



Situation Report

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Elections, politics and external involvement in Djibouti

Introduction

This situation report continues the research project on regional politics and security in the Horn of Africa conducted by the Institute for Security Studies.¹ While it follows in the footsteps of a 2008 situation report that was concerned primarily with the border dispute between Djibouti and Eritrea,² the current report is more concerned with the prevailing internal political situation in Djibouti and the conduct of the country's April 2011 presidential elections.³

The first part provides a brief overview of the political and electoral history of Djibouti. The second gives the legal framework for the conduct of elections and then examines the preparations for the April 2011 presidential elections and the results. It also surveys the most salient features of Djibouti's party system, focusing principally on the alignment of existing political parties. Part three considers the build-up to the April 2011 presidential elections, including constitutional amendments, the mysterious deaths of some senior officials, the exaggeration of the role played by Abdurahman Boreh, and the sudden outbreak of public protests. The fourth part describes the mainly military involvement of Eritrea, the United States (US) and France in Djibouti.

The principal sources of data used in the report are books, journal articles, unpublished reports and media publications. In order to strengthen aspects of the limited data that was available the author has used data collected during his many visits to Djibouti between 2008 and 2010.⁴ During these visits, he interacted with and interviewed many individuals who provided background and specific information in a credible manner.

Political background

In 1862, Obock – the northern part of present-day Djibouti – was ceded to France. This led eventually to the establishment in 1890 of a larger French colony.⁵ In effect – through a series of treaties concluded with local sultans in 1885 and with Ethiopia in 1897 – France peacefully formalised its control over the colony. It came to be known as French Somaliland and then as the French Territory of the Afars and the Issas.⁶ France administered the colony without much change until 1946 when some degree of autonomy was granted with the election of representatives to the French Parliament and the local assembly.⁷ Then, in 1967, France organised a referendum in the colony, in which 60 per cent of the electorate voted to remain part of France.⁸

From 1967 to 1975, France favoured the Afars over the Issas, with most government posts going to the former region. Indeed, in 1968, the Afar Democratic Regroupement (RDA) won 26 of the 32 seats in the local assembly

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and the RDA's pro-French and highly contested leader, Ali Aref, remained head of the local government. In 1975, following greater Issa agitation and interference from Ethiopia and Somalia, France decided to speed up the independence of the colony. In the process France ended its support of Aref in favour of Hasan Gouled Aptidon, the Issa leader of the African People's League for Independence (LPAI).⁹ A referendum was held in 1977 and, out of a total of 81 000 votes, 98 per cent voted for independence from France.¹⁰ In 1981 Djibouti was *de jure* established as a single party state. The People's Rally for Progress (RPP), which had replaced the LPAI in 1979,¹¹ was declared the only legal party allowed to nominate candidates for elections. Aptidon comfortably won the 1982 presidential elections with 84 per cent of the vote and increased this to 89 per cent in 1987.¹²

Aptidon managed to maintain Djibouti's stability until 1991 when a civil war broke out. In August 1991, the Front for the Restoration of Unity and Democracy (FRUD) was established and in November of that year, it launched an armed insurgency in the northern part of Djibouti.¹³ The FRUD did so because of the political alienation and inequality that politically mobilised Afars felt they were experiencing and also because of the government's rejection of genuine democratic power-sharing.¹⁴ In July 1993, the gradually reinforced Djiboutian National Army launched an offensive and was able to put down the insurgency, leaving more than a thousand people dead.¹⁵ The Djiboutian government had enjoyed the support of Ethiopia and Eritrea, despite the fact that both countries have large Afar populations within their borders. The governments of these neighbouring states had been 'surprised by initial successes of [the] FRUD and panicked at the prospect of a reversal in the balance of power in Djibouti'.¹⁶ The Djiboutian government signed peace agreements with the FRUD in both 1994 and 2001. These two agreements were made within the context of political reforms.

Indeed, in September 1992 at the height of the civil war, a new constitution was approved by a referendum. The country moved to a multi-party system, with four political parties allowed to register. The following year the People's Rally for Progress under Aptidon won the election with 73 per cent of the vote in a 60 per cent turnout.¹⁷ When legislative elections were held in 1997, the RPP, which had by this time formed an electoral alliance with the FRUD, prevailed again. Two years later in 1999, RPP member Ismail Omar Guelleh¹⁸ (sometimes referred to as 'IOG'), succeeded in replacing Aptidon both as president of the country and as president of the RPP.¹⁹ Guelleh won the April 1999 presidential elections with 74 per cent of the vote as the candidate of the RPP, which had joined forces with a faction of the FRUD to form a new ruling coalition – the Union for a Presidential Majority (UMP). In September 2002, the constitutional limit on the number of political parties was lifted, making way for the introduction of a full multi-party system or *mulipartisme complet*.

Nonetheless, in the elections held in January 2003, the UMP coalition won all 65 seats in the National Assembly, Djibouti's unicameral Parliament.²⁰ To contest these elections four opposition political parties had formed the Union for a Democratic Alternative (UAD). While the UAD had secured 38 per cent of the vote, this did not translate into any seats under Djibouti's first-past-the-post electoral system. Presidential elections were again held in April 2005 and Guelleh stood unopposed as the UMP candidate and claimed 96,85 per cent of the votes on a 78,9 per cent turn out. The opposition UAD, which had failed to field a candidate, called for a boycott of the elections and disputed the high turnout figure. Parliamentary elections were held in January 2008 and the UMP again won all 65 seats.²¹

Djibouti's electoral arrangement

While the legal framework for Djibouti's electoral process is governed by the Constitution of 1992, the Electoral Law of 1992 and its various amendments give further direction. The Constitution provides that the president shall be elected to a six-year term through universal suffrage and is limited to two terms (Article 23). If a candidate does not secure a majority of the votes cast in the first round, there

is a provision for a second round between the two candidates who received the highest number of votes (Article 27).

