

# HORN OF AFRICA BULLETIN

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The Horn of Africa Bulletin is a regional policy periodical, monitoring and analysing key peace and security issues in the Horn with a view to inform and provide alternative analysis on on-going debates and generate policy dialogue around matters of conflict transformation and peacebuilding. The material published in HAB represents a variety of sources and does not necessarily express the views of the LPI.

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Currently, we run conflict transformation programmes in the Horn of Africa and Great Lakes regions in partnership with local civil society organisations and universities in Somalia, Sudan, Ethiopia, Kenya and the DRC. There is also a common programme including publications, policy work and methodology design based in Sweden.

## Opportunity, Location and Strategy: Djibouti's Geo-Political Rise

Djibouti has always been defined by paradoxes and anomalies. It is the sole Francophone country in the Horn of Africa. It has also been in relative terms, an oasis of stability and peace in an otherwise volatile and conflict-prone region. In spite of Djibouti's obvious geo-strategic significance, it has until recently been overlooked by the media and received negligible attention in academic literature.

For a long time Djibouti had been regarded as an insignificant backwater whose economic basis was believed to lie in the rents derived from the Port of Djibouti and whose political existence was guaranteed by France, its former colonial power.

From the late 1990s onwards, several developments have immeasurably added to Djibouti's strategic importance and garnered greater attention for the country. The 9/11 attacks and the US-led 'Global War on Terror', the international naval campaign against piracy in the waters of the Somali coast and the 1998-2000 Ethio-Eritrean war coupled with the political skills of Djibouti's leadership, are the central factors that have led to a shift in its geo-political significance.

This issue of the Horn of Africa Bulletin (HAB) is devoted to Djibouti and examines the multifaceted aspects of Djibouti's internal dynamics and its geo-political significance. The contributors to the issue are drawn from diverse backgrounds and their articles touch on the internal political developments in Djibouti; Djibouti's relations with the Arab world; its efforts to resolve the conflict in Somalia, Djibouti's expanding economic and infrastructural collaboration with Ethiopia as well as the configurations and ramifications of the expanding military-strategic cooperation between Djibouti and major non-African powers. In what is a first for the HAB, this issue is also carrying two articles in French by two of our contributors.

Patrick Ferras' contribution describes the patterns and dynamics that gave rise to the growing non-African military presence in Djibouti and finally examines its implications for Djibouti and the region. Aden Omar Abdillahi analyses the legislative elections of 2013 and the profound political transformations it unleashed in Djibouti. These transformations were a key turning point in the Djiboutian political system and will have a bearing on the upcoming 2016 presidential elections. The contribution by Mohamed Omar is a comprehensive and analytic overview of Djibouti attempts to resolve the conflict in Somalia. The article also provides useful insights into the Djiboutian perspective on how inter-state competition and divergent interests in the Horn of Africa, have bedeviled peacemaking in Somalia. The article by Ambassador Djama Omar Idleh's examines the unfolding of Djibouti's political and economic links with the Arab world. The article by Zelalem Tesfaye studies the expanding economic and infrastructural collaboration between Ethiopia and Djibouti and the ramifications (political and economic) for the rest of the region.

The articles and their conclusions suggest a wide range of recommendations and issues of concern to policy makers. Ferras' article underlines how Djibouti's growing strategic significance has fundamentally shifted its traditional orientation to the outside world and is the outcome of not only developments external to Djibouti but also derived from the skillful maneuvering of its current leadership. At the same time, the obverse side of this state of affairs cannot also be overlooked in the potential for greater foreign influence in Djibouti and the possibility that it could be dragged into external conflicts. Aden's article highlights the fragility

of Djibouti's current political situation and draws attention to the criticality of a smooth political transition in the context of widespread economic dissatisfaction and calls for political liberalisation. The issues brought up in Aden's article become even more critical in a context where it is widely believed that the current president of Djibouti will soon be exiting the political scene due to his advanced years. Mohamed Omar's piece provides readers with useful insights into inter-state rivalries in the Horn and how these tensions have impacted regional initiatives to resolve the conflict in Somalia. This article underlines the need to take account of the competing needs and interests of regional states by the international community, when formulating policy and programmatic interventions in Somalia. Ambassador Djama's article discussing Djibouti's multifaceted relations with the Arab world should also draw attention to the possibility that developments in the Arabian Peninsula could also disproportionately affect Djibouti as is borne out by the influx of refugees fleeing the civil war in Yemen. Zelalem's contribution highlights the growing importance of the economic and infrastructural collaboration between Ethiopia and Djibouti but in a context where collaboration has not been free of some tensions.

Demessie Fantaye

Editor

Life & Peace Institute

## Djibouti between opportunism and realism: Strategic pivot in the Horn

By Patrick Ferras

In light of recent events (the attack against the restaurant *La Chaumière* in May 2014 and the massive influx of refugees from Yemen for several weeks), the Republic of Djibouti regularly appears in articles and comments from journalists. Djibouti's president since 1999, Ismaël Omar Guelleh has played an important role in the recognition of his country abroad and the strategic nature of its geographical position. In this article, I will first focus on the emergence and evolution of the Republic of Djibouti by analysing its major assets and the reasons for a strong foreign presence which have given Djibouti the status of the most important city- military garrison in Africa.

### **Djibouti: a partner that has become essential**

The Republic of Djibouti covers 23,000 km<sup>2</sup> and has a population estimated at 800,000. Independent since 1977, it has maintained its strategic value for France with which it is bound by a defense agreement. The year 2001 was a pivotal year for Djibouti. The attacks of 11 September and the subsequent Global War on Terror by the United States (US) made Djibouti a location sought by all the powers involved in this new model of conflict. A US base quickly took shape alongside the long-standing French presence.

The conflict between Ethiopia and Eritrea, which was only temporarily ended by the Algiers Agreements in December 2000, has led to a situation of “*neither peace nor war*” between the two countries. Aware that the situation will continue, Ethiopia turned to Djibouti for its imports and exports. To date, 85% of Ethiopian trade goes through the port of Djibouti. The decision to open the new port of Doraleh to foreign operators (Dubai) unveils the most modern platform in the region. It has allowed trade between the Arabian Peninsula, the Horn of Africa via the Indian Ocean<sup>[1]</sup>. The international role of Djibouti is linked to the responsiveness and opportunism of Ismaël Omar Guelleh who has integrated his country in the fight against terrorism by providing a secure rear base. The port is also significant to the country's economic development. Since the summit of the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA), hosted in 2006, Djibouti displayed its desire to become the entry point of trade for member states of COMESA<sup>[2]</sup>.

### **France-Djibouti: an older couple that shows signs of weakness**

The 1977 defense agreement and the Defense Cooperation Treaty signed in 2011 confirmed the strategic role of Djibouti to France. The 2011 agreement specified in its preamble that “*the French presence on Djibouti territory meets the common will of the French Republic and the Republic of Djibouti.*” Its main objective is defense cooperation to ensure sustainable peace and security in Djibouti (Art. 2). Article 4 underlined that the parties will regularly exchange views, analyses and information about the risks and potential threats to the Republic of Djibouti. In case of threats, the parties will evaluate

the situation and the measures to be taken for the defense of Djibouti. In this context, France supports the strengthening of the Djibouti Armed Forces and the French Forces stationed in Djibouti (FFDJ) benefit from operational facilities[3]. The financial commitment of France for the presence of FFDJ is a fixed annual contribution of 30 million euros. The strategic interest for France and Djibouti is clear. Approximately 2,000 soldiers are deployed to Djibouti. They serve a large number of air, ground and naval assets[4]. Due to budget restrictions and the priority of the “Barkhane” operation[5], the format of FFDJ could rapidly decrease to little more 1,300 personnel. Nevertheless, Djibouti remains the largest French military installation abroad.

### **Americans in Djibouti: an advanced system of observation and intervention in Africa and the Arabian Peninsula**

Since 2002, US forces have established a base near the French forces proximate to the airport but are also present on the Chabelley airport (south of Djibouti) which has become the base for the drones that conduct missions against Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP). In a few years, the US contingent has more than doubled, exceeding the French contingent and the means deployed are considerable. In less than ten years, the Combined Joint Task Force - Horn of Africa (CJTF HOA) has evolved from a light structure of headquarters to a military base equipped with modern and offensive assets[6].

