OPEN LETTER OF PROTEST TO MR. HERMAN J. COHEN:

January 3, 2013

To: Mr. Herman J. Cohen
Former United States Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs
Washington, D.C.

Dear Mr. Cohen:

This open letter to you, Mr. Secretary, is a personal protest against your ill-advised, misleading and historically incorrect statement of September 28, 2012 that you gave at a conference in Minnesota organized by an activist group called Institute for Horn of Africa Studies and Affairs (IHASA) where you attended as a keynote speaker.

The issue I am hereby protesting against has to do with your response to a participant’s question that tried to draw a parallel between South Sudan and the Ethiopian-Somali region (“the Ogaden”), with the underlined insinuation that this region of Ethiopia could have the same legitimate claim as that of South Sudan for independence. In an apparent agreement to the questioner, you stated that ‘it was the British that messed up the Sudan in the past, and it was the British that handed over the Ogaden to Ethiopia, following the liberation of Ethiopia and Somalia from the Italians’. (Emphasis is mine). (http://www.ogaden.com/)

Although similar erroneous assertions had been made by others, especially people with either flagrant anti-Ethiopian sentiments or those who do not have enough knowledge of Ethiopian history, including some self described Ethiopia/Africa “experts”, and you would not be the first person to make such a fallacious statement regarding the Ethiopian-Somali region, it is astounding when it comes from a person of your caliber and stature as a seasoned and experienced diplomat with, one would assume, more than average knowledge of African history.

When, about a couple of weeks ago, a friend forwarded to me the video of your speech in question here, and insisted that I should watch it, I frankly was disinclined to heed. But, mainly out of respect for the friend, I went ahead and watched it. I was saddened by your continued assault on Ethiopia and its history. Because your statement is so venomous and too injurious to the national security and very survival of Ethiopia as a country, and is an affront to and sullies its history, and frankly too blatant go ignore, I decided to let you know of my strong disagreement with your assertion in writing.

Dear Mr. Cohen,

Please understand the reason why Ethiopians are, as they should indeed be, outraged at this latest unwarranted and historically erroneous statement of yours. This was yet another gross injustice to African history, particularly to that of Ethiopian history. As has been reflected from time to

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time in the past, this kind of undiplomatic and boorish attitude is a clear manifestation of an incredible anti-Ethiopian sentiment. Admittedly, I do not claim to know the reason or reasons behind your offensive and contumacious attitude towards Ethiopia. Although this will not be the first time for you to trample on the national feelings and offend the sensibilities of proud Ethiopians, I, as an Ethiopian, find your latest pronouncement in question here to be just another poignant reminder of what you have been engaged in to undermine the unity and national interests of my country. You should know that this particular disdainful statement has no credibility whatsoever as it is not supported by any historical fact. Therefore, whether deliberate or not, your assertion that ‘The British handed over the Ogaden to Ethiopia’ is nothing short of being a disgraceful campaign directed against the territorial integrity of Ethiopia and the unity of its people, and an affront to its proud history for which millions of its sons and daughters of all religions, creeds and ethnic background have sacrificed dearly over the millennia. Even though your fallacious and offensive statement may deservingly draw caustic retorts from many compatriots, allow me to give you just few facts to dispel your wrong assumption about the issue at hand.

Given past experiences and your retorted perception and your propensity, as our track record shows, of identifying Ethiopians strictly on the basis of ethnicity, I take the liberty to assume that your first reaction to this letter of protest will definitely be to simply dismiss it as one that is coming from Amargna (Amharic) speaking ‘chauvinist Ethiopian”. That kind of preconceived notion, no doubt, is rooted in your wrong perception of Ethiopian society. But, be that as it may, one thing I want you to understand, Mr. Cohen, is that, that kind of attitude is not only patently wrong, totally unjustifiable and without merit, but also an unmitigated insult to the intelligence of Ethiopians of all walks of life, creed, religious background, ethnic/language affiliation, etc. and a negation of their immense sacrifices that they and their ancestors had to pay in order to preserve the honor, unity and territorial integrity of the country they love, Ethiopia. It is also an offense as well as a challenge to the commitment and integrity of all democratic Ethiopians of the day who are struggling and aspiring for a pluralistic and democratic society, for justice, equality and unity. And you should also know that Ethiopia is the sum total of all its citizens regardless of ethnic, religious, regional or any other group affiliation, and that Ethiopia owes its long recorded and proud history and enduring independence to all of its sons and daughters and that no single language/ethnic group has special ownership of those virtues.

Dear Mr. Cohen,

When democratic and patriotic Ethiopians talk of unity, it is neither out of nostalgia nor is it because they are not cognizant of the fact that in today’s Ethiopia that finds itself under a violent and repressive regime with atrocious records against its own people there are groups that aspire to secede from the country, nor is it for political expediency, nor because it is easy. No, it is not; it is simply because they realize that unity is strength and everybody is a winner in unity, and conversely, division is, especially in today’s globalized world, a lonely journey to the lion’s den as it exposes society to all kinds of vulnerabilities, including the fate of being ruled by extremist
groups; which is more than a probability given the nature of the proponents. Moreover, the people have never been given a chance to democracy and freedom that any decision on secession will have to be made through violence, making acceptance by any Ethiopian government impossible and peace with adjacent regions unthinkable. Additionally, since the group spearheading the secession movement not only denies Ethiopian identity, but also being African, for they claim to be Arabs, secession could lead society to serious identity crisis.

As you may know, Mr. Cohen, the anti-unity groups are encouraged, armed and aided by foreign powers with a different agenda of their own. Although these foreign powers are the last ones, if at all, to extend any humanitarian assistance when African countries, especially those south of the Sahara, are in dire humanitarian crises (be it manmade or natural disasters), when it comes to helping secessionist movements and those religion-based groups, including extremist ones, they are the first to shade their crocodile tears and are more than ready to lend all kinds of support, including training, transfer of weapons and money. It is safe to say that almost all anti-Ethiopian movements are foreign inspired and supported.

Obviously, I am not saying here that you are or the US or any other foreign power is solely responsible for the untold misery Ethiopians are subjected to under the TPLF/EPRDF regime. Although, as the indispensable supporters of the regime, the US and some European powers are not entirely blameless, it is primarily us, Ethiopians, on whose shoulders responsibility squarely lies for our state of being. Ethiopians are not, therefore, asking or expecting anyone else to fight their fight for their fundamental rights to be respected and for the unity of their country. All Ethiopians are asking for from these powers is to stop their unqualified support to the current repressive regime, and refrain from encouraging, aiding and abating secessionist groups. And it should be understood that even that demand is not a favor by any stretch of the imagination, but a simple logical thing to do for their sake as much as it is for us; because their long term strategic interests as well as that of the region’s can better be served, as history has shown time and again, when Ethiopia is at peace and strong. For Ethiopia to be a reliable ally and a dependable friend, its society should be democratized and at peace. And to be at peace and strong, Ethiopia should and needs to be united. Hence, for any power to be providing unqualified support to and cuddling with a dictatorial regime or giving political support to, however slanted and indirect, and encouraging secessionist groups and elements would amount to a campaign against their own strategic interests.

It should be abundantly clear that no country can expect to remain united by subjugating any sector of its society or by denying its citizens their economic and political freedoms and human and civil rights. Unity cannot be contemplated without justice and equality for all. These are prerequisites that ought to be adhered to. And this is absolutely clear to all democratic and patriotic Ethiopians. And as you know, Mr. Cohen, the more a country stays united – with, of course, individual liberty and group rights fully respected – a far better chance society has for peace, stability and prosperity that would benefit all.
I am, by no means oblivious to the fact that there are some who vigorously argue that Ethiopia’s unity is unsustainable. The main reason for that, they argue, is the multi-ethnic nature and diversity of the country, and the worsening of relations among the different population groups. Their simplistic solution lies in dividing the country into mini states. Such risky propositions and thoughtless arguments, mainly based on ulterior motives or simply because they have “special” relationships with proponents of secession, however, fail to take into account that economic deprivation and lack of justice, democracy and greater autonomy are the fundamental causes for resentment and desperation that lead certain sectors of society to seek secession, and that the solution lies in effectively addressing and resolving these basic issues peacefully and democratically. And it is doable and absolutely necessary.

My argument is that, further splintering of a country, especially through violence in a highly volatile African region, will result in the creation of nonviable states whose existence could only encourage further splintering, as smaller entities within will be enticed to seek a homeland of their own. Some of these could only depend on foreign powers for their survival. Given the high rate of population growth coupled with equally fast growing poverty and increasing destituteness, further division will have unfathomable consequences as it would result in creating an uncontrollably messy situation.

An ideologically driven (especially religion-based) and armed movement for secession is very corrosive and a double-edged sword that cuts both ways; the seceding entity and the one secession is sought from. Under the prevailing circumstances where democratic institutions and a culture of democratic governance are absent or nonexistent, and in the environment the region is, secession through violence of any part of the country will certainly create a fertile ground for extremist elements to bud and blossom. It is more than likely that problems directly resulting from violent secession will be unfathomably consequential and will not be confined to a seceding entity; a recipe for fostering unhealthy cross-border relations that would foment unending conflicts within and regionally, and causing perpetual instability. Arguably, the weaker and the smaller a country becomes, especially in volatile regions like the Horn of Africa, the more likely it would become a haven for extremist elements.

Although the imponderability of the consequences of secession may not be in dispute, given the current overall international and regional environment and the nature of some of the groups that are in existence and in the lead for secessionist causes, the undesirability of a chaotic outcome will not be mere speculation but a strong probability or even a regrettable inevitability; a prospect that would condemn the already suffering local population to interminable cycle of violence and would subsequently expose the region to turbulent instability.