The 1992 Electoral Law (Loi Organique n°1/AN/92) assigned the task of organising elections to an Independent National Electoral Commission (CENI) constituted prior to elections.²² Decree n°2002-0198/PR/MI, related to the amendment on the composition and functioning of the CENI, provided that the electoral commission's members should be representatives of government institutions (including members of the National Assembly), civil society, and political parties; and that they should be appointed on the basis of professional competence, integrity and patriotism (Articles 2, 3 and 7). According to Decree n°2005-0024/PR/MI of 2005, the CENI must be established 45 days before the elections and dissolved 15 days thereafter (Articles 13 and 24).

The CENI is tasked with the overall responsibility of developing the voters' roll, voter identity cards and polling day procedures. A lawyer by the name of Assoweh Idriss was elected in February 2011 as the head of the CENI, which has around 156 members. On the same day, six other members of the commission were appointed.²³ The 1992 Electoral Law (Loi Organique n°1/AN/92) organised Djiboutian territory into five electoral constituencies. These consisted of Ali-Sabieh (6 seats), Dikhil (12 seats), Tadjourah (6 seats) and Obock (4 seats), with each of these constituencies correlating with the delimitation of a district (Article 16), plus Djibouti City (37 seats). Decree n°2005-0024/PR/MI of 2005, which is related to the composition and functioning of the Independent Regional Electoral Commission, added the Arta district (3 seats) as the sixth electoral constituency (Article 4).

In 2004, there were a total of around 275 polling stations across the country: this included 142 in Djibouti City, 36 in Dikhil, 19 in Ali-Sabieh, 27 in Tadjourah and 16 in Obock.²⁴ Moreover, the 2003 parliamentary elections cost 180 million Djibouti francs, which is about US\$1 million. Half of this amount was financed by a grant from the US.²⁵ There were approximately 208 000 registered voters for the 2005 presidential elections and 151 000 registered voters for the 2008 parliamentary elections.²⁶

Preparations for the April 2011 elections

Democracy International, which is a US-based firm providing consultancy services on democracy and governance, supervised an eight-man programme known as the Djibouti Elections and Political Process. This programme was under contract to the US Agency for International Development (USAID) under the Governing Justly and Democratically Assistance Agreement between the US and the Government of Djibouti. Primarily the programme aimed to strengthen the CENI's management of the electoral process, carry out civic and voter education activities, enhance open political dialogue between the election administration and political parties, and provide international election observation.

Democracy International was 'halfway through a two-year, US\$2,2 million government-funded contract when it was accused of assisting opposition politicians'.²⁷ Indeed, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Djibouti

sent a diplomatic note to the US Embassy dated 2 March [2011] requesting the end of the partnership with Democracy International, alleging it had participated in and supported a violent 18 February 2011 opposition rally.²⁸

In January 2011, Democracy International urged the Djibouti government to

launch a comprehensive information campaign airing voter education messages on democratic principles, the meaning of elections and the roles and responsibilities of citizens. Furthermore, education addressing gaps in the public's knowledge of important areas such as voter registration and the issuance of national identification cards would go far in increasing understanding and encouraging broader public participation in electoral

processes. By way of complementing the informational efforts of the state and of encouraging greater popular participation in the elections, civil society organisations should seek ways to undertake non-partisan civic and voter education campaigns directed at traditionally marginalised groups such as women, the disabled, rural and semi-nomadic populations.²⁹

Political parties

In Djibouti, political parties can be broadly classified into two types: those contained in the ruling coalition and those in the opposition coalition. The ruling coalition is the UMP (Union for a Presidential Majority), which since 2008 has been headed by Dileita Mohammed Dileita, an Afar who served as Djibouti's ambassador to Ethiopia and was appointed prime minister in 2001. The coalition is dominated by the RPP, the ruling party, which has won all elections since attaining political power in 1977 and provides much of the coalition's leadership.³⁰ As stated earlier the president of the RPP is Guelleh, while its secretary general is Idriss Arnaoud Ali, who is the current speaker of the National Assembly. The ruling coalition also contains elements of the following groups: FRUD (the Front for the Restoration of Unity and Democracy) led by Ali Mohammed Daoud; the Popular and Social Democratic Party (PSD) led by Omar Ahmed Youssouf (known as Omar Vincent) following the death of the party's founder, Ahmed Boulaleh Barreh;³¹ and the Union of the Partisans of Reform (UPR), founded in 2005 and led by Ibrahim Chehem Daoud, who is a former member of the FRUD.