The CJTF-HOA depends on the US Command for Africa, whose main headquarters is located in Stuttgart (Federal Republic of Germany). The mission of this US Command for Africa is “*to protect and defend the national security interests of the United States by strengthening the defense capabilities of African states and regional organisms and, when directed, conducts military operations, in order to deter and defeat transnational threats and to provide a security environment conducive to good governance and development*”. The CJTF-HOA is the only permanent US military presence in Africa. This military base costs \$38 million. It was re-valued since the visit of Ismaël Omar Guelleh in the US in 2014. The US plans to stay in Djibouti for an indefinite period of time. The doubling of the rent points to both the commitment and US needs on Djiboutian territory. Africa is not a strategic priority for the US[7] and is generally understood as a peripheral space for American power [8]. But, its importance has been revised upward and if the *Light Footprint*[9] must remain minimal, it requires some support points. Djibouti is one of these main points[10].

### **Djibouti: an international garrison**

Along with the US and France, other smaller foreign contingents from Japan, Germany and Spain based in Djibouti have contributed to the fight against terrorism and piracy. The facilities of the port of Djibouti and the French presence have allowed significant logistical support to various naval operations (International, European and NATO). Djibouti has become in a few years an international garrison due to its close proximity to regions in crisis (Yemen, Somalia) and through international shipping routes vital for European and Asian economies.

The stability of Djibouti offers foreign partners in international or regional coalitions in a very turbulent Horn of Africa, transit facilities and major support points. Djibouti with its infrastructure capacities to deliver humanitarian aid in the region and recently in Yemen plays a major geopolitical role that all international actors have understood. China's plan to have military facilities in Djibouti has confirmed the strategic military status of the small country[11]. Rents paid by the various countries which maintain their military assets in Djibouti underlines the opportunism of the current head of state faced with present strategic realities.

## Conclusion

The Republic of Djibouti is a sentinel keeping watch over the Red Sea, the Arabian Peninsula and the Horn of Africa. Capitalizing on an exceptional location, the current head of state has managed to attract investments to develop Djibouti's economy and to focus his central strategy on the port of Djibouti. The stability of this small country offers its partners support points to deploy military assets involved in international missions. Three countries provide Djibouti insurance against current risks and threats. France and the US deter external aggression. Finally, Ethiopia would not accept a situation of chaos in such a friendly country ensuring the transit of its vital imports and exports.

After two decades of French protection, Djibouti has diversified its relations and has established itself as an active member of the international community. The opportunism of its president who exploits the competition between major powers and continually seeks new partners has led to a rise in Djibouti's strategic significance. The recent visits of the Turkish president and the US Secretary of State provide sufficient evidence. US, France and China have invested in Djibouti. Djibouti can no longer be simply dismissed as another example of an African state in the French backyard. France and US are allied but their missions are completely different (Defense agreement / GWOT). China has played an economic role and its foreign policy is not to establish large military bases in Africa. Despite the attack in May 2014, Djibouti has managed in the last decade to "rent" its strategic position and attract new investors. It remains one of the few African countries to have been able to manage and master this comparative advantage.

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## References

- [1] 90 % of global trade is conducted by sea. Ports are key nodes in this huge network.
- [2] COMESA has 19 members including Ethiopia, Eritrea, Djibouti, Sudan, South Sudan, Uganda and Kenya.
- [3] Air base, barracks, communications, troop's movement, security of the military establishments.

[4] Mainly, an infantry regiment, seven fighters (Mirage 2000), a detachment of Army helicopters (Gazelle and Puma), helicopter and cargo aircrafts from the Air Force (Puma, C160 Transall), two light transport boats.

[5] A counter-terrorism force intended to fight against Terrorism in Sahel countries.

[6] Including drones. The troops are more than 2 000.

[7] Papers from the Strategic Research Institute of the Military School, *La Stratégie américaine en Afrique*, Maya Kandel, December 2014.

[8] Paper from the Thomas More Institute, May 31, 2015, Antonin Tisseron.

[9] Concept describing US strategy in Africa.

[10] According to Maya Kandel, Africa is the laboratory of the new approach called Light Footprint (p. 13).

[11] China plans to open a military base in Djibouti to benefit from the exceptional strategic position of this country in the Gulf of Aden and to find a place among the international maritime powers present in this area. (Africa Agency, May 15, 2015).



DJIBOUTI

## La vie politique djiboutienne à l'épreuve des élections législatives de 2013 : vers un rééquilibrage des rapports des forces ?

By Aden Omar Abdillahi

La vie politique djiboutienne a fortement évolué depuis l'indépendance du pays en 1977. Dès le lendemain de l'indépendance, pour sauvegarder l'unité et la cohésion nationales, le choix d'un système à parti unique sembla convenir pour le pouvoir en place. Ainsi le RPP (Rassemblement Populaire pour le Progrès), parti du pouvoir et héritier de la LPAI[1], créé en 1979 demeura seul sur la scène politique nationale jusqu'à l'instauration, par la première constitution djiboutienne de 1992[2], d'un multipartisme partiel limité à quatre partis[3]. Cette réforme démocratique est précipitée par un contexte international[4] particulier et par la guerre civile (1991-1994), qui opposa le gouvernement djiboutien à la rébellion du FRUD (Front pour la Restauration de l'Unité et de la Démocratie). Ce n'est qu'en 2002 que fut consacré le multipartisme intégral. De même, la constitution a instauré un régime politique présidentiel, dominé par un président de la République à la fois chef de l'Etat et chef du gouvernement, qui est élu au suffrage universel direct doté d'un mandat de six ans renouvelable une fois. La révision constitutionnelle de 2010 a supprimé la limitation à deux mandats et réduit la durée de chaque mandat à cinq ans. Le Parlement djiboutien est constitué d'une seule chambre, l'Assemblée nationale, où siègent les 65 députés élus sur la base d'un vote à



liste majoritaire et depuis 2013 d'un scrutin de liste proportionnel.

Depuis les élections législatives de 2003, on observe une bipolarisation de la vie politique : d'un côté l'alliance des partis au pouvoir, l'Union pour la Majorité Présidentielle (UMP) et de l'autre, la coalition des partis de l'opposition, l'Union pour l'Alternance Démocratique (UAD), depuis 2013 nommée l'Union pour le Salut National (USN). Après dix ans de boycott électoral, l'opposition, réunie sous la nouvelle bannière de l'USN, contesta les résultats officiels des législatives de février 2013 qui lui attribuaient 10 sièges. Elle refusa de siéger à l'Assemblée nationale et procéda à la création d'un Parlement parallèle dans lequel elle détiendrait la majorité des sièges. Il en résulta une longue crise politique rythmée par des affrontements entre les éléments des forces de sécurité et les sympathisants de l'opposition, par des arrestations et des emprisonnements.

Cette élection a été particulière à plus d'un titre. D'abord, le scrutin de liste proportionnel a été introduit pour les élections législatives au lieu d'une liste majoritaire qui ne laissait guère de chance à une meilleure représentation des différentes forces politiques à l'Assemblée nationale. Ensuite, tous les partis politiques, y compris ceux de l'opposition, ont participé à ces élections. Et cela met un terme à des années de boycott électoral de l'opposition. Toutes les grandes figures de la scène politique nationale ont été présentes lors de cette compétition. Egalement, organisées à trois ans de la prochaine présidentielle, ces élections conditionneraient certainement le positionnement des uns et des autres pour 2016 et dessineront les contours du climat politique, qui mettra en orbite les prétendants à la relève. Enfin, les élections communales de 2012 dans la capitale ont ouvert la possibilité que l'UMP pouvait être battue. Cette perspective a cassé le mur de l'invraisemblable politique. Désormais, en matière d'élections, tous les scénarios seraient envisageables dans les esprits de tout un chacun, parti politique comme électeur. Dans quelle mesure les législatives de 2013 et la crise politique postélectorale ont-elles redéfini les rapports des forces dans la vie politique djiboutienne ?

Nous présenterons, dans un premier temps, la structuration des alliances et les principaux points de clivage entre la majorité et l'opposition avant d'analyser, dans une seconde partie, l'aboutissement de l'Accord cadre de décembre 2014.

