of their exploits in Bale affronted even some of their colleagues ... There was precious little return for such impositions.[4]

Armed rebellion started in highland Bale in 1962, fanned by both encouragement from the newly-independent Somali government, and the heavy handed response of the governor. The rebels were led by a minor chief named Wako Gutu, and used traditional shifta-style tactics, with no central command. Fighting gradually intensified until late 1966, when it was clear that the provincial police and militia could not contain the revolt, whereupon the government declared a state of emergency and called in the army.[5] There were ground assaults and aerial bombardments in both highland and lowland Bale in the early months of 1967, involving much indiscriminate violence against civilians. There were also punitive measures such as land confiscation, restrictions on nomads' seasonal migrations and heavy fines levied on uncooperative communities. By 1968 more than a quarter of the land was classified as confiscated.[6] In order to recover their land, farmers needed to pay their tax arrears -- a daunting prospect in view of the epidemic corruption of the administration. However the rebels could not be dislodged from their mountainous, forested base.

Military tactics then changed to a pacification approach, avoiding direct military confrontation on the ground. Roads were built into the rebel heartland, with the assistance of British military engineers. Combined with restrictions on movement and military surveillance of the lowlands, this helped to cut off assistance from Somalia. Air strikes continued, with US technical assistance, aimed at intimidating the rebels and destroying their food supplies (and therefore also the food supplies of the local population). These strategies were combined with leniency towards the rebel leaders, who were allowed to go free or rewarded with lucrative positions.

The final demise of Wako Gutu's forces came in March 1970, after military assistance was cut off by the Somali government, and the tightening noose of government troops ensured that they ran out of food supplies. The government then granted a general amnesty and made various promises to the general population, which it failed to keep. Conditions in Bale at the time of the revolution were almost exactly as they had been a decade earlier.

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[4] John Markakis, National and Class Conflict in the Horn of Africa, Cambridge, 1987, p. 194.

[5] Patrick Gilkes, The Dying Lion: Feudalism and Modernization in Ethiopia, London, 1975, pp. 214-18.

[6] Markakis, 1987, p. 200.

The Destruction of Oromo Political Movements

The 1960s saw a growth in Oromo cultural, social and political movements. In part this was related to the achievement of independence by African peoples which had been colonized by the European powers -- many educated Oromo aspired to a similar "liberation." An article by an Oromo student leader, Wallelign Mekonnen, in a 1969 student publication expresses well the feelings of subjugation:[7]

> Ask anybody what Ethiopian culture is? Ask anybody what Ethiopian language is? Ask anybody what Ethiopian music is? Ask about what Ethiopian religion is? Ask about what the national dress is? It is either Amhara or Amhara-Tigre!! To be a "genuine" Ethiopian one has to listen to Amharic music, to accept the Amhara-Tigre religion, Orthodox Christianity, to wear the Amhara-Tigre shamma in international conferences. In some cases, to be an "Ethiopian" you will even have to change your name. In short, to be an Ethiopian, you will have to wear an Amhara mask (to use Fanon's expression).

The Mecha-Tulema Self-Help Association, founded in 1962, was the most prominent attempt by the Oromo to organize legally. The association was only legally registered after overcoming considerable opposition from the government. It sponsored specific self-help projects, but had the broader aim of developing an Oromo "national consciousness." In 1966, using the pretext of a bomb explosion in a cinema in Addis Ababa, Haile Selassie cracked down on the Mecha-Tulema Association. Over 100 leading Oromo community leaders were arrested and brought to court, in a trial that was a parody of due process. Based on confessions obtained under torture and other dubious evidence, the two leading defendants were sentenced to death,[8] and others to long prison sentences. The organization continued an underground existence for several years thereafter.

Revolt in Highland Harerghe

In the mid 1960s there was also a small insurrection in the highlands of Harerghe. This was led by Sheikh Hussein, a former associate of the Oromo politician Tadesse Birru. The organization was called the Oromo Liberation Front (not to be confused with the second Oromo Liberation Front, founded in 1974), and carried out small-scale guerrilla activities.

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[7] Quoted in: Randi Ronning Balsvik, Haile Selassie's Students: The Intellectual and Social Background to Revolution, 1952-1977, E. Lansing, Mich., 1985, p. 277. Wallelign was killed by security forces during an attempted hijack of an Ethiopian Airways airplane. The EPRDF offensive of May 1991 which overran the government's northeast front and led directly to the flight of President Mengistu Haile Mariam was named "Operation Wallelign" in honor of this student.