Nonetheless, whatever the level of grievances (a given phenomenon under repressive regimes) society in general or a sector of it may have, no matter how feasible it looks or how conducive a regional environment appears to be to secession, and regardless of the presence of a determined group with abundant foreign assistance to push such a separatist agenda, secession is neither
desirable nor inevitable, nor is it advisable. The best possible solution to redress past injustices and address legitimate concerns would be through dialogue and by peaceful means.

As far as I see it and as has been proven time and again, beside the very few top leaders of secessionist movements, their family members, and close associates and their cronies, there are two groups that would be the ultimate beneficiaries of a country’s fragmentation: extremist or criminal elements and international mega corporations, but not the masses; who in all likelihood would be the primary victims of a new brand of oppression and acute deprivation. Therefore, no matter how hopelessly unbridgeable differences between various ethnic groups appear to be on the surface, or how unwilling to remain in a united Ethiopia some groups are perceived to be and how the overall situation as far as the country’s unity may look bleak, encouraging or even entertaining secession as the only option to solve societal problems, before first giving societies a chance at and helping them to democratize, would be a truly regrettable mistake. And, given the volatility and complexity of the region, any move towards secession would condemn the people to an uncertain future and would deny them the opportunity to prosper together.

Ethiopia is not a simple collection of distinct ethnic groups as some want us to believe. It is a country blessed with diverse society with inseparable and interwoven interests and endowed with abundant natural resources. Although its diverse and fast growing population may be seen by some as insurmountable problems and serious challenges for Ethiopia to remain a united country, it is my contention that that kind of fear could be credible only if the country continues to be ruled by oppressive dictators and if people continue to be denied their freedoms, and if their dignity and human rights are not fully respected. Ethiopian patriots and democrats see their diversity not as a curse or something to be feared, but as a true blessing to be relished and to be proud of, and they consider the unity of their country as a necessary foundation for a progressive and prosperous society and a strong nation.

The diverse people of Ethiopia are entitled to have dignity, justice, equality and the full spectrum of their human and political rights to be fully respected. That is not because they are Ethiopians only, but simply because these are fundamental human values that every human being deserves to enjoy. Despite perceptions otherwise, that is what Ethiopian democrats and patriots have been, and still are, fighting for. They do not see Ethiopian unity devoid of these cardinal human values and core principles. It is evident that Ethiopians are jealous of their independence and are extra vigilant about their unity. That is because they clearly understand the value of unity and are well aware of the grave dangers and undesirable consequences that loss of their country’s unity would entail. Given our enduring legacy and history of independence and our collective yearning for justice, equality and unity, I am confident that Ethiopians are not only determined to and capable of tackling the enormous challenges they are facing at this point and time, and are desirous of keeping their country united, but they will also thrive together.

I know perfectly well that, especially in today’s world, no multi-ethno-religious country is immune from internal strife nor the unity of such countries is somehow sealed and unthreatened.
There is no question that Ethiopian unity faces so much internal and external pressures of greater magnitude and substantially serious threats, including existential ones. Whereas the external threats are multifaceted and multi dimensional, the internal pressures emanate from lack of good governance. At the present time, mainly as a result of the highly irresponsible and reckless policies and dictatorial conduct of the regime in power (TPLF/EPRDF), Ethiopia faces real challenges endangering its very existence as a country. If corrective measures are not taken soon, some of the groups that have the support of Ethiopia’s historic enemies may attempt to secede. Some of the secessionist groups have links with and espouse the same hard line religious and political views as those branded to be extremists and terrorists by Western democracies. Regrettably, we have witnessed some powers that Ethiopians sincerely believed to be friendly engaging in apparent backdoor dealings and cuddling with secessionist elements and groups all the while supporting the regime in power. No doubt these powers will be surprised and haunted by such shortsighted approaches; just like they were by al Qaeda’s advent. But, it will be too late then. Sadly, be it on human rights, democracy or the environment, the world has come to know that double standard is the new standard practice of western democracies.

Mr. Cohen, please allow me to ask you what your argument would be against a united and strong Ethiopia, and conversely the reasons for your apparent favoritism to ‘liberation fronts’ in Ethiopia? Is it because you believe that Ethiopia will have to accept the demand for secession of any armed group claiming to represent a certain sector of the population simply because Ethiopia cannot afford to go through a costly civil war? Or out of concern for the sanctity of human life? Or is because you sincerely believe secession would be a better solution to all sides? Or simply because you believe these groups have nothing in common with the rest of the country and should be granted their wish? Or for a variety of other reasons you do not think Ethiopia should remain united? Or, as farfetched and as illogical as it may sound, do you believe fragmenting Ethiopia would be more beneficial to US interests in the region?

But, in my opinion, these or any other reasons you may have should answer the following fundamental questions.

First, what is the root cause of the demand for secession? Second, is secession the only option to address and solve political problems in society the root causes of which one finds to be mainly political grievances, marginalization, deprivation and oppression borne out of maladministration? If so why? Third, who benefits from secession? Fourth, is any demand by any group claiming to represent a certain sector of society to be accepted wholesale? Fifth, what are the consequences of secession on the people at whose behest the demand is being made, the country as a whole and the region? Sixth, what value do you put on a unity of a country?

Human history is replete with shifting borders and changes in sizes and shapes of countries. Due to circumstances, some big countries are torn apart and new ones that never existed before are born. Some countries came to existence at the whim of foreign powers as a result of a balancing act just to satisfy their strategic interests of a selfish nature, and without the consent or openly expressed desire of the respective populations. Countries we now know as Eritrea, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, etc… are examples of that. Some, especially smaller ones are taken over by
larger neighbors. There is a constant shift even within a nation state that some become extinct and their identity forgotten; as was the case in Ethiopia where not many people now know what the shape and size of its five big regions like Midre-Bahir/i, Angot, Enaria, Fetegar, Yifat that extended from the Red Sea in the North to the Indian Ocean in the East, to far beyond today’s border lines with Kenya in the South to the Sudan/South Sudan in the West looked like.

Given the overall internal, regional and international environment and the presence of an array of anti-unity forces in today’s Ethiopia, coupled with a weak central leadership, unfortunately, one cannot totally rule out the slim possibility of secession from the country. But, because any secession of any part of the country has a domino effect and will have disastrous consequences, it would be foolhardy and even suicidal for Ethiopia to allow that to happen in the first place. However, no one should ever doubt that any secession, especially one that is done through violence or connivance would or should ever be unacceptable to Ethiopia. But if the unthinkable happens, I have no doubt in my mind that no matter how long or whatever it might take, the country will be reunited. And that is not a wishful thought on my part, but a firm belief that is rooted in our history. Regions that at one time or another went outside of the control of the central government for over a century or more, including those where mainly foreigners formed sultanates, were reunited and once again became part and parcel of the country. Ethiopians did not simply give up on their kin in the northern part of the country once called Midre-Bahir/i simply because foreign invaders took it away from them by force, renamed it Eritrea and kept it under their control for over fifty years.

Some have come to underestimate the love and dedication Ethiopians have for their national unity and independence. But I hasten to add here that, however much has been done to divide our people and damage national cohesion; Ethiopians are determined and always ready to sacrifice for their unity and independence. Therefore, any false sense to the contrary is simply illusory. Besides, as an anchor of regional stability, Ethiopia’s unity and territorial integrity should be a concern to all countries of the region and beyond. It is my unflinching conviction that, however intense and malicious the systematic disinformation campaigns and other devious methods aimed at tarnishing its history and causing friction among its population groups on ethnic and religious grounds are, and however enormous the challenges to its unity may be, and regardless of the wrongly perceived notion that the country is irreparably and hopelessly fracturing and despite the myriad of problems it faces, Ethiopia remains and will continue to remain united. That is because Ethiopians have an innate sense of unity and an enduring commitment to it, as has been proven for millennia. And that would be a desirable course to follow for Ethiopians, and no doubt for the region; and the world at large will be well served by that.

Ethiopia faced enormous challenges and time and again its people paid tremendous sacrifices to remain an independent and indigenous African country. Although it is a country where all major religions, Judaism, Christianity and Islam are practiced and they all thrived at one time or another, Ethiopians showed an amazing capacity to adopt, absorb and mold all three into uniquely Ethiopian. As such, because Ethiopians fiercely resisted repeated foreign aggressions directed at them and were able to ward off foreign domination, one may comfortably say that
Ethiopia served as the gatekeeper and played a vital role in saving from greater marginalization, if not from total extinction, of the indigenous customs, cultures and identity of at least the people of East Africa. Had Ethiopians relented and failed to repulse foreign incursions and were not able to keep them at bay as much as they could, it would not be difficult to imagine what shape African history in regard to cultures, belief systems and values could have taken. The Ethiopian factor saved the people of East Africa from the fate of the African people in the northern part of the continent where today one hardly finds traces of indigenous African identity as it was totally altered.

One of your arguments to justify your sympathy with and apparent support to secessionist groups, could probably be that Ethiopia’s claim of sovereignty over this particular area or any other to be something that goes too far back in history, therefore too ancient to be relevant and convincing in today’s world. But, would you really apply that kind of approach to other countries as a justifiable argument? If the answer is yes, can you uphold the same line of argument; say for example with the state of Israel whose claim to the land goes even farther back?

As you know, Mr. Cohen, not all questions raised by any group could be acceptable to all or need to be acquiesced or agreed to as long as the overall objective is harmful to the whole. Obviously, Ethiopia as a country has the legitimate right and for the government of the day the solemn duty to safeguard the safety, wellbeing and security of the people and the unity and the territorial integrity of the country. Equally obvious is the fact that Ethiopia was not a superficially created country nor was its formation as a country through plebiscite or a democratic process as we perceive it today. And no country, as diverse and as ancient as Ethiopia is, could ever claim to be formed differently. The United States may be considered an exception in its formation as it was formed as a result of a constituent assembly convened in Philadelphia in the summer of 1787 where all thirteen members of an already formed Confederation agreed to form the Union. Nonetheless, in order to save the Union, the United States of America, one of the greatest democratic countries in today’s world, had to go through a bitter and costly civil war (1861-1865) between the Federal Government (the Union) and the Southern States referred to as ‘Slave States’ that formed the Confederate States of America (the Confederacy) to resist secession by the latter.