### **Structuration et clivages partisans**

D'un côté, il y a l'UMP qui regroupe cinq partis politiques : le RPP, le FRUD, le PSD (Parti Social Démocrate), l'UPR (Union des Partisans de la Réforme) et une aile factice du PND (Parti National Démocratique). L'UMP a été créée en 2003 autour du RPP, l'ancien parti unique, et du FRUD. Tout comme son principal membre, le RPP, elle a gagné quasiment toutes les élections : deux présidentielles (2005 et 2011), trois législatives (2003, 2008 et 2013) et les premières élections communales de 2006. En revanche, lors des élections communales de 2012 elle a perdu la mairie de la capitale face à la liste indépendante RADD (Rassemblement pour l'Action, la Démocratie et le Développement). Le RPP demeure ultra-dominant au sein de l'UMP au point que la ligne

politique de l'alliance se confond avec la sienne. Le RPP, en tant qu'héritier du principal mouvement indépendantiste, s'appuie sur cette crédibilité historique que les Djiboutiens lui reconnaissent. C'est le parti le mieux structuré et qui dispose de la plus large implantation territoriale. Il n'a jamais perdu une élection depuis sa création et a gouverné le pays sans discontinuité durant les trente huit années d'indépendance. Lors des législatives de 2013, l'UMP mettait en avant le bilan du gouvernement de ces dernières années, notamment les réalisations économiques et les efforts en faveur de la paix et de la stabilité aux niveaux national et régional. Elle promettait la continuité tout en mettant en garde les électeurs de ne pas se laisser emporter par la nouveauté, synonyme d'incertitude, incarnée par l'USN.

De l'autre côté, les partis politiques de l'opposition ont créé en janvier 2013 la coalition USN sur les ruines de l'UAD et après dix ans de boycott, qu'ils justifiaient par le cadre électoral discriminatoire à leurs égards. L'USN regrouperait sept partis : l'UDJ (Union pour la Démocratie et la Justice), l'ARD (Alliance Républicaine pour le Développement), le PDD (Parti Djiboutien pour le Développement), le PND, le MRD (Mouvement pour le Renouveau Démocratique), le RADD et le MoDeL (Mouvement pour le Développement et la Liberté). Seuls l'UDJ, l'ARD et le PDD sont officiellement reconnus comme membres de l'USN par le ministère de l'intérieur. Après les élections, le CDU (Centre des Démocrates Unifiés), seul parti du centre, a décidé de rallier l'USN. Quelques mois avant ces élections rien ne présageait la mise en place d'une coalition aussi large d'opposants prête à prendre part à une compétition politique. L'introduction de la proportionnelle à 20% pour les législatives d'une part, et la nécessité de revenir dans le jeu politique national avant l'échéance cruciale de l'élection présidentielle de 2016, d'autre part, ont fédéré les forces de l'opposition. Les leaders des oulémas<sup>[5]</sup> modernes, très écoutés et populaires, ont décidé d'apporter leur soutien à l'USN après le refus de la légalisation de leur parti, le MoDeL. En l'espace de quelques semaines, l'USN s'est muée en une redoutable machine politique. Surfant sur le mécontentement populaire face à la situation économique et sociale difficile du pays, l'USN appelait les électeurs à faire le choix du changement.

Dans le fond, il n'y a pas de grande différence idéologique ou programmatique entre l'UMP et l'USN. Cependant, le niveau de compétition de cette période dépassait de loin les standards habituels pour une élection de ce type, tout comme les enjeux immédiats. De même, la population s'est fortement mobilisée pour prendre part aux meetings et manifestations de la campagne électorale. L'UMP a mobilisé l'essentiel de son électorat historique composé de femmes et de personnes âgées. Ces groupes, considérés plutôt conservateurs, votent UMP parce que sceptiques à l'égard du changement et redoutant plus l'aventure et l'incertitude. Leur peur de l'inconnu et leur attachement à la paix et à la stabilité dominant leur désir d'amélioration. D'autant plus que la condition de la femme djiboutienne a évolué positivement sur beaucoup d'aspects durant la dernière décennie. Quant à l'USN, elle attire plutôt les jeunes et les cadres.

### **Manœuvres politiques et sortie de crise**

Après la proclamation des résultats officiels et leur rejet par l'opposition, une période de

crise politique tendue s'est installée. A la bataille électorale entre l'UMP et l'USN a succédé un affrontement entre le gouvernement, vainqueur des élections, et l'USN. Pour le gouvernement, il s'agit de revenir au calme, convaincre l'opposition d'accepter les résultats officiels et de siéger à l'Assemblée nationale afin de rassurer les Djiboutiens et envoyer un signal positif aux partenaires au développement et aux investisseurs. Pour l'USN, il importe, après une longue absence, d'être reconnue comme acteur politique en position de discuter d'égal à égal avec les tenants du pouvoir, d'obtenir des garanties juridiques pour une compétition politique plus transparente à l'avenir, de libérer les leaders et sympathisants de l'opposition en détention, d'acter l'abandon des poursuites judiciaires qui pèsent sur certains d'entre eux ou de leurs partis et enfin de rétablir dans leur fonction plusieurs opposants ayant perdu leur travail du fait de leur affiliation politique.

Dans le but de provoquer l'implosion de l'USN, le gouvernement a commencé à investir beaucoup d'énergie pour briser la détermination de ses leaders par une approche individualisante et sélective. L'USN se contentait du seul fait que la crise persistait, se réjouissait de l'embarras de la majorité au pouvoir face à l'absence de solution et se voyait en position de dicter ses conditions. Tandis que le gouvernement manœuvrait activement mais discrètement, l'USN s'empêtrait dans des discussions techniques interminables et conflictuelles entre ses factions sur les détails du contenu de l'accord idéal. En tentant de concilier et de faire la synthèse entre les différentes positions internes l'USN opposait les perfectionnistes contre les pragmatiques, les jusqu'aboutistes contre les réalistes et les radicaux contre les modérés, Entre temps, le gouvernement laboure le terrain et tente (aidé par la conjoncture) de reconquérir la confiance populaire par l'annonce d'une batterie de nouveaux programmes économiques et sociaux, par exemple projets portuaires avec les chinois et assurance maladie universelle. Le gouvernement rappelle aussi les Djiboutiens des efforts du président de la République en faveur de la paix dans le conflit, qui opposait le gouvernement au FRUD, et les récentes discussions inter-somaliennes (Somalie-Somaliland), qui se sont tenues à Djibouti. En même temps les images de la réconciliation après la guerre civile tournent en boucle à la télévision, A ces projets et images, séduisants pour la masse, l'USN opposait un langage technique sophistiqué, intellectuellement correct, mais inaccessible à la raison ordinaire et très abstrait pour émouvoir ou faire rêver. Le gouvernement mobilise, amadoue, persuade les siens et dissuade les autres. L'USN agite les jeunes, ghettoïse son action et poursuit une tactique de confrontation permanente entre ses sympathisants et les forces de sécurité. Elle s'appuie aussi sur une stratégie de communication efficace à travers les réseaux sociaux du web et la presse écrite européenne, pour maintenir la pression des pays occidentaux sur le gouvernement djiboutien afin de le contraindre à négocier.

Après l'échec de trois rounds de négociations, l'Accord cadre du 31 décembre 2014 marque l'apaisement de la vie politique nationale faisant suite à presque deux années de crise politique ouverte entre la majorité gouvernementale et l'opposition. L'USN a troqué le retour de ses députés à l'Assemblée nationale contre des concessions de la partie gouvernementale. La plus importante étant la mise en place des réformes démocratiques : rendre la Commission électorale nationale indépendante (CENI)

paritaire et véritablement indépendante et l'instauration d'un statut de l'opposition. A ce jour, les négociations sur ces deux points sont toujours en cours au sein de la commission parlementaire paritaire UMP-USN.