The ruling coalition is advantaged by unfettered access to the national media, which according to J Brass 'cannot serve as a forum ... because it is state-controlled and tightly monitored'.³² The UMP makes use of the state resources at its disposal for party financing.³³ In fact, the most persistent problem in post-1991 Djiboutian politics is the fusion of the ruling party and the state and the ensuing difficulty of distinguishing between these two entities. This synchronisation is best reflected by the fact that high positions in the party apparatus are often synonymous with equivalent positions in the state apparatus. In this way the coalition implants a network of its members in virtually all government institutions at all levels, thus enabling it to maintain tight control over the day-to-day direction of decision-making.³⁴

The opposition coalition is the Union for a Democratic Alternative (UAD), which is headed by Ismail Guedi Hared, who led the cabinet (*directeur de cabinet*) of former president Aptidon from 1977 to 1999. The UAD has boycotted four elections since 2005, including the 2005 presidential elections, the 2006 regional elections, the 2008 parliamentary elections and the April 2011 presidential elections. Within this coalition is the Republican Alliance for Democracy (ARD), which was established in 2002. The ARD was headed by Ahmed Dini Ahmed until his death in 2004³⁵ and is currently led by Ahmed Youssouf Houmed, who formerly held a ministerial position. Also in the coalition are the Movement for Democratic Renewal (MRD) headed by Daher Ali Farah, who edited a government newspaper, and the Union for Democracy and Justice (UDJ) headed by Hared, who is shy and reserved and lacks the guile and charisma of Dini.³⁶ Also aligned with the UAD is the Union of Democratic Movements (UMD), headed by Aden Robleh Awaleh.³⁷

The opposition political parties have failed in many respects to gain equitable and proportional access to political power and been unable to mount a strong and effective challenge to the ruling coalition. They have been disadvantaged by the first-past-the-post electoral system and also by 'the government's dominance of the media, its routine intimidation of the opposition's supporters and its severe restrictions on the freedom of speech, association and assembly'.³⁸ They accordingly lack confidence in a political system which has historically marginalised them. Moreover, the opposition parties are very weak in terms of organisational and financial capacity, number of members and material resources. They are paralysed by defections and division into rival factions, leaving most of the strong cards in Guelleh's hands.

The opposition political parties have failed to draw broad support. In fact, many Djiboutians say that these parties have failed to present appealing or substantive policies which they could support. One reason might be that the parties in the opposition coalition are deeply divided in their vision for Djibouti's future.³⁹ Another reason is the lack of a coherent political culture, with individual parties too weak to act independently.

Furthermore, critics claim that opposition parties

are based on clan and tribal identity. ... Some explain the boycott of [elections] by pointing to the absence within the opposition parties of solid and charismatic leaders with enough vision to appeal to the wider Djiboutian public; the lack of concrete platforms and agendas defining their political position, thereby offering no real alternative to voters; and the inability of the opposition to organise itself administratively and politically.⁴⁰

Critics also argue that, more specifically, Dini's 'death left a vacuum of leadership within the opposition coalition which is often criticised for its lack of direction and vision'.⁴¹ Indeed, the opposition clearly needs a leader untainted by ties to the Guelleh power structure.⁴²

The results

After some campaigning, including the ruling coalition's public rallies and performances, which enjoyed a great deal of coverage in state-owned media, voting took place on 8 April 2011. It took place in a largely peaceful and orderly manner, with minimal security incidents despite fears following the anti-government protests of February 2011.

Opposition parties boycotted the elections partly due to their concerns about the CENI's independence and neutrality. They had not put forward candidates by the 9 March 2011 deadline, leaving only two names on the ballot paper, that of Guelleh and Mohammed Warsama.⁴³ Born in 1959, Warsama served as president of the Constitutional Court between 2005 and 2009.⁴⁴ He ran as an independent candidate and had a limited support base.⁴⁵ But, in the final stages of the campaign, he received the backing of Aden Robleh Awaleh, the head of the Union of Democratic Movements,⁴⁶ and Mohammed Daoud Chehem, the head of the Djiboutian Party for Development (PDD).

According to preliminary results released by the Ministry of Interior, Guelleh obtained about 80,56 per cent of the vote, easily and expectedly⁴⁷ defeating Warsama, who garnered the remaining 19,42 per cent.⁴⁸ It is widely believed that Warsama only provided Guelleh 'with a token rival for this contest in name only'⁴⁹ and that the lack of a viable opposition candidate enabled Guelleh to be re-elected for a third term. The only unknown factor before the elections was the level of abstention, which had the potential to diminish voter turnout.⁵⁰ However, in a bitter disappointment to opposition parties, the voter turnout from 152 000 registered voters was officially recorded at about 70 per cent.

For these presidential elections, there were 386 polling stations in Djibouti including 217 in Djibouti City, 46 in Dikhil, 32 in Ali-Sabieh and 19 in Arta. The elections were monitored by an African Union (AU) observer mission composed of 27 members and led by Jacques Baudin, the former Minister of Foreign Affairs of Senegal. The mission concluded that the elections were organised in accordance with the regulations governing the conduct of elections in Djibouti.⁵¹

Removal of presidential term limits and suspect deaths

Under the 1992 constitution, the president is to be elected for two terms of six years. Accordingly, Guelleh was re-elected in 2005 for his second and last term. However, in April 2010, the National Assembly pushed through constitutional amendments 'which removed term limits, cut the presidential term to five years from six, created a senate and abolished capital punishment'.⁵²

This development was followed by a possibly coincidental but nonetheless suspect spate of deaths. These included the May 2010 suicide of Colonel Abdi Hassan Bogoreh, who had been Chief of Staff of the Gendarmerie since 2005, and a few months later in August 2010 the death of Lieutenant Colonel Abdillahi Mouhoumed, a top official in the Department of Documentation and Security. Lt Col Mouhoumed, who allegedly succumbed to a heart attack, was from an Issa subclan, the Saad Moussa.