Hence, in the final analysis, the unity of United States as one country was not determined through negotiations or by plebiscite but by means other than peaceful; on the battle field. The government of the day could not simply accept the demands of the Confederacy and let the Southern States secede simply because the Confederacy’s quest for secession was deemed “legitimate” by the proponents. Therefore, in the case of the United States, force was found to be not only necessary but also the only preferred option and determining factor to preserve the unity and territorial integrity of the United States. It is very difficult to speculate what the fate of the United States would be had the South succeeded in its quest for independence, or was simply allowed by the central government to secede from the Union. It is even hard to imagine if the United States could ever have achieved the economic dominance and military might, and its Super Power status and worldwide clout it has enjoyed for so long had the leaders of the thirteen European colonies not have the wisdom to create a Confederation. Of course, the American Civil War ended not only with a unified country, but also with the abolishment of the
abominable and inhumane practice of slavery. To heal the ill effects of the war and to solidify unity among the warring sectors, American leaders of the time had the wisdom to embark on a painstaking process known as the Reconstruction.

First let us briefly look at some facts and see if your assertion stands:

1). Ethiopian sovereignty over the area you carelessly assert to being “handed over to Ethiopia by the British” goes centuries before the British or any other European power (may be with the exception of Ottoman Turks) had any presence in the area. As you may know, the British got a foothold in East-Africa that later became British-Somaliland in 1887, followed by an agreement concluded between the Ottoman Empire and Britain in 1888. In fact, Ethiopian sovereignty in the east of the country, extending all the way to the Indian Ocean, dates as far back as the time of the glorious Axumite civilization into the second half of the first Millennium. Ports from the Red in the north to the Indian Ocean in the east, like Zeila, Swakin, Massawa and Adulis had been under Ethiopian control.

But after few centuries of Ethiopia’s loss of total control over its coastal areas in the east and north as a result of the aggressive expansionist campaigns of the Ottomans that was followed by Arab incursions (mainly as traders, including the deplorable practice of slave trade) into that part of Africa, as was the case in the greater North Africa region from Morocco to the west to Egypt in the east, Arab intruders and invaders settled and changed the cultures, traditions, languages and other indigenous African values and identities of the people of the Red Sea all the way to the Indian Ocean coastal areas of East Africa, including the historic port city of Zeila (northwestern Awdal region of today’s Somalia). The new Arab settlers were able to establish Sultanates in some of these invaded areas and ruled over indigenous Africans. But, in due course, some, if not most of these conquered areas, were reclaimed by a number of successive Ethiopian Kings (Amde-Tsion’s campaign liberated the area to the east including Zeila in 1332, King Dawit in 1410, Yishaq, Zer’a Ye’Aqob in the 1430’s, etc.), and Ethiopia maintained, despite incessant efforts by foreign expansionists, its sovereign authority over the lands reclaimed until the first half of the Fifteenth century. (For a full account of this historic narrative dispelling some of the widespread distorted argument by many, the article authored by the known historian and scholar, Professor Daniel Kendie, is, with his kind permission, attached herewith in its entirety as Appendix A).

2). We may not need to go as far back as the thirteen or fourteen or fifteenth century Ethiopia to examine the country’s sovereignty over its eastern region. In his effort to once again reunite the country by taking back territories that had once been part of Ethiopia in the past, Atse Menilik extended his rule to Harer and beyond as of January 6, 1887. The Ethiopian-Somali region was administered by Menilik’s central government and European colonial powers acknowledged Ethiopian sovereignty and respected the borders until Mussolini’s invasion of Wol-Wol at the end of 1934.
3). Do you know, Mr. Cohen, that one of the accusations labeled against the uncrowned ruler of Ethiopia Lij Eyassou (who assumed the role of Ethiopian ruler following the death of the great Atse Menilik), was that he spent time with his fellow Ethiopian-Somalis in the region in question (the Ogaden), and that he was accused of being a Muslim because, among other reasons, he built a mosque for them in Jijiga? One of the people who spread such unsubstantiated rumors was the British legation minister, Mr. Thesiger. And that apparently was to discredit Lij Eyassou who they somehow perceived to be sympathetic to Ottoman Turks and Germany, against whom they were at war. Such persistent but unsubstantiated allegations were aimed at creating discord among Ethiopians, especially between Iyassou’s followers and some sectors of the ruling nobility. And all those accusations against the ruler of Ethiopia for finding himself among his people in the Ethiopian-Somali region (Ogaden) was back in the 1918-1922, twenty some years before your claim of the British to having the authority to “give the Ogaden” to Ethiopia.

4) As you may know, Mr. Cohen, the barbaric Italian aggression of Ethiopia that lasted for five bloody long years and caused the death of millions of innocent Ethiopians and the destruction of Ethiopian societal fabric in what is generally known as “the Second Italo-Ethiopian War”, was started by the November 1934 Italian unprovoked and naked invasion of the Ethiopian oasis village of Wol-Wol located at 96 Kilometers (about 60 Miles) inside Ethiopia. (Incidentally, Wol-Wol was where the American petroleum corporation named Sinclair Oil had a test oil well drilled in 1955.) In addition to being a deliberate act of provocation and a calculated pretext to Mussolini’s planned invasion of the entire country, Italian invasion of Wol-Wol was aimed at sabotaging the previously planned Anglo-Ethiopian boundary commission talks that was tasked with demarcating the boundary between Ethiopia and British-Somaliland; just like the French did previously to demarcate the boundary between Ethiopia and French-Somaliland (Djibouti).

Although the British honored their commitment to the planned demarcation talks by sending to Wol-Wol a three-member British delegation led by Colonel Clifford and a high level Ethiopian delegation comprising, among other notables, the well respected and staunch patriots Fitawrari Almayehu Goshu and Fitawrari Shiferaw met at the previously arranged rendezvous (the oasis village at Wol-Wol), that deliberate cross-border aggression by Italian fascists derailed the demarcation talks between the two delegations; the British and Ethiopian. Because of that conflict, both Fitawrari Alemayehu and Fitawrari Shiferaw, along with 108 of their countrymen, lost their lives in defense of the honor and territorial integrity of their country; and the Italian aggressors, armed with modern weaponry supported by two tanks and three aircraft, lost 90 of their invading troops. In the ensuing patriotic war of resistance, many prominent Ethiopians including Kegnazmach (posthumously given the rank of Dejazmach) Afeworq Wolde-Semayat known as the Lion of Korahe, gave their lives there.

Mr. Cohen, Wol-Wol is located in Werder zone of the Ethiopian-Somali region. How can the British “give the Ogaden to Ethiopia” in 1941 an area they recognized to be Ethiopian and had tried to have a demarcation of the border between their colony of British-Somaliland and
Ethiopia in 1934? And why would Ethiopian patriots die there in 1934-35 had it not been part and parcel of their country? Does that make sense to you?

5). As you may know, Mr. Cohen, following the Wol-Wol unprovoked aggression by Italian invaders, Sir Anthony Aden of Great Britain, apparently aware of Mussolini’s insatiable appetite and avowed determination to occupy all of Ethiopia by force, proposed to transfer ownership of Zeila to Ethiopia if Ethiopia was willing to cede its Ogaden region to Italy? Obviously, the proposal was not acceptable to Ethiopian government of the day simply because Ethiopians of the region (the Ogaden) were not expendable commodities to be “transferred” to anyone and be denied of their Ethiopian citizenship rights at will. How can the British “give” to Ethiopia an area (the “Ogaden”) that they acknowledged to be Ethiopian and wished/proposed to swap for another area under their control?

6). Do you know that the representative of the Italian legation in Addis at the time of the Wol-Wol incident so arrogantly demanded an apology from none other than, in his words, “the governor of the Ogaden, Dejazmach Gebre-Mariam, himself” for the killing of Italian unlawful invaders? How can you claim that this land was “given to Ethiopia by the British in 1942”, whereas even the invading enemy attests to the fact that it was administered by Ethiopia back in1934?

7). Obviously, there is some wrong perception about British presence and the extent of their “authority” in the Ethiopian-Somali region (“Ogaden”) during and just after the war to dislodge the Italians in East Africa. It should be abundantly and unequivocally clear to all that the British were allowed by Ethiopia to establish temporary military bases in parts of this region of Ethiopia for the express purpose of conducting patrolling missions and mounting military operations to disarm Somali rebels mainly coming from Italian-Somaliland and their collaborators on the Ethiopian side. The 1942 Anglo-Ethiopian agreement enabled the British to do just that, and, British twisted and connived designs aside, it was never a transfer of Ethiopian sovereignty to the British. Therefore, the British had no legal authority whatsoever that would give them the right either to deny or to “give” Ethiopia its own land. (I’ll have more to say on this point towards the end just to illustrate the extent of British connivance).

8) Please bear in mind, Mr. Cohen, that, as was the case when Italian invaders tried to occupy Ethiopia from Italian-Somaliland, thousands of Ethiopian-Somalis of the region sacrificed their lives to protect the territorial integrity and honor of their country Ethiopia when the Saed Bare irredentist regime, in a vain attempt to “unite the fifth star” (the Ethiopian-Somali region) with Somalia proper, invaded Ethiopia. Therefore, any claim to justify secessionist tendencies including the notion that the people of the region have no desire to be part of the country would be an insult on and a denigration of the countless Ethiopian-Somalis who paid and continue to pay immense sacrifices to maintain the integrity of their country, Ethiopia.