### Conclusion

Les élections législatives de février 2013 et la crise politique postélectorale ont bouleversé les habitudes politiques à Djibouti. Contrairement à un certain point de vue pessimiste, ces événements ont enclenché un processus de changement, si non des mentalités, du moins des perceptions, à la fois dans l'esprit des Djiboutiens et des acteurs politiques face à la chose politique et plus généralement face aux questions d'intérêt public. Le terme « opposition », qui était auparavant banni du vocabulaire public est à présent prononcé par tout un chacun sans crainte et de façon naturelle. La culture du débat contradictoire s'est installée surtout avec la présence des parlementaires de l'opposition à l'Assemblée nationale pour la première fois de l'histoire politique du pays depuis l'indépendance. De même, les séances des questions-réponses aux membres du gouvernement devant les députés sont très suivies par la population et donnent lieu à des alignements sur les positions de l'UMP ou de l'USN. L'offre politique s'est diversifiée, la prise de position politique s'est démocratisée et on assiste à la structuration d'un véritable clivage social basé sur ce qui caractérise une génération et sur le genre.

Cette période a donné naissance aussi à un meilleur rééquilibrage des rapports de force entre la majorité et l'opposition. La majorité, secouée dans son monopole, a compris que les faveurs de l'opinion publique ne sont pas des acquis définitifs et qu'il va falloir écouter, proposer et convaincre en permanence les Djiboutiens. Elle a appris à accepter et à composer avec une opposition forte d'un large soutien populaire. De son côté, l'opposition unifiée a réussi à s'inscrire dans le théâtre politique national. Elle est une voix écoutée et une force politique porteuse d'un discours alternatif.

Désormais dans l'histoire de la vie politique djiboutienne, très probablement, il y aura un avant et un après février 2013. Dans moins d'un an, en avril 2016, la tenue de l'élection présidentielle fera office de test grandeur nature de cette balbutiante démocratisation du pays.

*[Summary]The Djiboutian Political System in the Aftermath of the 2013 Parliamentary Elections – A Fundamental Shift?*

*The political landscape of Djibouti has changed considerably since independence in 1977. A one party system until the country's first constitution in 1992, Djibouti has since evolved into a multiparty system with a proportional electoral system. Since the 2013 parliamentary elections, a dualistic party system has emerged. On the one hand the alliance of the five parties in power, UMP (Union for Presidential Majority), dominated by the former single party RPP (Popular Rally for Progress), and on the other hand the coalition of the seven opposition parties, USN (Union for National Salvation), that contested the results of the 2013 elections, resulting in a drawn out political crisis marked by clashes between opposition supporters and security forces.*

*Only a few months before these elections there were nothing that fore-shadowed the emergence of a coalition of opposition parties backed by a large part of the population, nor that these elections were going to be such a landmark in the country's democratisation.*

*The UMP has since its creation in 2003, like its dominant party RPP before, won all elections. So why were the 2013 elections so distinct? The stakes in 2013 were high. Voters had immersed themselves to an unusual degree in the electoral campaigns. Important contributing factors for this were the 2012 local elections in the capital, won by an independent party, opening up the possibility that the UMP could lose, and the introduction of the proportional electoral system in 2013. For the opposition it was a window of opportunity, before the presidential elections of 2016 and after the decade long boycott of elections. In a matter of weeks, the USN had mutated into a formidable political machine riding a wave of popular discontent with the existing socio-economic situation.*

*During the crisis that ensued after the declaration of the electoral results the government strove to maintain stability. For the opposition, it was critical to wring concessions from the state, ensure guarantees for future political competition and achieve the release of imprisoned opposition leaders and supporters.*

*UMP tried to regain the confidence of the people by announcing new socio-economic programmes and by harking back to the regime's political achievements both domestic and foreign. The USN persisted with its tactic of confrontations between its sympathisers and the security forces. It also used social media and print media abroad to maintain international pressure on the regime.*

*After three rounds of negotiations, a framework agreement was signed between UMP and USN in late December 2014. This restored calm after nearly two years of political crisis. The USN's members of parliament assumed their places in the national assembly in exchange for democratic concessions and reforms from the government side.*

*The 2013 elections and the political crisis that ensued unleashed a process that changed how politics and more generally how public interest is conceived by Djiboutians and their politicians. An adversarial debate climate has been allowed to thrive with the presence of opposition members in parliament for the first time since independence. The political arena has broadened and new political cleavages based on gender and age have emerged*

*The aftermath of the crisis led to more balanced relations between the opposition and the government. The UMP has realised that it needs to pay closer attention to public opinion. It has also learned to accept the presence of an opposition with substantial popular support. For their part the opposition has managed to garner stature and legitimacy.*

*The grand test for this incipient democratisation will be the 2016 presidential elections.*

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## Bibliographie

[1] La Ligue Populaire Africaine pour l'Indépendance était, sous la colonisation, le principal mouvement de lutte pour l'indépendance.

[2] Avant cette date, le pays ne disposait pas de Constitution. Deux lois constitutionnelles organisaient les pouvoirs et permettaient le fonctionnement des institutions étatiques.

[3] Le RPP, le FRUD, le PND et le PRD.

[4] La fin de la guerre froide a fait naître l'idée de voir les anciens pays du tiers monde, notamment l'Afrique, s'engager sur la voie de la démocratisation.

[5] Pour plus d'explications sur les liens entre islam et politique, lire Aden Omar Abdillahi, « La dimension politique de l'islam à Djibouti », *Observatoire pluriannuel des enjeux politiques et sécuritaires dans la Corne de l'Afrique*, note 1, février



DJIBOUTI, ETHIOPIA, REGIONAL PERSPECTIVES, SOMALIA

## Djibouti and the Somali conflict: Permanence, evolution, and constraints associated with a commitment to a complex crisis

By Mohamed Omar Youssouf

It is not by accident that Mr. Hassan Sheikh Ali Mahamoud, the first president to be elected inside Somalia since 1991, made his first official visit to Djibouti. On the one hand, this trip was significant, symbolically and politically, because it sent a signal to regional and international players regarding Djibouti's singular role during the transition period and the special place occupied by Djibouti in the eyes of the new Somali authorities. On the other hand, this visit demonstrated the Somali leader's deep gratitude to the Djibouti's head of state, Ismail Omar Guelleh, who became the first foreign president to set foot in Somalia during the civil war period when he visited the country in August 2011.

This paper discusses Djibouti's multifaceted involvement in the Somali crisis. The broadening of this commitment and the obstacles encountered will be discussed to better understand the role of Djibouti in Somalia.

### Djibouti and the Somali crisis: The reasons behind the commitment

The involvement of Djibouti in Somalia began prior to the collapse of the Somali state [1]. The Djiboutian authorities paid close attention to the crisis and sought to raise the

international community's awareness of the issue. The early involvement of Djibouti in the Somali crisis is partly explicable by the close socio-cultural links between the two countries. Furthermore, the role of Somalia in the Djiboutian independent movement during the colonial period also explains Djibouti's decision to take part in the process of finding a solution to the conflict, despite the constraints[2].

In a fluid regional and international context, Djibouti hosted the first conference of national reconciliation from June to July 1991 following an initiative led by Italy and Egypt. The timing indicates the eagerness of the Djiboutian authorities to find a swift solution to the Somali crisis. In accordance with the African consensus on border integrity and in a bid to discourage the breakup of Somalia, the unilateral declaration of independence by the SNM (Somali National Movement) was rejected by Djiboutian authorities who tried to convince the new authority to participate in the dialogue for reconciliation[3]. The two agreements reached in Djibouti were vitiated by the competition between the two warlords (Aidid and Ali Mahdi) in Mogadishu and the lack of support from the international community[4].

The renewed outbreak of violence coupled with the famine led to intense diplomatic activities by certain international organisations. The United Nations Security Council began to take closer interest in the Somali issue. Neither the arms embargo nor the deployment of peacekeeping operations (UNOSOM I, UNITAF, UNOSOM II) between 1992 and 1995 managed to end the conflict, let alone a political solution to the crisis. Pressure from the United States, and the non-adherence of the Somali players to the various peace initiatives eventually led the Security Council to withdraw peacekeeping forces, thereby giving the countries of the region the heavy responsibility to help Somalis to reconcile and find peace[5].

The dominant Djiboutian perspective holds that the lack of commitment from the member states of the Security Council, the ambivalent role of certain countries of the region and the ambiguous nature of Somali political players are the reasons behind the failure to find a permanent solution to the Somali conflict. From the Djiboutian perspective, the above interpretation was borne out, when President Guelleh laid the ground for an innovative solution to Somali crisis.