The February 2011 protests

Relatively small incidents of public protest, although still in the thousands, were held on 5 and 6 February 2011. The demonstrations were said to have been

triggered by some serious flaws in the marking of some law student examination papers [and] rapidly escalated into a general contesting of government policy when middle level and high school pupils joined in. The latter were frequently more determined than their elder siblings. They were also joined by young unemployed people.⁵³

The unemployed protestors were from Balbala, which is Djibouti City's largest slum.⁵⁴

More violent protests were held less than two weeks later on 18 and 19 February 2011. Independent observers estimated that the size of the 18 February demonstration was between one and two thousand people.⁵⁵ The protesters, mainly dissatisfied youths, were seemingly inspired by incidents in Tunisia, Egypt and Yemen.⁵⁶ The protesters brandished banners which read 'IOG get out', 'Ben Ali + Mubarak = IOG' and 'No to a third term'. They demanded that Guelleh step down immediately. In an unprecedented outburst of anger against Guelleh's government, the protesters threw stones at the police and burnt several vehicles.⁵⁷ The government used tear gas to try to break up the protests.

After two days of violent unrest that garnered international attention, the government arrested more than a hundred party activists and briefly detained three prominent opposition figures accusing them of organising the protests. The arrested leaders were Ismail Guedi Hared, Aden Robleh Awaleh and Mohammed Daoud Chehem. As mentioned, Chehem, a former member of the prime minister's cabinet (*directeur de cabinet*), heads the Djiboutian Party for Development, which was expelled in 2004 from the UAD opposition coalition after Chehem unilaterally tried to contest the 2005 presidential elections. Chehem's nephew is Ibrahim Chehem Daoud, who, as mentioned earlier, heads the UPR (Union of the Partisans of Reform). With the clashes taking an alarming turn and apparently leading to two deaths, the government deployed police by the hundreds to patrol neighbourhoods⁵⁸ and banned opposition meetings and demonstrations.⁵⁹

The Boreh factor

Abdurahman Boreh has all of a sudden emerged as Guelleh's major opposition contender.⁶⁰ Like Guelleh, he was born in Dire Dawa, eastern Ethiopia, and he is said to be privy to Guelleh's internal dealings and networks. Boreh is believed to have been involved in most of the lucrative businesses and deal-making in Djibouti. He controlled the large-scale trade in rice, cigarettes and other foodstuffs and has invested in fisheries and construction. He is said to have been instrumental in bringing a Dubai-based company, Dubai Ports World, to invest heavily in Djibouti, including building the luxury Kempinski Hotel.⁶¹ Boreh was even rumoured to have had business dealings with Somalia's warlords and business groups.

Guelleh and Boreh fell out and Boreh, who had seemed untouchable, was sacked from his position as head of the Autorité des Ports et des Zones Franches (Djibouti Port and Free Zone Authority) in June 2008. Lately, however, there have been persistent rumours in Djibouti that Boreh has made a number of visits to Eritrea and that he has met members of the Djiboutian opposition based in France.

Meanwhile, in June 2010, a Djiboutian court sentenced Boreh to 15 years in prison *in absentia* and a fine of US\$56 000.⁶² Despite this, Boreh, who at the time of writing was living in London, was said to have planned to contest the 2011 presidential elections.⁶³ Also, he claims that his company's properties were seized by the Djibouti government.⁶⁴

The Eritrean military threat

Since its independence in 1977, Djibouti has been trapped between neighbours who are hostile to each other. For decades it has experienced the antagonism between Ethiopia and Somalia and since 1998 between Eritrea and Ethiopia. The fact that after 1998 Djibouti became Ethiopia's sole outlet to the sea has drawn it into the dangerous conflict between Ethiopia and Eritrea, as evidenced in February 2008 by Eritrea's incursion into supposedly Djiboutian territory.⁶⁵ More seriously, in June 2008, fighting erupted between the military forces of Djibouti and Eritrea, with Eritrea seizing geo-strategic locations in northern Djibouti, including the Doumeira (Gabla Mountain) on the mainland and the islands of Doumeira and Kallida. In the resulting fighting at least nine Djiboutian soldiers were killed, with 50 wounded and a Djiboutian senior officer and 18 soldiers captured.

After these clashes, France established a temporary military base between the Djiboutian coastal city of Moulhoule and Khor Angar. This French base included a combat unit and a logistical team supposedly for further support of the weaker Djiboutian National Army,⁶⁶ and it undertook the collection of the bodies of soldiers killed during the fighting. During the June 2008 fighting, the French contingent conducted aerial reconnaissance and reportedly sent three ships, lending further credibility to France's stated commitment to defend Djibouti. However, there had been no compelling evidence of any additional and more direct French military involvement.⁶⁷

Even in June 2008, Eritrea, which is struggling with internal dissent, was in no position to attack deep into Djibouti and could not risk defeat by the French military contingent. It had already been defeated by Ethiopia during their 1998–2000 war.⁶⁸ Another military defeat would be suicidal for Eritrea and the French presence seems to have served at least to psychologically counter any further incursion by Eritrea. Moreover, for Ethiopia, an Eritrean attack on Djibouti would mean that Eritrea had finally crossed the Rubicon and attacked its lifeline.⁶⁹

In June 2010, following Qatar's mediation efforts, Eritrean troops withdrew from the contested border areas. A Qatari observation force was deployed to monitor the border area between the two countries until a final agreement could eventually be reached.⁷⁰ A joint committee chaired by the Qatari prime minister was due to be formed and was tasked to appoint an international company to demarcate the common border between Eritrea and Djibouti, with the consent of the two countries. Qatar, which enjoys good relations with the two uneasy neighbours, is due to continue monitoring the border until the final and binding decision is announced by the joint committee on the settlement of the border dispute.⁷¹ The agreement was welcomed by China,⁷² the AU and the United Nations (UN),⁷³ but drew criticism from Ethiopia. Ethiopia is still wary of Eritrea's intentions and is clearly concerned about Qatar's influence in the Horn of Africa and its frequent, high-level contact with both the Eritrean and Djiboutian governments.⁷⁴

Within Djibouti the effect of the Eritrea-Djibouti conflict has been to heighten internal ethnic tensions. Afar disenchantment with the Issa-dominated government remains widespread and has been expressed through an insurgency spearheaded by the FRUD.⁷⁵ The situation is tense but has not deteriorated to the level of 1991 when the insurgency erupted over demands for autonomy, which slowly receded after the 1994 and 2001 peace agreements.