But, there can be no denying that at different times in the past, as is the case at present, certain groups have resorted to and waged a secessionist struggle. Although people of this region, as
other ethnic groups in the country, have legitimate causes and reasons for raising issues of economic and political justice, equality, fair representation at all levels and good governance, these are burning issues of concern to and are the quest of all Ethiopians. Some of the groups that waged armed struggle in the name of the region’s populace did/do not subscribe to the same objectives. It is an undeniable fact that some among these groups were organized, trained, armed, aided and abated by Somali irredentist regimes since the Somali nation came to existence for the sole purpose of taking Ethiopian-Somali region (an area over one-fifth of the country) to fulfill an elusive goal of creating “Greater Somalia”. (I will not go into detail here as I’ve written about this issue on previous occasions.)

Mr. Cohen, please know that Ethiopians of the Ethiopian-Somali region (the Ogaden) are not commodities to be given to anyone at the whim of any foreign power. No one “gives” away the proud Ethiopians of the Ethiopian-Somali region (the Ogaden) to anyone. Ethiopia is theirs as much as it is to all of its people in other parts of the country.

9). I do not know, Mr. Cohen, by what logic you could draw a parallel between South Sudan and the Ethiopian-Somali region of Ethiopia (the Ogaden).

Let us briefly see the case of South Sudan. As you know, Mr. Cohen, during the nineteenth century the Southern Sudanese fought against foreign invaders (the French, the Belgians and the Mahdists) to maintain their independence. Egypt attempted to seize and colonize South Sudan in 1870, and, although was able to establish a province (Equatoria) in the southern part of South Sudan bordering Uganda, its control over it ceased in 1889 as “an Egyptian outpost”. Despite the fact that Egypt controlled the rest of Sudan, it did not have control over all of South Sudan.

True, the nature of the relationship between the two entities was changed to a federal status as a result of the June 1946 ‘Juba Conference’ that was organized by Great Britain, Anglo-Egyptian Sudan and later the British government “in collaboration with the Egyptian government (under a condominium governing arrangement) administered Sudan and South Sudan as essentially two separate colonies from 1924 until independence in 1956. It has to be noted here that, since 1924 it was even illegal for people living north of the 10th parallel to go further south and for people south of the 8th parallel to go further north. Such “legally” defined restrictions never existed between the Ethiopian-Somali region of the Ogaden and the rest of Ethiopia. The contrast between the history of South Sudan’s relationship with the state of Sudan to that of the Ethiopian-Somali region to Ethiopia is markedly different. Not only that they were not administered as separate entities by same foreign power at same time, but also that there was no formal binding agreement that legally determined the nature of relationship like the Juba Conference Agreement had for the two Sudans. The understanding between the two Sudans when Sudan became independent in 1956, as was stated in the February 1953 agreement between the United Kingdom and Egypt, was that the federal government would give South Sudan substantial autonomy, and that “Southerners would be able to participate fully in the political system” of the new independent Sudan. But, because Khartoum reneged on the promises,
conflict broke out even before Sudan got its independence and two very lengthy wars ensued; Anyanya I (1955 to 1972) and Anyanya II of SPLA/M led by Colonel John Garang (1983 – 2005) in which over two million and half people, mostly civilians, were killed.

So Mr. Cohen, where do you draw a parallel and what ‘similar mistakes’ are you referring to”?

As a person who not only is opposed to any further fragmentation of African states, but also as someone who sincerely believes that African states should have meaningful closer ties and even closer unity among themselves, at least on a regional level, I had mixed feelings about South Sudan’s independence on July 9, 2011. That is simply because Africa’s brighter future depends not only on its exploitable, tapped and yet untapped immense natural resources, but also on guaranteeing peace and stability; which, unfortunately, remain very illusive. Democratization peace and stability are relatively easily attainable goals if and when further splintering of African states is not pushed or advocated; as further splintering of African states will, given the tortured history of colonialism, foster more complications, more acrimonious relations and more frictions among states. Anyone advocating or encouraging secession as a solution to societal grievances would be just like prescribing a medical product that may not only kill the disease but the patient seeking treatment. And as you may know, Mr. Cohen, the best solution to an existing problem is to never create a bigger one in the process.

But, considering the difficult history between the two sides and the democratic manner in which the process was conducted, in due time and if democratic leadership is in place and if stronger democratic institutions are allowed to take root and flourish, I hope that prevailing peaceful environment could usher in new possibilities of a brighter future for a better unity based on equality and justice of the two sides, if not the region.

Just like their desire and plan to take the Ethiopian-Somali region (the Ogaden) from Ethiopia to merge it with British-Somaliland, the British had, as late as 1947, wanted and tried to join South Sudan with Uganda.

10). Mr. Cohen, as far as your assertion that “Ethiopia was liberated by the British’ is concerned, you may be surprised to find out that that is not how Ethiopians, including myself, see it. You are by no means the first or the only person to say so. As an Ethiopian, I take great offence at this unfair narrative. From the perspective of Ethiopians, this is not only an untrue representation of facts, or at least does not tell the story in full, but is also an offensive insult that is so demeaning and patronizing to Ethiopian patriots who fiercely fought for five long years against Italian invaders and their collaborating mercenary Askaris and Dubats, and who paid the ultimate sacrifice to liberate their country. Their immense sacrifices assured to end Italy’s genocidal campaign, helped restore their honor and reaffirm their country’s independence that lasted for millennia uninterrupted. However, Ethiopians are not ungrateful to the British for their valuable assistance in our struggle to end Italian occupation of their country and their sacrifices in the
Ethiopians are indeed very much grateful to them for all their contributions in that regard.

However, it should be clearly understood that the objective of the British (Allied Forces) military campaign in East Africa never was, both in intent and aim, the liberation of Ethiopia from Fascist occupation.

Of course, the official reason for the British military involvement in Ethiopia was to dislodge Italian occupation forces from there. However, closer scrutiny into the matter tells a different story, for it was riddled with ulterior motives. As a colonial power, it was no secret that they had aspirations to expand their colonial holdings. Some of their dubious actions prior, during and after the war attest to justify those suspicions.

The fact is that, before Mussolini’s declaration of war on Britain and France, both British and French governments sided with Italy in every possible way. A Franco-Italian Agreement concluded between Laval and Mussolini on January 7, 1935, in a foolish hope of garnering Italian support against looming German aggression, the French officially ‘gave the Italians a free hand in dealing with Ethiopia’. Back in 1938 the British, along with the French were the first to recognize Italian control over Ethiopia, and in fact the recognition was not verbal as the British signed an agreement with Italy recognizing Italian control of Ethiopia, and Winston Churchill called it “a complete triumph for Mussolini”. Consistent with the spirit and letter of the agreement, the British colonial authorities in Sudan, British- Somaliland and Kenya prevented any desperately needed assistance from getting to Ethiopian patriots fighting Italian occupiers. Similarly, the French blocked the importation from Djibouti of defensive weaponry Ethiopia paid for.

As was the case when Italy moved its forces of occupation in to Wol-Wol in the east of the country in November 1934, its aggression from the north on October 3, 1935 was similarly ignored by the League of Nations. And when Ethiopia formally appealed to the League of Nations in protest of Italian naked aggression on January 3, 1935, influential powers like France, Britain and others chose to ignore it. In a vain attempt to appease Mussolini, who they feared would side with Hitler if they condemned his invasion of Ethiopia that they know was illegal, and in contravention of the Article X of the Covenant of the League of Nations, that called for giving assistance to member nations that experience external aggression, these powers willingly and in a cowardly manner opted to sacrifice Ethiopia. Thence, Ethiopia, the only independent African country to be a member of the League since September 28, 1923 (just three years into the League’s existence), became a sacrificial lamb and was left to the vices of Mussolini. Ethiopia stood alone in its fight against European aggression, and all but six (Mexico, China, New Zealand, the Soviet Union, the Republic of Spain and the United States) sided with Italy and supported its occupation of Ethiopia.

In order to defend their country’s independence against Italian aggression, individual Ethiopian citizens who could afford contributed a Birr per person (and per household) and all government employees paid twenty percent of their meager salaries to buy weapons and ammunition. For the lonely, financially constrained and cash strapped Ethiopia, that was how it paid for the arms and
ammunition that the French blocked from being delivered to Ethiopia. That was the extent to which Ethiopia was denied justice and fairness, and the kind of treatment the League’s only independent African nation got from cowardly European powers. Those prominent powers not only gave unreserved political and diplomatic support to Italian invaders, but also made sure that the victims of Italy’s brutal occupation and illegal invasion did not get arms and posed no resistance to their European kin. And that kind of unconscionable behavior continued until, thank goodness, Mussolini’s June 10, 1940 declaration of war on Britain and France.

It is safe to say that at the time British and French colonial powers never understood or at least highly underestimated the yearning for freedom of the people of their subjugated colonies and did not foresee then that the inevitable independence of those colonies was coming in just a generation down the line.

Britain, as one of the first European powers to give recognition to Italy’s claim of authority over Ethiopia, did everything to please Italy; to the extent of illegally transferring to Italian authorities money Ethiopia deposited in its banks. Even after entering the war against Italy and while joining hands with Ethiopian patriots to dislodge Italian invaders from Ethiopia, the British conduct there during and after the war was unnervingly mischievous and riddled with connivance. Justifiably, fiercely independent minded Ethiopians found their conduct very disconcerting and truly alarming. And that was not the first time for Ethiopia to be backstabbed by the British. Despite repeated military campaigns to occupy Ethiopian land in what is now known as Eritrea, Italians were badly and humiliatingly defeated time and time again and turned back by the renowned Ras Alula. The Italians turned to the British for assistance. The British connived with them to give them their wish, by pleading with Atse Yohannes IV to come to the rescue of their besieged troops in Kessela who faced imminent annihilation by Mahdist forces, and in return they promised the Emperor any assistance he may need to secure Mitsiwa (Massawa). Although Massawa was under Egypt at the time, following their crushing defeat by Ras Alula’s forces at the Battle of Gura, Egypt’s control was fast dwindling and their stay there was untenable and about to leave. The British knew this. They also knew that once Egypt left, Massawa would be under Ethiopia’s uncontested control. Therefore, denying Ethiopia that chance and preventing her from controlling Massawa was found to be necessary; for they knew that Ethiopia would be a difficult enemy to contend with and an obstacle to their colonial ambitions if it once again fully controlled its Red Sea coast. So, the encirclement of their troops and their desperate situation was a perfect pretext to redeploy the gatekeeper Ras Alula. The British, powerless to control Massawa themselves, went for their second choice; another European power to deny Ethiopia the rightful control and ownership of Massawa. They (the British) communicated with Italy, and as soon as the Ras moved his troops to rescue the British, Italians got an opportunity to push inland and occupied certain parts of the highland area, eventually establishing themselves in Midre-Bahr/i and renaming it Eritrea following the death of Atse Yohannes IV.