### **The Arta Initiative in a rapidly changing regional and international context.**

The years preceding the hosting of the conference for peace and national reconciliation in the town of Arta were characterized by a number of attempts by various players to resolve the Somali crisis[6]. Taking advantage of the rotating presidency of Inter Governmental Authority on Development (IGAD) and the fact that Ethiopia was embroiled in a border conflict with Eritrea, the Djiboutian leader used this sub-regional organisation to find a solution to the Somali crisis[7].

Arta was characterised by several novel features. It included civil society at large (the private sector, women's groups and community leaders). During the preparation of the conference, the initiative received media coverage and extensive publicity. This was a break from the tradition of holding secret conferences which had become a hallmark of

reconciliation talks between Somalis. The Djiboutian government tried, albeit in vain, to involve Somaliland and Puntland in the peace process in Arta.

Having been able to bring together around its peace plan a greater number of Somalis than prior initiatives[8], the Arta conference was officially launched on May 2, 2000. The Arta process led to the drafting of a Transitional National Charter and the establishment of a Transitional National Assembly. The transitional assembly held its first meeting on August 13 2000 and elected Abdiqassim Salad the President of Transitional National Government (TNG) on the 26<sup>th</sup> August. He became the first Somali leader since 1991 to be at the helm of an internationally recognised government.

The Arta conference nevertheless faced opposition from some factions. With the connivance of Ethiopia, these groups came out in concerted opposition to the conference and its outcomes. Following the 11 September attacks, the Ethiopian regime were increasingly of the view that elements within the TNG were allied to Islamist extremism, which in turn discouraged the larger international community from rendering support to the transition process. Arguably, if responsibility for the failure of the TNG is partly explicable by the actions and agendas of foreign actors, the members and president of the TNG are partly responsible too, in their failure to exploit the interest and momentum generated by the Arta conference[9].

Since 2002, with the help of Ethiopia, another reconciliation process was launched in Kenya and led to the formation of a transitional government composed of the Transitional Federal Government (TFG) and the Transitional Federal Parliament (TFP). However, the project's legitimacy was questionable due to the perception by some sections of Somali opinion that the initiative was an Ethiopian "Trojan horse"[10]. The disagreements between the TFG and parts of the TFP and the rise of the Islamic Courts defeated the Mbagathi process. The covert US operations in Somalia and the Ethiopian intervention in 2006 against the Islamic Courts led to the stalling of the reconciliation process between Somali players (TFG and Islamic Courts) initiated by the Arab League, and the emergence of an Islamist insurgency. The government of Eritrea sponsored the formation, of the Alliance for the Re-Liberation of Somalia (ARS) in Asmara, which spearheaded the fight against the TFG and its Ethiopian allies.

The mediation process conducted in Djibouti by the United Nations in 2008 between the TFG and sections of the ARS led to the integration of some members of the ARS into an enlarged Parliament and the election of a new president, Sheik Sharif Sheik Ahmed. The willingness of the Djiboutian authorities to contemplate working with elements in the ARS in May 2008 has to be understood in the context of the tense relations with the regime in Asmara[11].

### **The decision to commit troops to the African mission in Somalia and a shift on Somaliland.**

Unlike some neighboring countries, Djibouti's involvement in the resolution of the Somali conflict which had been exclusively political and non-military for many years assumed a new dimension with Djibouti's decision to contribute troops to the African



Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM). This peacekeeping operation was beset with difficulties. The reluctance of African states to provide troops, the lack of adequate resources and the distrust exhibited by Somalis towards the presence of foreign troops led to a situation where the first Ugandan and Burundian troops suffered great losses.

While the Djiboutian authorities were envisioning participating in AMISOM, the key turning point was President Guelleh's speech[12] before the Security Council. It was towards the end of 2011 and after having been trained by French and US soldiers, the first Djiboutian regiment composed of 950 soldiers was sent to Baladweyne, the capital city of the Hiraan region in central Somalia[13]. Despite the structural constraints[14], the military commitment of Djibouti is important symbolically. The UN's reluctance to deploy peacekeeping forces to replace African soldiers and the presence of Ethiopian and Kenyan troops, distrusted by Somalis[15], renders Djiboutian participation in AMISOM critical to the mission's legitimacy.

Upon their arrival, the Djiboutian troops managed to create a climate of trust with the local authorities and the population, which made it easier for them to initiate dialogue between the various Hawiye clans of the region, thereby enabling the marginalisation of Al-Shabab[16]. Members of several clan militias have been integrated into the Somali security forces after having been trained by the Djiboutian officers[17]. Furthermore, the decisive gains secured by the Djiboutian troops with the support of the Ethiopian contingent helped to weaken Al-Shabab in the region[18]. On the humanitarian front, areas previously controlled by Al-Shabab, were now within reach.

Another new aspect in Djibouti's role in Somalia centers on the softening of Djibouti's stance regarding Somaliland over the last few years. The Djiboutian authorities have adjusted to the new context of relations between Somalia and Somaliland in the aftermath of the London Conference of July 2012. For the first time, Somaliland took part in a conference on Somalia. At the end of the London Conference, the president of Somalia and his Somaliland counterpart agreed to future talks about the relations of the two entities. Having always opposed recognition of Somaliland in the absence of a resolution to the conflict in the rest of the country, the Djiboutian authorities have naturally been in favor of the idea of negotiations between the two entities on the issue of secession. It is within this framework that Djibouti hosted the third round of discussions between the Somali president and his Somaliland counterpart at the end of 2014.

## **Conclusion**

Djibouti's involvement in the resolution of the Somali crisis has evolved over the years. It is also undeniable that the Djiboutian authorities have demonstrated their willingness to play a more significant and decisive role in Somalia since President Guelleh came to power.

However, Djibouti's efforts in Somalia and the outcomes have to be understood in the context of the structural constraints which have limited the impact of Djibouti in the Somalia crisis, such as its limited resources. An additional set of factors which have

constrained the efforts of Djibouti revolve around the competing strategic interests of regional and non-regional states. Coupled with the peculiarities of the Somali crisis and the lack of interest of the international community, unless in rare instances (terrorism and piracy), it has led to a situation whereby the consequences rather than the root causes attract attention. In turn, it limits the efficacy and impact of initiatives at the regional level.

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[1] The conflict in the north of Somalia between SNM (Somali National Movement) and the regime of Siyad Barreh triggered the first waves of refugees' in these regions towards Djibouti. There are 20,000 Somali refugees in Djibouti.

<http://www.unhcr.fr/cgi-bin/texis/vtx/page?page=4aae621d44b&submit=GO> (accessed May 15th 2015)

[2] Small country with less than one million inhabitants and with limited economic resources, Djiboutian authorities also had to contend with the emergence of an armed rebellion in the north of the country (Front pour la Restauration de l'Unité et de la Démocratie - FRUD).

[3] FONTRIER M., L'Etat démantelé (1991-1995). Annales de la Somalie, L'Harmattan, Paris, 2014, p. 93-94.

[4] Interpeace/Center For Research and Dialogue., A history of Mediation in Somalia since 1988, May 2009, p. 11. Available at:

<http://www.interpeace.org/publications/somali-region/60-a-history-of-mediation-in-somali-a-since-1988-english/file> (accessed May 15th, 2015).

[5] Resolution 954 on Somalia of 4 November 1994 (S / RES / 954). UN Security Council. <http://www.un.org/fr/documents/>

[6] There were discussions in Nairobi to bring together some warlords (October 1996) and the Sodere process in Ethiopia (January 1997), then further discussions in Yemen (May 1997) and finally the Cairo conference (November 1997). Reading the UN SG reports covering this period reveals that competition between countries in the region (S/1997/135, S/1997/715, S/1998/882). <http://www.un.org/fr/documents/>

[7] Cf. Declaration of the 7th Summit of Heads of State and Government of IGAD, November 26th 1999. See Appendix 4 of Interpeace/Center For Research and Dialogue., *op cit.*, p. 85.

[8] Cf. § 7 of the UN Secretary General's report on the situation in Somalia, 19 December 2000. (S/2000/1211). <http://www.un.org/fr/documents>

[9] Interpeace/Center For Research and Dialogue., *op cit.*, p. 50.