However, the situation has been exacerbated by the claim that Eritrea is recruiting, training and arming unemployed Afar youths and sending them into Djibouti to plant mines and launch attacks against the Djiboutian National Army.⁷⁶ In

light of current ethnic tension, Afar raids could conceivably be dangerous. As of the first quarter of 2011 the Djiboutian government remains genuinely worried that a potential Afar insurgency in the north could quickly spread to the south, especially in view of the fact that the Djiboutian National Army is weak and the population in Djibouti City is facing deteriorating economic conditions due to high unemployment and inflation, which surged to 3,8 per cent in 2010.⁷⁷

In fact, from media reports, the FRUD, which has been recruiting Afar youths, resisted an attack by the Djiboutian National Army in September 2009 on its position in the Mablas region. The troops were supposedly units based at Gal Ela in Mablas, together with reinforcements from the barracks at Tadjourah and Obock. If this FRUD report is accurate, then this military operation would have been the Djibouti National Army's first major offensive against the FRUD since the one of May 2006.⁷⁸

US military presence

In 2002, the US established the Combined Joint Task Force-Horn of Africa (CJTF-HoA). It is based upon the assumption that transnational terrorist cells would flee the 2001 US-led campaign in Afghanistan, establish a safe haven in the Horn of Africa and proceed to coordinate future attacks from there. It is a multi-service formation operating under the auspices of the US African Command (AFRICOM), which since March 2010 has been led by Rear Admiral Brian Losey. Since 2003, the task force has been housed in Camp Lemonier, a former French Foreign Legion camp adjacent to the Djibouti-Ambouli international airport, which is managed by Dubai Ports World and has suitable runways and lighting conditions. The US pays around US\$30 million annually for Camp Lemonier, which is its only official military base located in Africa.⁷⁹

The Camp Lemonier base is composed of approximately 2 000 short-term rotational personnel of whom the core staff is made up of between 320 and 375 reserve and active-duty officers. The personnel providing base support number between 250 and 284 for Camp Lemonier with an additional number of between 279 and 294 in the Provisional Security Company.⁸⁰ The components of the thousand-strong manoeuvre include the Air Component Coordination Element, the Civil Affairs Teams, the Engineer Units and the Mil-to-Mil Training Teams.⁸¹ It encompasses military personnel, including all the major US services (Air Force, Army, Navy and Marines), intelligence personnel from the CIA⁸² and officers from allied countries. CJTF-HoA is responsible for the area covering Ethiopia, Eritrea, Sudan, Djibouti, Somalia, Kenya and Yemen. The other areas of interest include Uganda, Tanzania, Seychelles, Comoros, Mauritius and Madagascar.⁸³

The vast distances encompassed by the CJTF-HoA's area of responsibility coupled with the shortage of roads make helicopters the primary means of long-distance travel and logistics supply for CJTF-HoA forces. Its troops train for counter-terrorism missions in the Horn of Africa. From a military standpoint, CJTF-HoA is tasked to detect and destroy locations which are thought to be potential and actual hideouts for al-Qaeda elements, break their logistical lines and directly attack groups connected to al-Qaeda.⁸⁴ It is also tasked to enhance the military capacity of the countries in its area of operation, with which it regularly exchanges information. CJTF-HoA conducts counter-terrorism training and joint operations focusing on tightening the security of porous borders, improving airport security and undertaking better maritime security, thus limiting the opportunity for terrorists to hide and organise.⁸⁵

French military presence

France⁸⁶ currently (as of April 2011) has around 2 900 soldiers in Djibouti, its largest base in Africa.⁸⁷ For up to nine years, as of 2004, France pays an annual amount of €30 million to keep this force in place.⁸⁸ The French military contingent has been commanded by Air Force Brigadier General Thierry Caspar-Fille-Lambie since August 2009 and is comprised of the 5th Regiment Interarmes d'Outre Mer

(Overseas Joint Forces Regiment) and the 13th Demi-Brigade de la Legion Etrangère (Foreign Legion Half-brigade), with each regiment reduced to a core of 600 to 800 soldiers and equipped mainly with AMX-10RC light tanks, ERC-90 Sagaie reconnaissance vehicles, MILAN anti-tank missiles and 120 mm mortars.

On a 4-month rotational basis the two regiments are augmented with personnel from France. The regiments are supported by a carefully integrated apparatus of support units, including the 10th Bataillon de Commandement et de Service (Support and Command Battalion), which coordinates the logistical chain and the Détachement de l'Aviation Légère de l'Armée de Terre (DETALAT or Army Aviation Support Detachment) with five SA-330 Puma medium lift helicopters and two SA-342 Gazelle reconnaissance helicopters.

France also maintains an air force detachment in Djibouti – the Detachement Air 188 Colonel Emile Massart – which operates from the Djibouti-Ambouli international airport. This includes six Mirage 2000 C fighters and three Mirage 2000 D fighters of the Escadre de Chasse 3/11 Corse, plus one C-160 Transall transport aircraft, one AS-555 Fennec reconnaissance and anti-tank helicopter and two SA-330 Puma medium lift helicopters of the Escadron de Transport d'Outre Mer 00.088 Larzac. The aircraft are flown and serviced by 800 French Air Force personnel whose number is not likely to be cut. The air defence component includes three batteries of MISTRAL surface-to-air missiles.