[8] Lt. Mamo Mazamir was executed for treason. Gen. Tadesse Birru was reprieved by Haile Selassie, and released at the time of the revolution. In 1975 he was rearrested by the Dergue and executed along with a colleague.

In August 1971 Sheikh Hussein changed the name of his organization to the Ethiopian National Liberation Front (ENLF), and incorporated some of Wako Gutu's followers, but thereby also split his movement. By 1973 the ENLF controlled significant areas of the highlands of Harerghe and Bale.

The Revolution and the Oromo Movement

The revolution of 1974 split the Oromo movement. Many of the members of the Dergue were themselves Oromo -- including General Teferi Bante, Chairman from November 1974 until his execution by Mengistu in 1977.[9] Many of the Dergue's initial programs, notably the land reform of 1975, the change in official designation from the derogatory "Galla" to the more acceptable "Oromo," and the legalization of the use of the Oromo language for public speaking, were welcomed. As a result, the All-Ethiopia Socialist Movement (MEISON), which was led by several prominent Oromos, allied itself with the Dergue from 1975 until it was purged in 1977 (see chapter 6).

The land reform of 1975 gave the Dergue great political capital in the Oromo areas -- which it promptly began to deplete by heavily taxing the peasants and requisitioning food from them for the army and the towns. The land reform also set up Peasant Associations (PAs), with the initial aim of re-distributing land. PAs were given wider-ranging powers shortly afterwards. In the south, most of the PA leadership originally consisted of local people elected with much popular support. This began to change in 1978. The purge of MEISON coincided with a slightly less violent purge of the leadership of the PAs, and the formation of the All-Ethiopia Peasant Association. From this point onwards, PA leaders were all appointed by the government.

Many Oromo leaders went into armed opposition in 1974. They joined defectors from the ENLF and the first Oromo Liberation Front, and founded the (second) Oromo Liberation Front (OLF). This was initially active in the highlands of Bale and Harerghe, and had its first meeting to publish a political program in October of that year. The initial insurrection was a decentralized revolt which encompassed a number of different groups. The government launched two offensives, the first in 1974, and the second in early 1976, using locally-recruited militia. These succeeded in scattering but not suppressing the nascent OLF resistance. Influenced by MEISON, the Dergue entertained hopes of negotiating a compromise with the OLF, and several meetings were held, but without result. By early 1977, the OLF had set up an

[9] Gen Teferi's father's name was actually Benti (an Oromo name) but he changed it to Bante (an Amhara name) to be more acceptable to the Amhara elite.

administration in parts of the Chercher highlands of Harerghe, and was active in Bale, Arsi and Sidamo.[10]

In 1976, the Somali government set up a guerrilla force to fight in Oromo areas, as a counterpart of the WSLF, calling it the Somali Abo Liberation Front (SALF).[11] Wako Gutu and Sheikh Hussein were among the prominent Oromo nationalists who joined the SALF, which formally superseded the ENLF. The pre-existing split between the ENLF and the OLF, and fears that Somalia harbored irredentist ambitions to annex Oromo areas, using the SALF as a vehicle, led to distrust and at times conflict between the OLF and the SALF.

From 1974 to 1977 insurrection spread through much of the Oromo highlands of southeast Ethiopia.

Ethiopian Rule and Famine in the Ogaden

The inhabitants of the Ogaden received little from the Ethiopian government during the first decades of the occupation except raiding parties. Following independence in 1960, the Somali government set up the WSLF and there was increasing agitation for the Ogaden to secede from Ethiopia. The Ethiopian army immediately moved to set up military bases in the area. Up to 500 civilians were killed when the village of Aisha was destroyed to make way for a military post in August 1960.

In 1963, following the first systematic attempt by the Ethiopian administration to collect taxes, there was widespread insurgency in both lowland Harerghe and Bale. The guerrillas relied heavily on the Somali government for support, and while they grew in numbers to about 3,000, they never posed a serious military threat to the central government. Their guerrilla tactics were unsophisticated and the army was able to engage and disperse them on several occasions. The Ethiopian government also put pressure on Somalia by incursions into Somali territory and threats of a larger-scale invasion. Following government military offensives in late 1963 and an agreement between the Somali and Ethiopian governments in March 1964, the insurrection was largely over.