Therefore, given their bitter experiences with them, Ethiopians had been suspicious of and very much concerned about foreigners, particularly Arabs and Europeans with colonialist mindset; and justifiably so. Greedy European colonial powers that encircled Ethiopia all around regarded the presence of a united and independent Ethiopia not as reliable and trusted friend to be treated with respect, but as a major obstacle that hindered their ambitions to complete the scramble and
total domination of Africa. Similarly, expansionist Arabs saw a Christian dominated Ethiopia as the only and biggest obstacle to their domination and drive to Arabize the whole East Africa region and beyond. From their perspective, both determined that Ethiopia was an unacceptable presence and all necessary direct and indirect means, including sending their invading armies, had to be used to do away with. And both never stopped to conspire against the unity and territorial integrity of Ethiopia. Therefore, Ethiopian patriots at that time had good reason to be wary and suspicious of British presence in their country to the extent that, at one point in 1941 proud Ethiopian patriots forced the British to lower their flag until the Ethiopian tricolor was hoisted first. Well, because of their bitter experiences, Ethiopians could not let their guards down. And their independence required extra vigilance. It is in that context and through that prism of bitter experiences that Ethiopians had to be wary of the British, albeit comrades-in-arms at that particular time in history.

It should be clear that, typical of their conniving behavior, the British attempted to consider Ethiopia as "enemy territory", as was openly and shamelessly claimed by General Mitchell. This was meant not only to deny Ethiopia 'a seat at the future peace conference, but also marginalize the country, compromise its territorial integrity by denying its sovereignty over many of its parts (as they, in the name of "enemy territory"), intended to annex the Ogaden region and other areas in East, South and West of the country with their colonial possessions in British Somaliland, Kenya and the Sudan, and to cut off Tigrai and annex it with their new protectorate of Eritrean'.

However, ‘the adamant insistence and methodical diplomatic efforts of Ethiopians made it possible to extract Ethiopia from the lop-sided, unfair and oppressive interim agreement’ known as ‘Interim Anglo-Ethiopian agreement’ (signed January 31, 1942) that made Ethiopia a virtual British protectorate but in name. The British were ‘outmaneuvered by Ethiopians and were forced to sign a new agreement’ on December 19, 1944. The realization of that new agreement was greatly helped thanks partly to the historic decision of the United States to re-established its diplomatic mission in Ethiopia, and Ethiopia was made eligible for a US policy known as ‘Lend-Lease’; a US law “formally titled An Act to Further Promote the Defense of the United States” and enacted on March 11, 1941 as a program that allowed the US to supply “the United Kingdom, the Soviet Union, China, Free France and other Allied nations with materiel”.

This eligibility to Lend-Lease proved to be “a vital tool to Ethiopian officials in their negotiation with the United Kingdom” to force the British accept the second agreement as was desired by Ethiopians; thus foiling their veiled and venomous designs to undermine, if not destroy Ethiopia as a unified and sovereign nation. And thanks to the new Anglo-Ethiopian agreement, the British “agreed to relinquish several advantages they had enjoyed in Ethiopia. The new agreement also revoked British precedence over other foreign representatives. But perhaps more important was the use of the word "Ally" in the agreement. Not only did this remove any further basis for considering Ethiopia "enemy territory" -- as General Mitchell had claimed—but it also prevented Ethiopia from being denied a seat at the future peace conference, and made it harder for the British to ‘permanently keep the Ogaden without jeopardizing the territorial status of other allies’.

Thus, typical of conspiratorially minded British authorities and functionaries at the time, they resorted to a sinister campaign of seriously undermining the unity of the Ethiopian people, all the while appearing to be friendly to Emperor Haile-Selassie and provided material support (arms,
ammunition and money) and helped train a contingent of Ethiopian freedom fighters and engaged in actual fighting in the military campaign against Italian forces alongside Ethiopian patriots (for which Ethiopians are ever grateful and are appreciative of). They tried to control the affairs of the country, including administrative matters and at one point attempted to prevent the Emperor from assembling his cabinet and created a difficult environment for him to perform his duties as freely as he should. They dragged as much as they possibly could to pull out their military outposts in the Ogaden region well after what was necessary, and their mischievous role to, on one hand, discourage and undermine the “Ethiopia or Death” Unionist movement of patriotic Eritreans who wanted nothing but reunification with their motherland Ethiopia, and on the other hand their overt and covert support to forces opposed to unification or even federation with Ethiopia can never been overlooked. Additionally, by deploying people like Majors Erskine and Blockhurst, they embarked on a vitriolic campaign against unionist forces and systematically promoted ethnic division of the Ethiopian people; ironically a prelude to the TPLF/EPRDF imposed system of government.

Although such was the duplicity of the British government and their colonial officers at the time, individual citizens like the ever honorable Richard and Sylvia Pankhurst, Sir Sydney Barton, and others made a conscientious decision to help Ethiopia and its people that fell victim to Italian occupation in any way they could, including by forming an advocacy group called ‘The Abyssinian Association’. Ethiopians owe these noble people in England and others like the late Professor John H. Spencer and African-American air force pilots Hubert Julian (who dubbed his plane ‘Ethiopia I’ back in 1924 to express his love and admiration for Ethiopia) and John C. Robinson of the United States for their immense contributions and sacrifices during Ethiopia’s struggle against fascist Italy, and for their sincere, honest and marvelous lifelong friendship.

Nonetheless, whatever evil designs the British government had in mind suspicious Ethiopian patriots (including the Emperor) did not give the colonial minded British functionaries an untrammeled power in their country.

Why do I say that the “British liberated Ethiopia” narrative has been unfair, if not out rightly convoluted? Well, Mr. Cohen, I would like to kindly ask you to just consider the following facts and judge for yourself whether my argument against the general assumption that “the British liberated Ethiopia” is justified. Without in anyway minimizing the critical supportive role the British played in dislodging the Italians from Ethiopia and their valuable assistance in reshaping governmental structures including the training and formation of the Ethiopian Army, the judicial system and bureaucracy, I believe that the main cause, reason and impetus for their decision to stand alongside Ethiopian ought to be clearly understood, and the more negative aspects of their involvement should not be ignored. In my opinion the dichotomy between what is perceived to be a British ‘liberating’ act and their intent and actual deeds as it pertains to Ethiopia’s pride, independence sovereignty and integrity is very much misunderstood. Moreover, it is my contention that Ethiopia’s crucial contribution, albeit in an indirect way, towards the success of the military campaign of the Allied Nations over the Axis Alliance had been totally ignored and remains unrecognized to this day.

First, the decision by the British to take on Italians in Ethiopia has nothing to do or has no correlation with the brutal and illegal occupation of Ethiopia, nor was it driven by humanistic
concerns and was it ever a decision guided by conscience. The British decision to join Ethiopian patriots to defeat Italians was a direct result of and solely caused by Mussolini’s fateful declaration of war on Britain and France; that is four long years after Ethiopia was invaded and Ethiopian patriots had been fighting against Italian atrocious occupation. (It has to be noted here that, the Libyan people faced the same fate as did Ethiopians and fought Italian bloody occupation of their country as of October 1911 until the Allied Armies ousted Italian colonizers there during the Second World War). Therefore, British involvement in Ethiopia came in the context and as part of the overall political decision and military strategy of the Allied Powers to defeat the Axis Alliance.

The main reason for British involvement in the military campaigns of 1940 and 1941 that took place in Ethiopia was primarily to weaken, if not destroy Italian forces where they were (East Africa) and deny Italians from moving their troops to redeploy and reinforce their (Axis) forces in European theatres of war that would have tilted, however temporarily, the military balance of powers and made things more difficult for Allied powers. Additionally, the British wanted to prevent Italian forces from attacking or occupying neighboring British possessions, where they appeared to be (vis-à-vis Italy) outnumbered and more vulnerable. That was because of the balance of forces of the Allied and Axis Powers in East Africa.

Secondly, the British and the Europeans in the Allied countries more than Ethiopia benefited from their involvement in the East Africa military campaigns. Let me explain.

A) Balance of Forces between the Allied and Axis Powers in East Africa was tenuous:

British Middle-East Command under General Archibald Wavell had a total of 86,000 British and Commonwealth troops spread out in Palestine, Egypt, Sudan, British-Somaliland, Kenya, etc. to deal with any conflict in Libya, Iraq, Syria, Iran and East Africa. The British initially (in 1940) had roughly a hundred aircraft. In contrast to that, as early as April 1935 Italy added 680,000 soldiers to boost their already 620,000 strong forces (400,000 Italian soldiers in Eritrea and 220,000 in Italian Somaliland). In addition to a fairly strong navy stationed in Massawa, Assab and Mogadishu ports, their huge army of 1,3000,000 troops in East Africa also included a great number of logistical and support units, 9,300 machine guns, 2,750 pieces of artillery, 795 tanks, and 595 aircraft (between 200 to 300 of them were combat aircraft), tons of ammunition, food and other necessary supplies and ample transportation vehicles. Moreover, Italians had at least another 208,000 men (14 divisions) in Libya.