The French military presence has acted as a deterrent against any would-be aggressor, and by extension has effectively eased the tensions in the Horn of Africa.⁸⁹ France provides training to Djiboutian officers and special forces and air support for the Djiboutian National Army. This support also extends to troops on the ground, including intelligence, transportation, medical services and supply operations as during the clashes with Eritrea in June 2008. Moreover, in May 2009, the French conducted joint exercises with the Djiboutian National Army involving a thousand troops and focusing on counter-insurgency operations, including infiltration and ambushes.

The one-sided presidential elections held on 8 April 2011 will not have a significant impact on the distribution of power in Djibouti.⁹⁰ The effect is simply to extend for a further five years Guelleh's virtually unchallenged 12-year hold on power. In being far from fair and competitive, the outcome allows no prospect of a more pluralist political dynamic and will further aggravate the existing problems in Djiboutian politics.

Nevertheless, all political parties ought to play the democratic game of give-and-take. In the first place, opposition parties must act with a sense of responsibility by moderating political rhetoric. They should not fail to note their unpreparedness for power and the reality that they need more time to gather strength and experience. Opposition parties should learn how to function as an organised, united and especially, as a responsible force operating within the boundaries of the democratic process no matter how restricted they may be.

For its part, the UMP-run government should show more tolerance to the opposition and be more open to criticism. The ruling coalition should agree to re-establish trust among all political parties and engage in a broad-based dialogue with them in order to create a healthy divergence of ideas, ease leadership dilemmas and correct deficiencies. It should give greater powers to a more freely elected National Assembly and a more independent judiciary, ensure that human rights and fundamental freedoms are fully guaranteed and that social development programmes are rapidly implemented. The holding of elections that are free and fair is vital in order to deepen and strengthen democracy, but this needs to be preceded by reforms that level the political playing field, which previously have seemed inconceivable. Only then will all political parties have an equal opportunity to disseminate their ideas so that elections can be truly competitive.

More importantly, the government should acknowledge that repression can quell agitation only temporarily. Given the endemic poverty, degradation of livelihood sources, inequitable distribution of revenue, widespread corruption, human rights abuses and lack of real political reform, in the longer term repression will only spur on the very upheavals that the government wishes to avoid. The protests of February 2011 are a forewarning that at any moment the reservoir of repressed anger in Djibouti could conceivably erupt into a mass uprising.

In terms of regional politics, Djibouti's tensions with Eritrea are very far from resolved. Worries about further Eritrean aggression have in part been fuelled by unsubstantiated accusations the Eritrea is providing support to Djiboutian armed groups. There is also a widespread belief among Djiboutians that Eritrea has yet to achieve its regional strategy, namely to re-establish its influence in the Horn of Africa, disrupt the Djibouti corridor and break the geo-political deadlock with Ethiopia.

Finally, in a business-as-usual manner, the US and France are set to discreetly maintain their military forces in Djibouti and to continue their unqualified support to Guelleh, thus fuelling the assumption that Djibouti's stability rests on his leadership. In the global war on terrorism and the fight against piracy (neither of which are likely to abate in the next five to ten years) gaining the cooperation of accessible and relatively stable governments remains uppermost in current US and French policy towards the entire Horn of Africa region. A secondary priority for these two countries may be to contain Eritrea's moves to sow instability in the region. While both the US and France preach the need for unfettered democracy, they contradict themselves when short-term priorities are at stake.⁹¹

- 1 The author greatly benefited from the comments of Dr Solomon Ayele Dersso, Mehari Tadele Maru, Roba Sharamo, Alemayehu Fayera and Wondwosen Michago, each of whom read in depth earlier versions of the report. The report was also significantly improved by the insightful advice of the three reviewers.
- 2 B Mesfin, *The Eritrea-Djibouti border dispute*, Institute for Security Studies Situation Report (2008).
- 3 According to the second census conducted in 2009, Djibouti has a total population of about 818 000 of whom 58 per cent resides in the capital city which has a population of 475 000. The population growth rate of Djibouti is estimated to be 3 per cent and nearly 52 per cent of the population is said to be under 20 years of age. The population is split into two ethnic groups, the Somali Issas and the Afars. The Somalis including the Issas account for roughly 60 per cent of the population and the Afars account for 35 per cent, the remaining 5 per cent are French, Arab and Ethiopian.
- 4 There is little available research on Djibouti's history and internal politics. P Woodward, *The Horn of Africa: politics and international relations*, London: IB Tauris, 1996, 214. This situation report attempts to fill this gap, serving accordingly as both a source of information and a catalyst for further studies.
- 5 C Dubois, *Djibouti 1888–1967*, Paris: L'Harmattan, 1997, 5–6.
- 6 V Thompson and R Adloff, *Djibouti and the Horn of Africa*, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1968, 7–8; Dubois, *Djibouti 1888–1967*, 55.
- 7 Thompson and Adloff, *Djibouti and the Horn of Africa*, 61.
- 8 Thompson and Adloff, *Djibouti and the Horn of Africa*, 96.
- 9 Aptidon was an Issa Somali of the Mamassan subclan. He was born in 1916 in Djibouti and had worked as a nurse and contractor. Aptidon represented Djibouti in the French Senate from 1952 to 1958 and in the French National Assembly from 1959 to 1962. He then returned to Djibouti to serve as Minister of Education under Ali Aref with whom he broke off relations in 1967 to lead the campaign against France. He had no children of his own and died in 2006. A Laudouze, *Djibouti*, Paris: Karthala, 1989, 74; Thompson and Adloff, *Djibouti and the Horn of Africa*, 64 and 74.
- 10 Laudouze, *Djibouti*, 71.
- 11 This political party replaced the LPAI in 1979. Laudouze, *Djibouti*, 83.
- 12 Laudouze, *Djibouti*, 78.
- 13 P Schraeder, Ethnic politics in Djibouti: from eye of the hurricane to boiling cauldron, *African Affairs*, 92(367) (1993).
- 14 M Kadamy, Djibouti: between war and peace, *Review of African Political Economy*, 23(70) (1996), 516.
- 15 Kadamy. Djibouti: between war and peace. 518.
- 16 Kadamy. Djibouti: between war and peace. 519.
- 17 International Foundation for Election Systems and International Republican Institute, Djibouti: 2005 pre-election assessment report, Report submitted to the United States Agency for International Development, 2005, 20; M Aden, *Ourrou Djibouti 1991–1994: du maquis Afar à la paix des braves*, Paris: L'Harmattan, 2002, 172.