More serious for the civilian population of the area was the government's policy of mounting punitive expeditions, which killed or confiscated large numbers of animals, depriving the pastoral communities of the basis for their survival.

Military administration remained in the Ogaden after the insurrection. Most major

[10] Africa Confidential, 19 11, May 26, 1978, p. 6.

[11] "Abo" is a form of greeting common to many peoples in southeastern Ethiopia. The Somali government was eager to avoid use of the name "Oromo."

towns had curfews for at least a year. Ogaden clan leaders documented a number of incidents in May 1964, when 75 people were reported killed by the army, together with more than 14,000 domestic animals killed or confiscated, and July 1964, when 22 people were killed and over 8,000 animals killed or confiscated.[12] This "economic war" against the Ogaden was supplemented by a policy of encouraging Amhara farmers to settle in the more fertile areas, especially in the Jijiga area. The process of land registration became a vehicle for settler farmers claiming land rights, depriving pastoralists of use rights.[13] The lack of access to these pastures became critical when drought struck in 1973-4.

The introduction of administration also led to attempts to regulate the livestock trade. Selling animals is critical to survival for the Ogadeni pastoralists. Hitherto, most Ogadeni animals had been sold to Hargeisa and Berbera in Somalia, along an age-old trade route which was now technically regarded as "smuggling." The new administration confiscated many "smuggled" animals. Together with the harassment of herders attempting to sell animals in Ethiopian towns, this acted as a powerful obstacle to trade, leading directly to the impoverishment of the herders.

A final and key element to the pacification campaign in the Ogaden was the government control of water points. A network of functioning wells is crucial to the mobility which herders need in order to seek out seasonal pastures. There are many reports of the wells dug by the Ogaden people themselves being poisoned. New reservoirs (birkas) were built by the government, but primarily to serve the interests of settler farmers and townspeople.

In 1967 there were further military actions, chiefly in lowland Bale, aimed at WSLF groups which were acting in concert with Wako Gutu, and their civilian supporters.

In 1969 Maj.-Gen. Siad Barre seized power in a military coup in Somalia. He acted fast to consolidate his power, and one of his actions was placating the Ethiopian government by formally disbanding the WSLF -- though not renouncing Somalia's longstanding claim to the Ogaden.

During 1971-2 there was another round of atrocities by the army against Issa and Ogadeni pastoralists. The conflict was based upon two factors. One was Issa-Afar competition for political control of Djibouti, which was moving towards independence from France. The Issa, who are the majority in Djibouti, were in favor of immediate independence; the minority Afar, supported by Haile Selassie and favored by France, wanted independence postponed. The

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[12] Ismail Wais, "An Account of the Colonial Experience of the Western Somalis," Horn of Africa, 4.4, (1981/2), p. 28.

[13] Noel J. Cossins, "Pastoralism under Pressure: A Study of the Somali Clans in the Jijiga Area of Ethiopia," Addis Ababa, Livestock and Meat Board, 1971, p. 82.

second factor was drought. Conflict was sparked by occupation of a series of important wells around Barreti by the neighboring Afar in the late 1960s. When there was poor rainfall in 1971 and 1972, the Issa tried to reoccupy the wells, there were armed clashes between the two groups.

On the pretext of the dispute over the wells, the Ethiopian army intervened against the Issa. According to a letter of complaint written by the chiefs of the region to the Ethiopian parliament, between April 1971 and May 1972, the army killed 794 people, as well as confiscating nearly 200,000 head of livestock.[14]

In 1974, drought added to the Ogadenis' problems, and the area was struck by famine. The loss of pastures to immigrant farmers, restrictions on movement, and continued armed clashes with the Afar all contributed to the famine.

According to a survey done in Harerghe in May-June 1974, death rates among the lowland pastoralists were about three times normal.[15] Assuming "normal" to be 20 per thousand, and the affected population to be 700,000, this implies 28,000 famine deaths over the previous year. Another survey done a year later found that death rates had risen slightly, implying a similar number of famine deaths in 1974/5.[16]

Responding to the famine became one of the first tasks of the newly constituted Relief and Rehabilitation Commission (RRC), which became active in delivering large quantities of food relief and setting up feeding centers.