[10] MARCHAL R. La Somalie : un nouveau front antiterroriste ? », Les Etudes du CERI, n° 135, Juin 2007, p. 7.

<http://www.sciencespo.fr/ceri/sites/sciencespo.fr/ceri/files/etude135.pdf> (accessed May 26th 2015)

[11] It was on the day of the signing of ceasefire agreement that Eritrea decided to drag Djibouti into a border conflict. To find an analysis of the links between the border conflict between Eritrea and Djibouti, the Somali crisis and the lack of a permanent solution to the conflict between Ethiopia and Eritrea, see our presentation in Dakar at the Second Conference of the African Society of International Law in October 2013. Available at : <http://afrilex.u-bordeaux4.fr/autour-du-reglement-des-differends.html>

[12] The president declared before the Security Council that « With Mogadishu no longer controlled, a decision has to be taken, once and for all, in the absence of alternative solutions, to cleanse the Somali capital and its surroundings from militants in order to bring safety and law and order to the city... That will give the government an important and solid base to control the whole country ». Speech of 19 May 2010. <http://www.un.org/press/fr/2010/CS9930.doc.html> (accessed May 27th 2015).

[13] Between March and May 2015, a second contingent of the same number of men joined the first in order to strengthen their brothers in arms already on the ground.

[14] With an army of barely ten thousand men, Djibouti is among the contributing countries of AMISOM, the one that has the smallest military capacity compared with Burundian employees (50,000), Ethiopia (138000) and Uganda (46000) . With some two thousand troops deployed in Somalia, is about 20% of the army which is in Somalia.

[15] It is also not insignificant that Ethiopian and Kenyan soldiers are deployed in areas on the border of Somalia with their countries (Sector 2 and 3 for Kenya and sector 3 and 4 for Ethiopia).

[16] Peace and Security Council, Africa Union, Report of The Chairperson of the Commission on the situation in Somalia, 13 juin 2013, PSC/PR/2.(CCCLXXIX), [www.peaceau.org/fr/resource/documents](http://www.peaceau.org/fr/resource/documents) (accessed 25 mai 2015).

[17] Djiboutian officers provided training to nearly a thousand Somali soldiers and some hundreds of police officers who were integrated into the Somali security forces. <http://amisom-au.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/11/Sector-IV-Belet-Weyne.pdf> (accessed May 26th 2015)

[18] These military gains in the field were obtained as part of Eagle and Indian Ocean operations undertaken by AMISOM in all its areas of activity from March and August 2014. Peace and Security Council, Africa Union, Report of The Chairperson of the Commission on the situation in Somalia, 16 october 2014, PSC/PR/2.(CDLXII), [www.peaceau.org/fr/resource/documents](http://www.peaceau.org/fr/resource/documents) (accessed May 26th 2015)



DJIBOUTI, EGYPT, LIBYA, SAUDI ARABIA, SOMALIA, SUDAN, YEMEN

## Les relations multidimensionnelles entre Djibouti et le monde arabe

By Djama Omar Idleh

La République de Djibouti est un îlot francophone entouré par un océan arabo-anglophone. Située à la pointe de la Corne de l'Afrique, elle dispose d'une superficie de 23200km<sup>2</sup> et d'une population avoisinant les 900 000 habitants. En dépit du caractère restreint de son territoire, cette jeune nation rassemble toutes les communautés de la sous-région et d'ailleurs. Si son isolement linguistique pendant la période coloniale ne posait aucun problème, en revanche, une fois l'indépendance proclamée, cette situation ne s'accommodait plus avec l'ambition de la jeune République de s'affranchir du joug colonial en s'intégrant dans son espace arabe. De ce fait, l'adhésion officielle de Djibouti à la Ligue Arabe intervient le 4 septembre 1977. Elle devient à cette occasion, après le Soudan et la Somalie, le troisième pays afro-arabe de cette organisation panarabe. La proximité géographique, les liens historiques, religieux et culturels sont les principales raisons de cette adhésion. Il faut souligner, par ailleurs, qu'appartenir au bloc arabe procure à cette jeune nation un indéfectible soutien diplomatique et financier. Enfin, la position géographique avantageuse de Djibouti a été un élément décisif dans cette adhésion du fait qu'elle contribue grandement à valoriser l'importance géostratégique globale du monde arabe.

Aussi loin que l'on remonte dans l'Histoire, les peuples de la Corne de l'Afrique, dont celui de la République de Djibouti, ont entretenu des rapports suivis avec l'Arabie voisine. Il en est né des liens solides que l'avènement de l'Islam a considérablement approfondis. Le facteur géographique a joué un rôle déterminant dans le tissage des relations originelles comme dans la diffusion de la troisième grande religion monothéiste. Conséquence de ces liens historiques, la République de Djibouti appartient au monde afro-arabe. Cela explique que les autorités gouvernementales aient engagé dès l'accession à l'indépendance une politique multidimensionnelle avec le bloc arabe. Cette démarche a pour objectif de réhabiliter et raffermir une identité nationale bafouée par plus d'un siècle de colonisation.

Cet article vise à analyser succinctement les liens culturels, diplomatiques et économiques de Djibouti avec le monde arabe.

### La politique d'arabisation

La politique d'arabisation du pays s'est faite à travers son introduction dans le système éducatif national. Le gouvernement de la jeune République, après une période difficile entre 1977 et 1982, promut l'enseignement de la langue arabe à partir de la 5<sup>ème</sup> année du primaire. L'insuffisance des moyens humains, l'absence de programme d'arabe approprié mais aussi de manuels et de méthodes pédagogiques adaptés ont été les principaux obstacles rencontrés par le jeune gouvernement djiboutien dans la mise en œuvre de sa politique de promotion de la langue arabe. Face à cette situation, le

gouvernement se trouva dans l'obligation de faire appel à la générosité de l'ALESCO (Organisation arabe pour l'éducation, la culture et les sciences) et des États arabes. Ces derniers envoyèrent des enseignants d'arabe de nationalité tunisienne qui entrèrent en fonction dès la rentrée scolaire de septembre 1978. Il faut noter aussi que certains pays frères contribuèrent généreusement en fondant des écoles (madrasas) à Djibouti et en accordant des bourses aux étudiants voulant poursuivre leur cursus dans ces pays. Au premier rang de ces nations, se trouvent l'Irak, l'Arabie Saoudite et le Yémen. Malgré les difficultés rencontrées, la première phase de l'arabisation de Djibouti a connu de bons résultats.

Depuis l'arrivée au pouvoir d'Ismail Omar Guelleh, en 1999, une seconde étape de l'arabisation du pays a été franchie. En effet, à l'instar du français, cette deuxième phase d'arabisation a eu pour but d'approfondir l'enseignement de la langue arabe à partir des premières classes à l'école primaire. Une telle démarche se fixait comme objectif de former une génération de Djiboutiens parfaitement bilingue et visait à inscrire définitivement Djibouti dans le champ arabe. De même, dans la Constitution djiboutienne, le français et l'arabe sont les deux langues officielles du pays. Aujourd'hui, le succès de la politique de l'arabisation est une réalité palpable dans le quotidien des Djiboutiens. En effet, en plus du système éducatif, l'arabe est présent dans les médias (radio, télévision, presse), les enseignes des ministères et autres lieux publics sont désormais en arabe et en français, des cours en commerce sont dispensés en langue arabe pour les hommes d'affaires nationaux, des foires arabes sont régulièrement organisées par la Chambre de Commerce de Djibouti et le pays dispose d'un journal quotidien publié entièrement en langue arabe (Al-Qarn). Aujourd'hui, la place de plus en plus prépondérante qu'occupe l'arabe à tous les niveaux des institutions éducatives, d'une part, et le nombre sans cesse croissant des Djiboutiens et des Djiboutiennes diplômés des universités arabes, d'autre part, démontrent l'indéniable succès de la politique d'arabisation de Djibouti.