- 18 Born in November 1947 in Dire Dawa, eastern Ethiopia, Guelleh did part of his schooling in Dire Dawa and speaks Amharic, the official language of Ethiopia, very well. He has served in the immigration section of the French Sureté Nationale and then joined the African People's League for Independence (LPAI), working in its the propaganda section. He later became head of president Aptidon's cabinet (*chef de cabinet*) and trusted advisor. He also headed the security service and has an intimate knowledge of regional dealings and politics as well as Djibouti's political forces, a knowledge which he has used to practice a politics of divide-and-rule supplemented by repression and intimidation when expedient. Moreover, 'he built up and retained a formidable network of informants and strong-arm men': A Bollee, Djibouti: from French outpost to US base, *Review of African Political Economy*, 97 (2003), 481. Guelleh is 'a firm and cautious leader who shows little tolerance for any threats to his rule, whether real or imagined. And, he seems to enjoy the loyalty of most of the senior military officers. His mechanism of control mainly consists of a pervasive security network and manipulation of the conflicting interests and rivalries of key military and security personnel': personal interview, Djibouti City, Djibouti, December 2009. Significantly, Guelleh is an Issa Somali of the Mamassan subclan. This subclan overwhelmingly dominates the civil bureaucracy, the business sector, the police force, the elite 500-strong Republican Guard (created in 2002 and headed by Colonel Mohammed Djama Doualeh from the Mamassan subclan), the military (headed by Major General Zakaria Cheikh Ibrahim the Chief of Staff from the Mamassan subclan), and the security service which is commonly known as the Department of Documentation and Security. The security service is headed by Hassan Said Khaireh (appointed head of national security to the presidency), who is from the Mamassan subclan and reports directly to Guelleh.
- 19 International Foundation for Election Systems and International Republican Institute, Djibouti: 2005 pre-election assessment report, Report submitted to the United States Agency for International Development, 2005, 20; M Aden, *Ourrou Djibouti 1991-1994: du maquis Afar à la paix des braves*, Paris: L'Harmattan, 2002, 172.
- 20 C Ouazani, Djibouti: baptême de feu démocratique, *Jeune Afrique*, 2189-2190, 2003.
- 21 Mesfin, The Eritrea-Djibouti border dispute, 10.
- 22 The Ministry of Interior plays an important role in terms of procuring election equipment and deploying polling station materials and staff and overseeing public relations. The Ministry of Interior also issues the national identity cards that voters must present at the polling station. Rapport de la mission d'observation de l'élection présidentielle du 8 Avril 2005, 11; International Foundation for Election Systems and International Republican Institute, Djibouti, 20.
- 23 L'avocat Assoweh Idriss élu à la tête de la CENI, Agence Djiboutienne d'Information, 4 February 2011, 1.
- 24 Rapport de la mission d'observation de l'élection présidentielle du 8 Avril 2005, 11.
- 25 Ouazani, Djibouti: baptême de feu démocratique, *Jeune Afrique*, 18.
- 26 W Davison, Djiboutian president expected to win third term after opposition crackdown, *Bloomberg*, 7 April 2011, 3.
- 27 Djibouti evicts US vote group ahead of election, *Associated Press*, 17 March 2011, 1.
- 28 K Manson, Djibouti suspends US election mission, *Financial Times*, 12 March 2011, 1.
- 29 Democracy International, Electoral observation mission to Djibouti 2010-2011, 15 March 2011, 3.
- 30 The RPR has been 'winning not only every presidential election but every seat in the 65-member National Assembly in every legislative election'. J Brass, Djibouti's unusual resource curse, *Journal of Modern African Studies*, 46(4) (2008), 530.
- 31 The party was founded in 2002 by Moumin Bahdon Farah who had served as Minister of Foreign Affairs for nearly 15 years and also as Minister of Justice. He died in September 2009.
- 32 Brass, Djibouti's unusual resource curse, 532.
- 33 International Foundation for Election Systems and International Republican Institute, Djibouti, 10.
- 34 International Foundation for Election Systems and International Republican Institute, Djibouti, 10; personal interview, Djibouti City, Djibouti, December 2009.
- 35 Born in 1932, Dini along with Aptidon established the LPAI. Dini then became independent Djibouti's first prime minister. He joined the FRUD and led its insurgency after 1992. He condemned the 1994 peace agreement but returned to Djibouti in 2000 after signing a ceasefire agreement. He was 'known as a consummate politician and the only leader who could have effectively united the opposition parties, he died in 2004': International Foundation for Election Systems and International Republican Institute, Djibouti, 12.
- 36 Rapport de la mission d'observation de l'élection présidentielle du 8 Avril 2005, 12.
- 37 Awaleh is the former head of the Liberation Front of the Somali Coast (FLCS) who served as Minister of Commerce until 1983, went into exile in France in 1986, returned to Djibouti in 1992 and contested the 1993 presidential elections. M Pelerman, L'opposition est aujourd'hui unie, *Jeune Afrique*, 2002, 1999, 105. Awaleh also served as Guelleh's advisor and as a member of the National Assembly between 2003 and 2009. F Soudan, Le vrai Guelleh, *Jeune Afrique*, 2619, 2011, 44.
- 38 Economist Intelligence Unit, Djibouti: February 2011, 2011, 9.
- 39 Personal interviews, Djibouti City, Djibouti, April 2008, February 2009 and December 2009.
- 40 International Foundation for Election Systems and International Republican Institute, Djibouti, 13.
- 41 Ibid.
- 42 Houmed, Farah, Hared, Awaleh and Boreh were all associated, one way or another, with Guelleh and then became his political opponents. In fact, one of the reviewers of this situation report observed that 'the Djiboutian political leadership culture both on the government and opposition sides is quite similar'.
- 43 Djibouti opposition boycotts presidential election, *Reuters*, 11 March 2011.