At the start of the Second World War (when the British decided to join hands with Ethiopian Patriotic Forces) Italy had more troops in Africa than in Europe. And in view of Mussolini’s declaration of war on Allied Nations, this factor was not to be taken lightly. The Allied Nations in general and the British in particular understood that effectively dealing with this huge potent force was not only necessary but also imperative for, among others, the following three main reasons:

First, they had to protect their colonial interests from being taken over by Italy and avoid any chance of annihilation or at least minimize huge losses of their troops in East Africa and the Middle-East; Secondly, they had to secure Indian Ocean and Mediterranean shipping routes and
waterways where much of the strategic supplies and critical cargo (like Persian oil, Malayan rubber, Indian tea and Australian and New Zealand foodstuff s) needed by the United Kingdom in both peace and war had to pass through; Thirdly, in order to contain and defeat the Axis Powers in European theatres, cutting off, containing and immobilizing Italian troops stationed in Africa and denying them any possibility to redeploy and reinforce their (Axis) forces in Europe was a good active defense and sound military strategy. To reinforce this theory, it suffices to refer to what was said then to describe how tenuous the situation was and what kind of dilemma the British faced at the time; someone stated that the ‘mere existence of the Italian Fleet in the area caused problems to Britain and forced them to utilize warships sorely needed elsewhere to protect Mediterranean convoys’.

Unfortunately, the Allied Nations that were hard pressed by the Axis Powers in European and Asian theatres did not have enough manpower to directly challenge and deal with Italian forces in East Africa. As if to highlight the danger and prove the point, the Italians flexed their muscle on two fronts in East Africa in 1940; as was manifested in their attack of British-Somaliland in August, forcing the British to evacuate and flee to Aden, and their takeover of the British garrisons in Kessela and several border villages in Sudan and Kenya.

B) Filling the critical void was imperative:

By 1940, the threat of the Axis Alliance on the Allied Nations and their interests in the Middle-East and East Africa was increasing and was of great concern to the British. From a military strategy point of view, isolating, incapacitating and neutralizing the Italian forces in Ethiopia was crucial if that increasing threat was to be dealt with effectively. However, given the strength of Italian forces there, that proposition would appear foolhardy, or at least a difficult undertaking. But there was a critically important factor that would make the task relatively easier. General Archibald P. Wavell understood this very well. Realizing the critical manpower (troop) shortage the British were faced with to fend off further Italian aggressive measures on their garrisons and effectively challenge Italian forces in East Africa to achieve the objectives mentioned earlier, he was convinced that the only chance he had was to look for local support. He decided to muster all the support he needed. And the key to that success was to turn to Ethiopian patriots who had been fighting to free their country from Italian occupation over the previous four years. But to garner that needed support from them, he had to gain their confidence and win their trust. Although there was an effort by some British to make direct contact with Ethiopian patriots, the patriots did not trust them and were very suspicious of the motives. As I learnt from some patriotic leaders themselves, their suspicion was not unfounded. The British were convinced that the only person to dispel the suspicion Ethiopian patriots had toward them and to have their full cooperation, the best avenue was to involve Emperor Haile-Selassie himself. He was invited to the Sudan from his exile in Britain to participate in a conference convened by Foreign Secretary Anthony Aden, where a joint plan by the British and Ethiopian Patriotic Forces was drafted and agreed to.

It is fair to ask what the fate of Ethiopia would have been if the Allied Forces (the British) were not involved in the campaign that defeated Italy. Not surprisingly, my answer is unequivocal ‘not
very much different; as Ethiopia was bound to be free, with or without direct British involvement in the fight against Italian troops in Ethiopia - probably a little delayed and with some complications due mainly to the connivance of colonial powers, especially Britain, because it had more clout after the War to influence matters in the region and had an insatiable desire to expand the size of its colonies in East Africa, including by annexing Ethiopian territories, but mainly because they (the British) consistently conspired to undermine Ethiopian unity and territorial integrity.

Let me explain why Ethiopia’s liberation by Ethiopians themselves was not only doable but also unstoppable.

a) Since Mussolini declared war on Britain and France, Italy immersed itself in a war that was, of necessity, very demanding in manpower and arms. It would have been forced to withdraw at least much of its experienced troops from Africa to reinforce its troops in Europe and defend the home front, which without doubt would be a pressing priority for Mussolini.

b) Given Italy’s very weak economy, its lack of suitable raw materials to produce quality armaments, etc. its defeat in Europe and elsewhere was inevitable. Although the country was deeply in debt, in 1939 almost 40% of its budget was allocated to military spending. Italy’s involvement in Spain to support General Francisco Franco alone was costing it up to 8.5 Billion Lire (about 20% of the country’s expenditure). Additionally, in 1936 to 1937 for example, Italy was spending about 19.2 billion Lire to create necessary infrastructure in order to maintain its colonial administration in East Africa; whereas its entire annual revenue was only 18.5 billion Lire. With its declaration of war on Allied Nations that was bound to be untenably costly, and with an economy in shambles, Italy could not have the financial power to sustain over a million troops in East Africa at the level they were, and would anyway have been forced to withdraw much of its forces there.

c) For about two years after Italians used forbidden poison gas to defeat Ethiopians at Maichew and the ensuing horrendous genocidal massacres at the hands of fascist invaders, and the murder of some of the outstanding patriotic leaders like Ras Desta Damtew, Dejazmach Abera Kassa, Dejazmach Wondwossen Kassa, Dejazmach Asfawossen Kassa, Dejazmach Balcha Safo, Dejazmach Beyene Merid, Wag-Shum Hailu Kebede, etcetera, and the imprisonment and exile of others, understandably, organized opposition was weakening. But, in due course and as more and more Ethiopians started regrouping around prominent leaders, the ranks of the Patriotic Movement was growing by the day and gaining momentum. Especially those in Gondar, Gojam, Shewa, Harer, Sidamo, etc… were growing fast and getting better organized. For example, the renowned Patriotic leader Ras Abebe Aregai who was left with less than a hundred fighters by the spring of 1937 had over 20,000 fighters by March 1940. The same was true with other outstanding and equally prominent leaders like Ras Wubneh, Bitwoded Adane Mekonnen, Dejazmatch Geressu Duki, Dejazmatch Gebre Mariam Garri, Dejazmach Belai Zeleke, Dejazmach Sahle, etc.
For these and other reasons, the inevitable decrease in troop level coupled with the demoralizing news from Europe and elsewhere would result in Italian troop dispiritedness and decreased moral to fight; making them very vulnerable to ferocious attacks by Ethiopian Patriotic Forces.

It should be noted here that, at no time, including the first two extremely bloody years, was Italy’s army of occupation able to extend its control over at most two-third of the country. When the British decided to join hands with Ethiopian Patriotic Forces, Italian occupiers were mostly confined to their military garrisons, cities and towns, and Ethiopian Patriotic Forces were controlling more and more liberated areas, growing in numbers and even one time collaborators were joining their compatriots.

d) As I explained earlier, British involvement cannot and should not be in any way undermined, and every assistance Ethiopian were able to garner at that critical time had to be truly appreciated. However, we need to know the level of involvement and the role of Ethiopian Patriotic Forces vis-a-vis the British in the fight that ended Italian occupation. Much of the fiercest Italian resistance the British faced was in Eritrea. The level of Italian resistance in Ethiopia was limited and the British deployed relatively less troops. The reason for that was simple; Ethiopian Patriotic Forces were dependable and in big numbers to do much of the job. For example, in the May 23, 1941 a joint military operation in Debre-Markos by British and Ethiopian Patriotic Forces that resulted in the surrender of Italian troops numbering 1,600 along with their commander Colonel Maraventano had only 36 soldiers under British command.

It is because of the level of involvement by Ethiopian Patriotic Forces that the fight against Italian forces in East Africa took less time than it did in Libya.

There are a couple of points that need to be mentioned here.

The first one is the fact that, despite Italy’s horrendous genocidal atrocities in Ethiopia, and unlike Germany and Japan, there was no tribunal of any kind to even look into the crimes committed by them against Ethiopians. Although their conduct amounted to war crimes, genocide and crimes against humanity, no one was held accountable for the dreadful massacres of Ethiopians by Italian Fascists. No doubt it is simply because the victims were African and the victimizer European. Ethiopians for posterity will never forget this gross miscarriage of justice that left an indelible mark on the credibility of the West’s fairness.

The second one is that the British not only protected surrendering Italian troops and their maniacal murderers from Ethiopian control, they took all military equipment captured from Italian invaders of our country. But, what is more stupefying is their reasoning. They ‘openly and boldly’ stated that no Italian weapons ‘should be left for use by blacks’. Although Ethiopians in general and the Patriotic Forces in particular were justifiably enraged by such blatantly racist, unbelievably arrogant and truly reprehensible behavior of the British, the British got away with that, mainly because of the Emperor’s tolerance, which I still have a hard time comprehending.

Is that what you call British “guilty consciousness”, Mr. Cohen?

These are facts; just the facts, Mr. Cohen.
Dear Mr. Cohen,

Patriotic and democratic Ethiopian nationalists who not only cherish the glorious part of their country’s proud history, but who also are determined to see and strive for the establishment of a just society where past injustices (of the types that any society as diverse as Ethiopia could not be immune from) are properly and satisfactorily addressed and redressed, where justice reigns and all citizens enjoy their god-given freedoms and their inalienable rights, will no doubt find your provocative, highly offensive and unmitigated assault on their history..

True, for far too long many self-appointed “experts” have tried to define Ethiopia for Ethiopians themselves, and have taken the liberty to rewrite and tell our history at whim. This is mostly out of either lack of knowledge or sheer ignorance or simple idiosyncrasy, but is also rooted in and emanating from an unambiguously inherent racist state of mind. This kind of negative attitude seems to be more acutely pronounced when it comes to Ethiopia. I dare say that there are two reasons for that. One is that, despite continuous and incessant efforts by foreign intruders and invaders from near and far who tried to colonize or at least dominate Ethiopia as they did all around, this is a country whose citizens so bravely fought, paid enormous and incalculable sacrifices and jealously preserved their independence; and secondly and more poignantly, racist Europeans have never overcome the humiliating defeat of Italy at Adwa at the hands of the fiercely independent-minded brave Ethiopians who happened to be of an assumed “inferior” race. Some are still unforgiving and un-forgetful of the fact that, for them a “superior” white race was soundly and crushingly defeated by black Africans, the Ethiopians. And all they could do is bash Ethiopia and maliciously tarnish its history; and they seem to find solace in doing just that.