### **Les liens diplomatiques**

Aussitôt l'indépendance du pays proclamée, les pays arabes - l'Arabie Saoudite, l'Égypte, le Yémen, la Libye, la Somalie, le Soudan en tête - se sont empressés d'établir des relations diplomatiques avec Djibouti. Du fait de ses ressources financières limitées, Djibouti créa à son tour des missions diplomatiques auprès de ces pays. Depuis 1999, le nouveau Président de la République a fait de l'intégration de Djibouti dans son environnement géopolitique arabe l'un des axes stratégiques prioritaires de sa politique étrangère. Cette démarche a eu pour conséquence une véritable revitalisation des relations diplomatiques entre Djibouti et les pays arabes. En effet, la création de nombreuses missions diplomatiques djiboutiennes dans les pays arabes tels que le Qatar, le Koweït, les Emirats Arabes Unis, le Soudan et le Maroc demeure la démonstration d'une évidente volonté politique de mieux s'intégrer dans cet espace arabe. De plus, l'ouverture de plus en plus d'ambassades arabes à Djibouti explique l'intérêt qu'accordent ces pays à son endroit. Les visites incessantes qu'effectuent les leaders politiques tout comme les hommes d'affaires des pays arabes du Golfe en République de Djibouti constituent aussi un signe supplémentaire du succès de cette nouvelle approche

des autorités du pays qui accordent une importance particulière à la diplomatie économique.

### **La coopération économique et commerciale**

Au lendemain de l'accession à l'indépendance, la jeune République a bénéficié d'un soutien financier constant et conséquent de la part des pays arabes du Golfe, notamment l'Arabie Saoudite qui s'illustra par sa générosité sans limite à l'égard de Djibouti. Aujourd'hui, de nombreux projets sont finalisés ou en cours de l'être grâce aux capitaux privés et publics des pays arabes. A l'inverse de l'absence de confiance des entreprises occidentales, surtout françaises, dans le potentiel de l'économie djiboutienne, les investisseurs et les institutions financières arabes accordent un intérêt toujours croissant. Ces investissements arabes bénéficient aussi bien au secteur privé qu'au public et ce sur le long terme. C'est le cas de la construction du port ultramoderne de Doraleh, il y a dix ans, et du développement des infrastructures du vieux port djiboutien dans le cadre d'un partenariat avec DP World, un opérateur portuaire émirati, depuis le début des années 2000. Ces ports, de standard international, sont considérés comme les plus sophistiqués de la région. C'est le cas aussi du projet de la construction du futur complexe universitaire de Djibouti. Il sera réalisé avec le concours du Fonds Arabe pour le Développement Économique et Social (FADES).

### **Conclusion**

Au-delà de la langue, l'Islam et plus généralement la culture arabo-musulmane sont une partie intégrante de l'identité djiboutienne. Bien que Djibouti soit situé sur le continent africain, les Djiboutiens ont toujours eu le sentiment d'être plus arabes qu'africains. Par ailleurs, leur africanité est remise en doute par les africains eux-mêmes. Selon une lecture historique généralement admise, les ancêtres des Djiboutiens auraient traversé la mer Rouge en provenance de la péninsule arabique pour s'établir sur les côtes africaines et se seraient mélangés aux populations locales.

C'est à l'aune de ces facteurs historiques et identitaires qu'il faudrait comprendre et interpréter les liens culturels, diplomatiques et économiques actuels de Djibouti avec le monde arabe.

*[Summary] In Djibouti and the Arab world: A Multidimensional Relationship*

*Ambassador Djama Omar Idleh's article Djibouti and the Arab world, A Multidimensional Relationship constitutes an introduction to the cultural, diplomatic and economic links shaping the relationship between the French-speaking Republic of Djibouti and the Arab countries.*

*After briefly referring to the historical and geographical factors that link Djibouti with the Afro-Arab world, the author concentrates on the Djiboutian governmental efforts to break out of the country's isolation derived from its colonial legacy. With this aim in mind, he identifies and concisely analyses three main dynamics which contributed to the intensification of the relationship between Djibouti and its Arab neighbors: the*

*arabization of the country, the strengthening of diplomatic links and the deepening of the economic and commercial cooperation with Arab countries.*

*Firstly, policies promoting Arab language among the Djiboutian society are considered by the author as key contributions to the emergence of a bilingual society, whose cultural exchanges with Arab countries have been increasing in the past decades. In arguing for this position, Ambassador Djama Omar Idleh highlights the example of the introduction of Arab lessons in Djiboutian schools at the beginning of the 1980s and its long-term repercussions. In addition to deepened cultural links, the author focuses on the new strategic priorities of the Djiboutian foreign policy. He notably chooses to dwell on the multiplication of diplomatic missions of Arab countries in Djibouti and the reciprocal increase of Djiboutian diplomatic representation in Arab countries, perceived as a strong symbol of the re-emergent diplomatic relations between Djibouti and its neighbors. After mentioning the importance granted by the Djiboutian authorities to economic diplomacy, the author finally emphasizes the intensification and widening scope of foreign investments from Arab Gulf countries as a sign of the fruitful economic and financial cooperation between Djibouti and its partners.*

*To conclude this succinct study, the author invites the reader to interpret these dynamics through an in-depth analysis of the identity and historical features of Djibouti.*

***L'ambassadeur Djama Omar Idleh*** est un haut diplomate djiboutienne et chercheur qui a servi comme ambassadeur en France et a une vaste expérience dans le Moyen-Orient. Il est actuellement basé au Centre de recherche et d'études (IEPES) à Djibouti. Il peut être rejoint au [Omar\\_djama@yahoo.fr](mailto:Omar_djama@yahoo.fr).

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DJIBOUTI, ETHIOPIA

## **The political economy of geo-strategic location and infrastructure development in Djibouti: National and regional ramifications**

By Zelalem Tesfay Gebreegzabhere

Djibouti is a small country with a physical size of 23,200km<sup>2</sup> and a population of 830,000[1]. The population are mostly subsistence pastoralists and has trade relations with regional neighbors and Arabian Peninsula. The country has a harsh climate and lacks arable land, fresh water, significant mineral and vegetation resources[2]. Estimates show 70% of the population as living in poverty and 50% of the youth as

unemployed. The economy is dominated by the public and service sectors. Transit business and associated logistic services as well as banking and telecommunications are the key pillars of the economy, while economic sectors such as fisheries, tourism, and mineral resources have yet to be optimally exploited. The industrial sector is backward and constrained by availability of raw materials and production costs. The primary sector remains marginal in contribution to the GDP due to the dry climate, lack of water resources, little arable land and weak fishery and irrigation[3]. Consequently, the country is viewed as economically dependent, politically fragile and victim of influence from its former coloniser France. The country is poor and aid dependent yet experiencing high economic growth.

### **Djibouti's geo-strategic advantage and infrastructural development initiatives**

Against this backdrop, Djibouti generates income induced from its geo-strategic location and resultant infrastructure expansions. The country has derived benefits from its position as a gateway to the Red Sea between the Indian Ocean and the Mediterranean Sea and as a trade route for landlocked Ethiopia. Around 86 % of government revenue comes primarily from its International Port serving Ethiopian trade. Likewise, Djibouti possesses military strategic significance due to its proximity to the Arabian Peninsula. Djibouti earns US\$30-36 million per annum from the US and French military bases[4]. Djibouti's accelerating economic growth can be attributed to the following factors:

### **Factors Boosting Djibouti's Revenue and Economic Growth**

#### **The incidence of Ethiopia-Eritrea Conflict**

Djibouti has benefited from the regional political and economic developments during the past decade. The most important event was the conflict between Ethiopia and Eritrea which increased Djibouti's strategic importance for Ethiopia. Ethiopia uses Djibouti as its primary sea outlet for its international trade thereby boosting Djibouti's economy. The leading foreign investor in Ethiopia Sheikh Alamoudi also contributed in financing and handling facilities in the old port. Since 1998, the volume of Ethiopian cargo and petroleum products has quadrupled[5]. These developments pushed both countries to cooperate in the economic, social, and security spheres shifting from the uneven and dependency relationship characterised by tensions and frictions of the past.

As a result, Djibouti has become the sole cost-effective port for both import and export goods[6]. Consequently, it has started expanding and upgrading its port facilities and related infrastructure to increase cargo and container capacity[7]. Since 1998, Djibouti has earned more than US\$3 million per day from Ethiopia[8]. These realities make the recently emerging Ethiopia-Djibouti cooperation a viable alternative way to tackle the economic and political animosities between the two countries.