The RRC's activities during 1974-5 had a large humanitarian component. However, whether through an ethnocentric view of the superiority of a settled over a nomadic lifestyle, or through a deliberate policy of using the drought as an opportunity to extend government control over the recalcitrant population, the famine relief program served to undermine key aspects of the Ogadeni way of life.

By early 1975, more than 80,000 Ogadenis were living in 18 relief shelters. The shelters were run on military lines, with strict curfews enforced at 8.00 p.m. Movement in and out was severely restricted -- making it impossible for each family to keep more than a handful of small animals. Traditional festivities were reportedly banned in some camps. The government had the explicit intention of turning the camp populations into settled farmers, rather than allowing them to return to a pastoral way of life. Another intention was to relocate camps well away

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[14] Quoted in: Wais, 1981/2, pp. 25-8.

[15] John Seaman, Julius Holt and John Rivers, "Hararghe under Drought: A Survey of the Effects of Drought upon Human Nutrition in Hararghe Province, Ethiopia," Addis Ababa, RRC, 1974, pp. 39-41.

[16] M. Gebre Medhin, R. Hay, Y. Licke and M. Maffi, "Initial Experience of a Consolidated Food and Nutrition System: Analysis of Data from the Ogaden Area," Journal of Tropical Paediatrics and Environmental Child Health, Monograph No. 48, 1977, pp. 33-4.

from the Somali border.

As a result of these restrictions, the great majority of the Ogadeni men stayed outside the camps, moving with their animals, unwilling to risk approaching their families within the camps. Fear that the Ethiopian government was intent on undermining their traditional way of life was one factor that spurred many Ogadeni men into armed opposition to the government.

The Secret Invasion: March 1976-May 1977

After the revolution, Ethiopia was in turmoil, and its army was bogged down in the war in Eritrea and fighting insurgencies in several provinces. The Somali government had meanwhile greatly expanded its armed forces, with Soviet support, so that in certain areas -- such as artillery, tanks and mobile battalions -- they outnumbered the Ethiopian army, and in most other areas they matched them. There was, however, political discontent in Somalia, as President Siad Barre's authoritarian rule was antagonizing certain groups. Although President Siad had pledged to abolish "tribalism", he came to rely more and more on support from certain clans. At the beginning of 1976, President Siad turned to the elders of the Ogaden clan for a political alliance, and concluded a deal whereby the government would provide support for the cause of the "liberation" of the Ogaden from Ethiopia, including military assistance, in return for political loyalty to the regime. It is important to note that the deal was struck with representatives of the Ogaden clan, not representatives of the population of the Ogaden, which includes many clans. The WSLF was re-founded, and members of the Ogaden began to receive preferential treatment in matters such as government and army posts and education.

In the first months of 1976, the WSLF became active once again inside the Ethiopian Ogaden. With a leadership based in Mogadishu and close to President Siad, it drew recruits from the frustrated and alienated pastoralists. Its main base was Hargeisa, infiltrating through the Haud reserve area into Ethiopia to make guerrilla raids. The Somali media trumpeted its successes, but the claims made were out of all proportion to the reality: in fact, the guerrillas were making little real military headway.

Officers in the Somali army became impatient with the slow progress of the WSLF, and argued that if the Somali government's stated intention to annex the Ogaden was genuine, it would be necessary to use the regular army. In early 1977, President Siad responded to these complaints with a compromise: soldiers from the regular army would henceforth fight with the WSLF. About one fifth of the Somali army, numbering about 3,000 men and consisting mainly but not entirely of members of the Ogaden clan, was deputed to become the principal force of the WSLF. The soldiers took off their uniforms and put on the ragged clothes of guerrillas; they

abandoned their armor and heavy weapons for light guns and hand grenades.[17]

Under the command of senior military officers, the "army" units of the WSLF engaged in attacks on Ethiopian military positions, while the pre-existing "guerrilla" units of the WSLF undertook activities such as ambushes, sabotage and laying land mines. The plan did not succeed. The soldiers were not trained for guerrilla warfare, and the officers did not like a method of warfare which conflicted with their conventional training. When an attack on an Ethiopian garrison at Gode (southern Ogaden) in May 1977 was repulsed with the loss of over 300 dead, including 14 middle- and high-ranking officers, dissent in the army became vocal. In June the decision was made to commit the Somali army, in uniform and with full armor and support, to the Ogaden.