Mr. Cohen, here are some of your records that Ethiopians consider to be at least unbalanced if not out rightly against the national interests of their country.

1) Your refusal to include pan-Ethiopian organizations like COEDF at the infamous ‘London Peace Conference’ of May 1991, where only Liberation Fronts (EPLF, TPLF and OLF) that never had any national agenda and who were in no position to represent the country’s interests as a whole were allowed to decide on the fate of the ancient nation of Ethiopia.

The inadvisability of the exclusion of democratic forces and other pro-Ethiopians in the process was not felt by Ethiopian only. Mr. Christopher Clapham, an Ethiopian Specialist at Lancaster University said at the time, ‘Everyone who counts in a deeper sense in Ethiopia – people who never rebelled, who run the part of the economy that works – has been left out of all this’.

2) In addition to preventing groups with clearly defined and unambiguous Ethiopian agenda to participate in that fateful ‘Peace Conference’ in London, and in violation of its very spirit and purported purpose, you singlehandedly determined the outcome of the Conference without even consulting the Ethiopian government’s delegation, or without giving them prior notice of your impending decision. That personal decision of yours, Mr. Cohen, denied them to have a say on such matter of detrimental import.
By shunning the government delegation and giving unduly importance and a determinant role to the trio armed groups with no national agenda, you undermined the Ethiopian national position to have an impact at the negotiating table and weakened the delegation’s efforts to rally support to the Ethiopian cause. The result was the division of the country in two, the polarization of society and the institutionalization of a purely ethnocentric system of government; unprecedented in the country’s long recorded history. Ethiopia became an experimental lab for ethnic-based rule. Thus, a truly enviable chance of historic proportions for a true and viable national reconciliation that could have resulted in a win-win and acceptable solution to the country’s fundamental problems, and a good opportunity to be on a good footing to start a genuine democratic process was lost.

Both your inflexible position to exclude pan-Ethiopian forces at the Conference and your decision to sideline the government’s high level official delegation were measures that could be considered nothing short of not only meddling in the internal affairs of a sovereign nation, but also a reckless anti-Ethiopian campaign and an unduly condescending and highly patronizing act that can only be expected of abrasive colonialists of a bygone era, and not from a United States high level official in the closing years of the Twentieth century. No wonder then that The Newsweek magazine dubbed the result of the “Peace Conference” ‘Cohen’s Coup’.

Thence, more than anything else, Mr. Cohen, your decision to abandon the role of an honest mediator as was expected by many at the time and, whether deliberate or not, your unwarranted bias against democratic Ethiopian centrist forces, and your predetermined position to catapult the trio to power, denied Ethiopians a level playing field that could, in all probability, have paved the way for a genuine national reconciliation to take place which could create an enabling environment for a new democratic beginning to take root.

That kind of measure is beyond comprehension as it is incompatible with diplomatic norms of civilized nations and lacks common decency. You may, as other proponents of the conduct and final decision of that Conference that enabled the trio belligerent forces of EPLF, TPLF and OLF, to decide the fate of the nation have, argue that the determination was made at the “request” of the then accidental head of state, Tesfai Gebre-Kidan, and that those Fronts ‘already had a commanding presence that nothing would stop them from taking over power’, and that ‘it was necessary they did so in order to “avoid chaos and bloodshed”, especially in the Capital City.

That may appear convincing to casual observers and to those who do not really understand Ethiopian society.

The June 9, 1991 Newsweek Magazine under the title “‘Cohen’s Coup’ in Ethiopia?” wrote this about your unilateral and unprecedented diplomatic declaration calling for Eritrean referendum; “The real bombshell that day came out of London, where Cohen ... reversed decades of U.S. policy by calling a referendum on independence for Eritrea”.

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You violated the spirit and purpose of the conference and undermined the goodwill and readiness of the delegation to the conference of the Mengistu’s military government led by the country’s Prime Minister, Mr. Tesfaye Dinka, by giving the green light to those Fronts to enter Addis Abeba, the capital, without even having the decency to consult with the government’s legitimate representatives at the conference and having their input into the decision; thus giving the insurgents unwarranted legitimacy and above all leveling the field for Eritrean secession to proceed at the sheer will of EPLF and without any consideration to Ethiopia’s legitimate concerns and legal rights pertaining to the territorial integrity of the country, the human and political rights of Ethiopian citizens of Eritrean origin and non-Eritrean Ethiopians living in Eritrea, and other aspects of Ethiopian national interests.

3) The unfolding events in Ethiopia following the “London Conference” were, as had been expected, very much disconcerting to Ethiopian democrats. Concerned about their country’s future under TPLF, Ethiopians everywhere, particularly in western democracies, expressed - through petitions and peaceful demonstrations - their outrage at and opposition to the arbitrarily predetermined decision and the aggressively pursued disgraceful campaign of the new ethno-warlords to facilitate the secession of Eritrea, the dismantling of national institutions like the country’s Armed Forces and the imposition of an ethnocratic rule that divided their country into ethnic enclaves.

Washington DC was one of the epicenters of opposition to the new ethno-rulers. When Ethiopians were preparing for one of the largest demonstrations in DC, something utterly surprising happened. What you did then has, unfortunately, left an indelible impression on some of us. We found it shocking. What happened was this. A very prominent African-American who genuinely was concerned about the turn of events in Ethiopia was asked to be a guest speaker at the event and the gracious gentleman gladly accepted the invitation. (Out of respect for his privacy and until I have his permission, I will have to withhold his name for now). Aware of his involvement and willingness to be part of our campaign for democracy, human rights and unity, he was contacted by you and asked to refrain from and stop cooperating with those opposing the new rulers you help impose on the Ethiopian people. Unfortunately, Mr. Cohen, your approach to the respected gentleman who knew Ethiopia far better than you do and who was deeply concerned about Ethiopia in particular and Africa in general, was so demeaning that he took it as an outright insult on his intelligence, and was so embittered by it. For now, I opt not to go into the details and nature of the encounter and spare you embarrassment. Suffice it to say here that your view of the prodemocracy opposition was very vitriolic, contemptuous and never to be expected from a senior diplomat holding the office of US Assistant-Secretary of State for African Affairs. Although deeply disturbed by your incomprehensible conduct of a dubious nature, I am glad to say here that, as a person of strong convictions and a man of his world, the gentleman, God bless him, stood with us all along. During those testing times, this gentleman and the late Professor Spencer were two of the few true friends of Ethiopia. We will always be grateful to
them for their decency, principled commitment to human dignity and democracy and for their love of Ethiopia.

What I find perplexing was not your unqualified support to the new rulers per se. It was understandable for you were indispensible in facilitating their usurpation of power, and your continued support to them could be simply because you did not want to undo something of your making. But the intensity of your opposition to prodemocracy groups, and particularly to a certain language group is beyond comprehension. In this regard, you harbor the same level of bias, if not outright hatred, to this particular group, as the late Meles Znawi, Isaiyas Afewerki, etc. Do you have any reason for that, M. Cohen?

4). In your capacity as Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs, especially considering your ambassadorial experiences in Africa, more was expected from you to show a reasonably balanced approach in dealing with the complex situation in Ethiopia. Unfortunately, throughout your tenure as a senior diplomat at the State Department, you never attempted and did not show any willingness to even once hear what the democratic opposition had to say. Your dismal failure, whilst in a strong position to make a marked difference by using your good offices and influential senior diplomatic position may have led some to be disillusioned with United States’ commitment to multiparty system and inclusive democratic process – especially considering your “no democracy no aid” empty rhetoric – and conversely might have emboldened the new rulers to stick to their dictatorial behavior.

Thence, given these aforementioned experiences, will you be surprised, Mr. Cohen, if Ethiopians question your judgment and are livid at your statement in Minnesota mentioned hereinabove?

I really hope not.

These are facts; just the facts, Mr. Cohen.

Hands off Ethiopia Mr. Cohen!

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Appendix A

Was the Ogaden Handed Over to Ethiopia by Britain in 1948?

Dr. Daniel Kendie

*Ethiopia’s determination and resolute courage to resist the unprovoked Italian aggression, and to be able to defeat Italy at Adwa in 1896, more than anything else, explains the perfidious and deceitful lies, distortions, provocations, intimidations, and the constant attempt to re-write Ethiopian history, because of the fear that Ethiopia’s stand will contribute to the anti-colonialist, nationalist, and Pan-Africanist sentiments.*

Let us begin with the problems of sourcing. The accuracy of the information gathered from external sources is usually checked and counter-checked by consulting local sources, or the other way. To be able to do that, apart from professional training, one needs mastery of languages as well as of the relevant literature.

While there have been outstanding foreigners who wrote about Ethiopian history in a professional manner, there have also been pseudo-intellectuals, who have attempted to re-write Ethiopian history, and whose writing has had no purpose except to advance the interests of those who financed their research. By simply relying on the information collected from the colonial archives, such “scholars” still profess to have written a history of Ethiopia without consulting Ethiopian sources. The Ethiopian viewpoint is not represented. After all, there are two sides to an issue.

In writing the history of the Horn of Africa before the colonial scramble, consulting the Chronicles of Ethiopian Emperors such as Amde Tsion [1312-1342], Dawit [1382-1411], Yeshaque [1414-1429], Zere Yacob [1434-1468], and Sertse Dingil [1563-1597] becomes crucial. What is worthy of note is that some of the chronicles are accessible even in foreign languages. For example, *The Glorious Victories of Amde Tsion* is available in German [Dillmann, 1884], in French [Perruchon, 1889], in Italian [Conti Rossini, 1900], and in English [Dr Huntingford, 1965].