#### **Revenue generated from external powers due to geo-strategic importance**

The attacks of 11 September in the United States and piracy along the Somali coast led to a shift of US strategy towards the region[9]. In 2002 Djibouti allowed the



establishment of a US military base on its territory. In so doing, Djibouti earned US\$38m per a year from the US coupled with additional financial and development assistance[10]. Furthermore, the US invested US\$70 million per annum including economic aid[11]. Djibouti's strategic importance to global political and economic security attracted further foreign investment from countries such as Spain, Japan, Dubai and China. From 2004 to 2009, the country witnessed a great amount of FDI inflows[12]. This is testimony to the fact that the key driver for Djibouti's economic growth emanates from the political and economic security interests of external economically and politically dominant powers particularly the USA, China and Japan.

Japan paid \$30 million for its base facilities in Djibouti not including other forms of assistance[13]. Likewise, China continuously supported Djibouti since 1979. Many of the infrastructure projects located in Djibouti are funded by China[14]. Currently, China and India are expanding their presence in Djibouti not simply due to economic considerations but also for security reasons. The above facts reveal the growing economic and political competition between the powerful states over Djibouti for their economic and security goals.

In 2012 and 2013, foreign direct investment grew. Construction of Doraleh container terminal and geothermal plants are examples[15]. In 2012, the China-Africa Development Fund declared a US\$6.4 million soft loan to Djibouti[16]. Currently, Djibouti is working to produce geothermal energy around Lake Assal at a cost of US\$240 million partly funded by China that is expected to produce 60MW by 2018. The US has also shown interest in supporting this project[17]. China has funded the port facility at Khor Ambado and recently agreed to construct a new airport. China's reconstruction of the 460-mile railway from Djibouti to Addis Ababa is almost complete[18]. The above overview allows us to infer that both the economically and politically strong countries USA and China are deepening their presence in Djibouti to protect their economic and security interests. Nonetheless, their involvement could erode independence of Djibouti in pursuing its regional cooperation and integration plans in the Horn of Africa especially with Ethiopia. Furthermore, the US-led "War on Terror" may have its own adverse effects on the political stability and economic relations among the Horn countries.

Likewise, Djibouti has partnership and a flow of capital from the Middle East. Trade has significantly increased as a \$400 million container terminal has been planted at Doraleh supervised by Dubai Ports World (DPW). Consequently, the Horizon Oil Terminal owned by Emirates National Oil Company was constructed at Doraleh in 2004-2005 satisfying the fuel import demands in Djibouti, Ethiopia and of the French and US military forces. Since 2009, Doraleh has become the only deep-water port in the region handling 15,000 tonnes[19]. These developments illustrate Djibouti's emphasis on bilateral cooperation arrangements irrespective of geographic proximity to harness economic benefits. These initiatives have strengthened the country's infrastructure targeting its geo-strategic location making it a hub of port services to other countries in Africa as well.

### **Regional cooperation on infrastructure development**

Djibouti is showing a growing interest in regional integration. Particularly, Ethiopia and Djibouti are engaged on infrastructure expansion activities on energy, water, port, and transport. Both countries are incrementally integrating their economies by building a strong cross-border economic zone hoping to enjoy mutual benefit and expand foreign direct investment[20]. In so doing, they are working to ensure economic growth and alleviate poverty in line with their respective policies. Nonetheless, both countries face numerous economic, political and security challenges requiring their joint engagement.

As the main sea outlet for Ethiopia, Djibouti is building mega port and rail projects targeted to meet the increasing demand[21]. Other trade agreements are also being arranged with Kenya and Saudi Arabia. Likewise, Djibouti seeks wider markets to link itself to the Great Lakes region countries[22]. But more importantly, the independence of the oil exporter South Sudan has paved the way for new realms of cooperation between Djibouti and other countries in the region. This has resulted in a tripartite agreement among South Sudan, Ethiopia and Djibouti on a logistical corridor port service: a US\$3 billion oil pipelines project crossing through Ethiopia[23].

Furthermore, Ethiopia has exported 50 megawatts to Djibouti since 2011. It covers 60 percent of their customers at a cost lower than diesel electric supply. An additional power connection arrangement was agreed between the two countries in 2013 that will allow importing an extra 70MW. The energy interconnection is the least costly option for addressing the energy constraint in both countries[24]. After energy connection to Ethiopia's power grid, retail and industrial domestic tariffs were cut significantly, easing pressures on household and business budgets. This has also enhanced economic interdependence between the two countries[25], not to mention reducing the country's trade deficit by lowering oil imports[26]. Again this shows the infrastructure development cooperation is a win-win situation, economically benefiting both countries.

Likewise, the rail and road expansion, construction of new ports and water projects are expected to provide immense benefit for the two countries. The projects include the Ethiopia-Djibouti railway and upgrading the capacity of the old ports in Djibouti. Recently, Djibouti has allocated a \$9.8 billion budget for port developments targeting Ethiopian import-export. Furthermore, Ethiopia signed a bilateral agreement with Djibouti in 2013 to supply 103,000 cubic meters of water per day[27]. Both countries also agreed on a gas pipeline project and to cooperate in the mining sector[28].

## **Conclusion**

Djibouti's revenue increments and fast economic growth is the outcome of its geo-strategic location and the resultant infrastructure developments. Port services to Ethiopia, its geo-strategic importance for external powers, and cooperation on infrastructure development with Ethiopia are key sources of revenue for Djibouti. Consequently, Djibouti has registered 5% GDP growth on average for the last five years and is expected to maintain the same rate of growth in the years to come[29]. Nonetheless, Djibouti's economy lacks diversification as the agricultural and industrial sectors are marginal[30]. Economic growth has yet to result in the reduction of poverty

and job creation.

Equally important is cooperation between Djibouti and Ethiopia on infrastructural projects such as railways, roads, water supply, power, trade and enhancing the capacity of the existing ports in Djibouti. Djibouti might face competition from both the Eritrean and Somaliland's ports in the years to come. Nonetheless, given the above mentioned investments in port facilities and emerging infrastructure expansion; Djibouti has created greater cost and capacity advantage over regional competitors. Hence, it can be concluded that Ethiopia and Djibouti in a manner of speaking symbolise best practice in the IGAD economic integration process. The economic cooperation between the two countries has boosted the economies of both by enhancing mutual economic benefits paving the way for regional economic interdependence.

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## Resources

### Questions and Challenges Raised by a Large Scale Humanitarian Operation in South Sudan

This report produced by the Secure Livelihoods Research Consortium, examines the dilemmas and ramifications of large scale humanitarian operations in the context of the ongoing conflict in South Sudan. The report describes the conditions of internally displaced peoples (IDPs) and their relations with host communities. The report also delves into the minutiae of the politics and maneuvering between organizations providing humanitarian assistance to displaced communities on the one hand and the GRSS (Government of the Republic of South Sudan), SPLM/A-IO (Sudan People’s Liberation Movement/Army-In Opposition) and local level authorities, on the other. This report would be a useful resource not only for those studying the South Sudan conflict but also for practitioners in the development and humanitarian assistance sphere.

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### Between Somaliland and Puntland: Marginalization, militarization and conflicting political visions

This work by Markus Hoehne is an invaluable contribution to the scant literature on ‘borderlands’ and marginal ‘borderland communities’ between ‘Puntland’ and ‘Somaliland’. The book provides an anthropological and richly textured take on the dynamics of sub-state formation and the politics of ‘borderland political entrepreneurship’ by elites in the contested territories between Puntland and Somaliland. It describes the evolution over a decade, of Dhulbahante and Warsangeli elite interaction with the different regional administrations in northern Somalia.

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### Djibouti: Changing Influence in the Horn’s Strategic Hub

This Chatham House briefing paper by Styan is a comprehensive overview of the factors that explain Djibouti’s emerging geo-strategic significance. It also analyzes the complementarities and tensions underlying the growing economic interdependence between Ethiopia and Djibouti. The above discussion is juxtaposed to recent domestic

political developments in Djibouti in a context defined by continuing economic underdevelopment, poverty and the striking socio-economic inequalities. This work is a useful and timely introductory resource for anyone interested in recent developments in Djibouti.

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