The Regular Invasion, July 1977-March 1978

On July 23, 1977, the Somali army invaded the Ogaden. The Somali government still refused to declare war and insisted in the media that all military actions were the responsibility of the WSLF, but the truth was evident.

The first assault was made in the central-southern Ogaden, and Gode and Gabridaharey fell to the invaders within a week. Half of the Ethiopian Third Division was put out of action, and the Somali force moved rapidly north. This was followed by an invasion from the vicinity of Hargeisa directed towards Dire Dawa; the attack on the town started on August 10. Three attempts to take the town failed within two weeks, and instead the Somali army turned its attention to Jijiga, which was evacuated by the Ethiopian army on September 10. The Somali army then concentrated on attacking Harer, advancing from Jijiga in October. A brigade that was originally directed to the south of Harer in a diversionary move actually succeeded in occupying a section of the town for several days in November before being pushed back. Harer was besieged for two months.

WSLF units engaged in sabotage action, impairing the mobility of the Ethiopian forces by destroying communications.

The conventional fighting was confined to the north. In the southern Ogaden, the Ethiopian garrison at Dolo (near the Ethiopia-Somalia-Kenya triangle) withdrew to northern Sidamo, and three Somali brigades crossed into Ethiopia, encountering no resistance. The invading force stopped short of Negele (southeast Sidamo) when two of the brigades were re-assigned to the northern front, and this area remained quiet. In Bale, the SALF was active on a

[17] The following account of the Somali invasion and abuses associated with it draws heavily on material provided by Abdi Razaq "Aqli" Ahmed, formerly a Major in the Somali army.

small scale, and there was no conventional military action. A single battalion was assigned to El Kere, and then moved to Fiiq in central Harerghe, meeting no resistance on the way.

In late December, the USSR responded to repeated appeals from the Ethiopian government and switched sides. It airlifted several billion dollars worth of military equipment to the embattled Dergue, including over 600 battle tanks and 67 MiG fighter-bomber airplanes.[18] Approximately 16,000 Cuban combat troops were also flown to Ethiopia together with modern armor. The government had earlier launched a program of mass mobilization, and was expanding the army from 60,000 regulars and 75,000 militia to 75,000 regulars and 150,000 militia. This led to a dramatic change in the make-up of the Ethiopian army. Its firepower and mobility became immediately greater than those of the Somali army. It was now advised by the same Soviet strategists who had trained the Somalis.

In late January, the Ethiopian counter-offensive began, directed by Soviet advisors and spearheaded by Cuban troops. The Somali army was pushed back from Dire Dawa and Harer and outflanked by mobile and airborne units. Counter-attacks were repulsed, and dissent within the Somali army escalated. In early March the Somali command gave the order to retreat, and the Ogaden was evacuated and reoccupied by the Ethiopian army without a fight.

Abuses by the Somali Army

The Somali army was regularly violent and abusive to the inhabitants of the areas it occupied. Its treatment of Oromo civilians was markedly worse than ethnic Somalis -- many of the troops came from the same clans as the local Somalis, and therefore treated them with more respect, not least because clan loyalty demands vengeance on those who commit an offense against a clan member.

The pattern of abuses consisted mostly of small groups of soldiers committing the following types of violations:

* Soldiers destroying or looting property, and on occasion killing the owners who protested.

* Soldiers raping women, and killing brothers, husbands or fathers who objected.

* Soldiers taking food or livestock to eat, and sometimes killing the owners who objected.

* Soldiers opening fire on civilians who returned to investigate the condition of their houses or farms which had been occupied by soldiers.

[18] NOVIB, "War and Famine in Ethiopia and Eritrea, An Investigation into the Arms Deliveries to the Struggling Parties in Eritrea and Tigray," Zeist, The Netherlands, 1991.

The extent of these abuses and whether the soldiers responsible were held accountable and punished depended entirely on the local commander.

On several occasions there were larger-scale violations which had been authorized by senior officers. These included the mining of buildings in Jijiga and other towns during the retreat in February-March 1978. In addition, in November 1977, the commander of the force which had occupied part of Harer town was instructed by a senior officer to destroy as much of the town as he could before retreating. Harer is a holy city to Moslems and the local commander, as a devout Moslem, refused to carry out the order.