Yet, let alone examine manuscripts in Geez, Amharic, Tigrigna or other Ethiopian languages, the supposedly “scholarly” works on Ethiopia have not even been provided depth and illumination from the translations. Although they appear in academic format, they are completely superfluous. It is evident that they have been produced to serve other purposes than to help advance the cause of knowledge and scholarship.

In historical terms, today’s Djibouti and Somaliland were part of the Ethiopian State centered in Axum. For example, the well known port of Zeila was one of Axum’s major outlets to the sea along with Adulis and Swakin. Since the Ethiopians invaded the Hedjaz and occupied Jeddah in 702 A.D, the Arabs were able to take the Dahlaque Islands and Massawa in retaliation.
However, having recovered Massawa from the Arabs, Ethiopia still controlled Zeila even in 977 A.D. It must be noted that the conflict between the Ethiopian highlanders and lowlanders which came later, was not continuous, but rather intermittent. Emperor Amde Tsion utilized Zeila in 1328 when he reduced the major Muslim principalities like Adal, and continued with Ifat, Dawaro, Hadya, and Fatagar, and made them tributary states. Negus Dawit resumed with the task of consolidating what was achieved by his illustrious father and established a system of frontier defence with regard to the principalities.

Since Negus Yeshaque expanded the administrative facilities of Zeila, the port remained an important trade centre between Ethiopia and the Middle East even in the fourteenth, fifteenth, and sixteenth centuries. As the Chronicles of Negus Yeshaque testify, the word “Somali” appeared for the first time in his victory celebration songs. What was began by the previous emperors, i.e., the conquest of what is now called the Ogaden, was completed by Emperor Zere Yacob (1434-1468), who defeated Adal in 1445 and Mogadisho in 1447. As a result, the southern trade routes were secured. Thereafter, commercial centres like Mogadisho, Brava, and Merca became dependent for their prosperity upon the entrepot trade between Ethiopia and the markets of Asia.

Harar was built as a civilization by the Adere – an Ethiopian community, still there, and who speak a language that is very close to Amharic. In 1577, the Emperor Sertse Dingil (1563-1597) led an army of considerable strength and brought an end to Harar as a military power. On his way to the province of Enarya [today’s Illubabor and Keffa provinces], the same emperor paid a working visit to Gojjam, Damot - what is now called Wollega, Limu, Jimma, Hadya, Gurage, Kembata, and Bale. Sertse Dingil baptized the Enarya leader, Sebenhi, and his son Bedancho, and according to his chronicle, he gave the son the Christian name of Zemariam. Before returning to his capital - Denkez- not far from the city of Gondar, he reduced Enarya’s payment of annual tax by 50%.

With this background, let us now turn to the modern period. The British established themselves in 1887 in what was to become British Somaliland - a country of 180,000 sq. kms with half a million inhabitants, in order to find a source of cheap food supplies for their garrison in Aden, where they had 182 officers. They also wanted to control the strategic Strait of Bab-el-Mandeb, and to keep an eye on the French, who had already established themselves in Djibouti in 1884. Furthermore, the British occupied the Sudan in the 1880s and Kenya in 1890. Largely encouraged by the British, the Italians took over Massawa in 1885, and what became Italian Somaliland in the 1880s. It should be remembered that the British did this by betraying Ethiopia in a clear breach of the obligations set down in the Adwa Treaty of 1884.

Encircled on all sides by colonial possessions, understandably, the Emperor Menelik felt threatened. Having defined Ethiopia’s historic borders, in his 1891 Circular Letter to the European Powers, he said, “If distant powers come forward to partition Africa, I have no intention at all of being an indifferent spectator.” True to his pledge, he meant what he said, when he challenged the Italians at Adwa in 1896. However, the pseudo-scholars have
twisted his honourable stand by claiming that he was expressing his intention to participate in the partitioning of Africa.

From the point of view of those of us who have studied Ethiopian history, what is remarkable about it all is that Menelik never took an inch of land which was not historically Ethiopian.

In this respect, the British newspaper, *The Spectator* of March 7, 1896 wrote: “The Italians have suffered a great disaster, greater than has ever occurred in modern times to white men in Africa. Adowa was the bloodiest of all colonial battles.” France described Ethiopia as ‘a country which could pose political questions of great importance.’ A French journalist viewed it in a similar fashion when he said: “All European countries will be obliged to make a place for this new brother who steps forth ready to play in the Dark Continent the role of Japan in the Far East.” We should note that Japan had defeated China in 1895 and Russia in 1905.

The Emperor Menelik was an able and far-sighted leader who could keep several irons in the fire. He needed the French to checkmate British ambitions, and the deep-rooted and abiding friendship of Russia whom he trusted very much, to stand by his side. Since the British could no longer rely on the Italians as their watch-dog in Northeast Africa, naturally, they had to deal with Ethiopia directly. As a result, the European colonial powers which had encircled Ethiopia on all sides - Italy, France, and Britain felt constrained to make their own boundary arrangements. Hence, a year after Adwa, they had to negotiate a series of boundary agreements with Emperor Menelik and to establish boundary lines with Ethiopia.

Ethiopia and Italy agreed upon a boundary in 1897 and marked it on two maps. However, it was claimed that the maps had disappeared and led to serious disputes. In an attempt to settle the disputes, Ethiopia and Italy entered into the Convention of 1908. Article IV of the Convention says, “That all of the Ogaden shall remain dependent on Abyssinia [Ethiopia]. To that end, a joint boundary commission was appointed in 1911 to mark the boundary on the ground.

Demarcation progressed well, but because of the breaking of the war with Ottoman Turkey, Italy did not want to continue with the demarcation of the border. With the coming to power of Mussolini in 1922, Fascist Italy came with a different political agenda, i.e., avenging the defeat at Adwa, and the possible colonization of Ethiopia, for which it was given a free hand by France and England. In 1934, Italy used the unmarked border as a pretext to occupy Walwal - an Ethiopian town situated 60 miles inside Ethiopia.

When the Ethiopians fiercely resisted, Mussolini branded them “aggressors” for defending what was internationally recognized as Ethiopian territory. The defense of Walwal was the price Ethiopia had to pay in blood and tears [1934-1941]. In its odious aggression, Italy used 800,000 soldiers, 600 aircraft, 400 tanks, 30,000 transport vehicles, and the extensive use of mustard gas to bleed Ethiopia to death. Some 40,000 Somalis, including the late Somali President Muhammad Siad Barre were also mobilized in the invasion of Ethiopia.
In 1941, the entire Horn of Africa came under British Military Administration, except Ethiopia, which lent the Ogaden to the British, so that as an ally, they could use it as a base for conducting military operations against Germany, Italy, and Japan. The Ogaden was returned back to Ethiopia in 1948-1949. When some people therefore say that the British handed over the Ogaden to Ethiopia, may be they are referring to this historical period.

Ethiopia’s borders with Somalia are therefore internationally recognized, and have been confirmed on ten different occasions from 1897 to 1988, as follows:

1. On July 28, 1897, when the Anglo-Ethiopian Boundary Treaty was affirmed by the British Parliament and duly ratified by Queen Victoria. The boundary is demarcated.

2. On June 16, 1908, when the Italian Parliament ratified the Italo-Ethiopian Boundary Treaty of 1897 and the Convention of 1908. Duly concluded, signed and ratified, it legally binds the signatory parties and their successors, either directly or by right of devolution. The boundary is partly demarcated.

3. In 1923 when the League of Nations registered these treaties (art.1, para.3 and art.18), by the very fact of Ethiopia’s membership to the League of Nations;

4. In 1934, when the members of the League of Nations accepted the 1908 Convention as the legal basis for solving the Italo-Ethiopian boundary dispute, and when Ethiopia went to war with Fascist Italy (1934-1941) in the defense of its eastern province;

5. In 1945, when the United Nations registered these treaties;

6. In 1950, when the United Nations General Assembly approved the Trusteeship Agreement of 2 December 1950, affirming that Somalia’s boundaries with Ethiopia shall be those fixed by international agreements. In so far as they are not delimited, they shall be delimited in accordance with a procedure approved by the General Assembly;

7. In July 1964, when the OAU Heads of State Summit in Cairo adopted the Resolution (AHG/Res.16 (I) on the inviolability of state frontiers;

8. In 1964, when the Non-Aligned Heads of State Summit in its meeting in Cairo also decided that existing frontiers should be maintained;

9. In 1981, when the OAU Heads of State Summit in Nairobi declared that “the Ogaden is an integral part of Ethiopia.”

10. In 1988, when the late President Muhammad Siad Barre of Somalia signed an agreement in Djibouti with President Mengistu Haile Mariam of Ethiopia renouncing Somalia’s claim to the Ogaden.

Some Ethiopian Somalis, who live in the Ogaden Province, want to exercise their right to self-determination. To that end, they invoke the December 14, 1960 United Nations General
Assembly Declaration on Self-Determination, Res. 1514 (XV). Such a declaration, in the formulation and issuing of which Ethiopia was a party, was never meant to be used as a means of subversion, destabilization and still less, for challenging the unity and territorial integrity of sovereign states, but to speed up the decolonization process particularly in the African continent.

For Ethiopia, therefore, the right of self-determination does have preponderance over the principle of sovereignty. Ethiopia does emphasize that Ethiopian Somalis, who live in the Ogaden Province, enjoy the right to govern themselves, to establish their own regional constitution, to elect their own representatives to regional and federal assemblies, to participate in the executive, legislative and judiciary branches of government, and to use their language as a medium of instruction in schools, and in that way, to exercise the right to self-determination. One could also add for example, that if Somalia’s views on self-determination are to be taken seriously, it should be the first to recognize the Republic of Somaliland because the majority of the citizens of that country have already voted for independence.