Attacks by the Somali air force in late July resulted in civilian casualties at Aware and Degahabur. In mid August the Ethiopian government reported that a Somali air attack on the airfield at Jijiga had only narrowly avoided causing a large number of civilian casualties because an airplane on the ground had been evacuated just minutes beforehand.

There were also violations of the rights of combatants by members of the Somali army and WSLF. These included:

* Summary execution of officers and men in order to maintain discipline. In February 1978, the commander of the Jijiga front requested each battalion commander to send him twelve soldiers, implying that they would be considered for promotion or another form of award or benefit. All of them -- numbering about 80 -- were summarily shot. The commander explained that his junior officers had been insubordinate, and that in future all who disputed his orders would be similarly dealt with. In January, five middle-ranking officers were shot separately in suspicious circumstances.

* Retreating Ethiopian soldiers were set upon by WSLF fighters and armed WSLF sympathizers and killed.

* Abuses against prisoners of war (see chapter 17).

Abuses by the Ethiopian Army

The Ethiopian army was also responsible for abuses against the civilian population during the war. Before abandoning the towns of Jijiga, Degahabur, Aware and Gabridaharey the army summarily executed civilians. In the case of Jijiga, nearly 100 were reported killed.

Individual acts of violence by Ethiopian soldiers against civilians have been reported. A serious instance of an abuse used as part of a military tactic occurred just south of Harer in late December, when the Ethiopian troops forced a line of ethnic Somali women to walk in front of their advancing soldiers, using them as a human shield. The Somali soldiers were faced with the alternatives of retreating under fire or opening fire themselves -- they chose the latter, and about 20 women were killed.

The worst and most systematic abuses by the Ethiopian army occurred during the reoccupation of the Ogaden in March 1978. Journalist Norman Kirkham described how the Ethiopian and Cuban troops swept through the Ogaden after the retreating Somali army, virtually unopposed:

> I met numbers of the survivors who told me that civilians had been shot in the streets or had been executed summarily in house to house sweeps. Sometimes whole crowds were machine-gunned; villages were burned to the ground.
>
> Some of the worst incidents followed the fierce battles for the town of Jijiga where thousands of refugees had fled. One of them, Hassan Khaireh Wabari, a 31 year old merchant, told me "Artillery, bombing and tank fire devastated many of the buildings before the Cubans and Ethiopians moved in at daybreak. Sick people and others trying to protect their homes were shot, and later I saw people being rounded up and executed with machine guns. At first the women were saved so that they could be raped. Then they were killed."
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> Sheikh Ali Nur, a Koranic teacher from Fiiq, near Harer, said that he had walked many miles to tell me of similar attacks in his area. "They shelled and bombed us. Then they shot the men, raped the women, and destroyed the houses. I know that about 130 were exterminated in my village and about 800 more died in the same district. Even the animals were shot."[19]

Kirkham reported that neither side in the conflict gave quarter or took prisoners. One of the major abuses he witnessed was indiscriminate bombing of civilian targets, which had forced thousands of people to abandon towns and villages and set up temporary grass shelters concealed in the bush.

> We travelled for 120 miles to the bombed out areas of Malako, a ghost town deserted after bitter fighting last year, and to Garbo, where the people had scattered into the nearby hills after an air raid had wiped out their village a few weeks earlier. We walked across an acre of charred ruins and ashes and I was shown cannon cartridges and a three-foot rocket container as the villagers described what had happened.
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> The attack had begun at breakfast time when an American F-5 jet of the Ethiopian air force suddenly swept out of the sky, roaring low over the huts. The pilot climbed again swiftly without firing and the people sighed with relief, but too soon. Slowly, the green-and-brown camouflaged jet turned and began to descend again, this time followed by a MiG-21 loaded with napalm. The F-5 made four runs, spraying American cannon shells and rockets, while the MiG dived on the four corners of the village, dropping its deadly napalm in a neat rectangle.
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> Within ten minutes, Garbo had been turned into an inferno. The people ran for their lives but in spite of the preliminary warning pass by the F-5, more than 90 died in the

[19] Sunday Telegraph, London, April 8, 1979.

flames or were killed by the strafing. Others were hideously burned and are being treated in a hospital across the border in Somalia.[20]

Following the counter-offensive, 500,000 people were internally displaced within Ethiopia, and refugees streamed into Somalia.

[20] Sunday Telegraph, London, April 8, 1979.