- 44 Le portrait du candidat indépendant Mohammed Warsama, 5 April 2011, http://www.djibouti24.com/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=432%3Aleportrait-du-candidat-independant-mohamed-warsama&catid=1%3Alatest-news&lang=fr (accessed 6 April 2011). This situation report's reviewer remarked that 'the profile of [Warsama] is interesting in the sense that he belongs to the 1960 generation and has strong links with Djibouti city. His electoral message was based on the slogan of freedom, equality and dignity. As a lawyer and a very popular figure of an urbanised and multi-community neighbourhood (Quartier 1), Warsama does not belong to the classical category of Djiboutian politicians but the third generation of middle-class urban dwellers. For the first time also, the official opponent of the current president is neither from the historical political leaders or the pre-independence period who share very long personal rivalries with Guelleh'.
- 45 Africa Confidential, Hello North Africa, 52(6), 2011, 12; Oxford Analytica, Guelleh will see off reform pressures, 25 March 2011, 1.
- 46 Djibouti opposition backs Warsama for presidency, Reuters, 5 April 2011.
- 47 Davison, Djiboutian president expected to win third term after opposition crackdown; Djiboutians expected to return president in poll, Reuters, 8 April 2011; Djibouti president set for re-election win, Agence France Presse, 6 April 2011. On Election Day, a Djiboutian told the author of this situation report that 'everyone knew president Guelleh would win. He just followed a tried-and-tested script. It was unthinkable that Warsama would defeat him and his well-oiled political machine'.
- 48 Le Président sortant remporte les élections avec 80,58 pour cent, Agence Djiboutienne d'Information, 9 April 2011.
- 49 Indian Ocean Newsletter, IOG changes his campaign team, 1305, 19 March 2011, 3.
- 50 Indian Ocean Newsletter, Abstentions threat to presidential election, Alert, 26 January 2011.
- 51 Le président des observateurs de l'Union Africaine se félicite du bon déroulement de l'élection présidentielle, Agence Djiboutienne d'Information, 9 April 2011.
- 52 Djibouti parliament removes presidential term limits, Reuters, 14 April 2011, 1.
- 53 Indian Ocean Newsletter, IOG bracing himself against a possible Mubarak scenario, Alert, 11 February 2011.
- 54 Soudan, Le vrai Guelleh, 41.
- 55 Political protests spread to Djibouti, Voice of America News, 18 February 2011, 1. One news report put the number as high as 6 000 and claimed that 'the rally turned violent when riot police moved in, and opposition politicians said dozens of people were wounded and five killed': Djibouti evicts US vote group ahead of election, 2.
- 56 The Economist, Djibouti's troubles, 24 February 2011, <http://www.economist.com/node/18233712> (accessed 10 March 2011).
- 57 There is a perception that Guelleh has concentrated political and economic power 'in the office and person of the president who makes many of Djibouti's laws and policies through unilateral Presidential Decree': Brass, Djibouti's unusual resource curse, 529. There is also a widespread perception that he has become one of the largest owners of multi-million-dollar business enterprises in Djibouti along with his wife, Kadra Mahamoud Haïd, who is an Isaaq Somali. There seems to be currently an intense behind-the-scenes power struggle between the Issa clan which is the largest Somali clan in Djibouti and the Isaaq clan which dominates neighbouring Somaliland. Indian Ocean Newsletter, President IOG sitting on a time bomb, 1299, 18 December 2010, 1; personal interviews, Djibouti City, Djibouti, April 2008, February 2009 and December 2009.
- 58 Authorities arrest opposition leaders in wake of anti-regime protests, Agence France Presse, 19 February 2010, 1-2; Guelleh face à l'onde de choc arabe, Jeune Afrique, 2618, 2011, 8; A Arteh, Protests hit Djibouti, opposition leaders held, Reuters, 19 February 2011, 1; W Davison, Three opposition leaders detained amid protests in Djibouti are released, Bloomberg, 20 February 2011, 1.
- 59 Indian Ocean Newsletter, President IOG finally takes a tough line, Update, 3 March 2011.
- 60 Boreh has posted on his website his official biography providing interesting facts. Abdurahman Boreh, <http://djiboutiplan.com/abdourahman-boreh-3> (accessed 1 March 2011).
- 61 T Giorgis, Former ally poses challenge to Guelleh's bid for third term, Addis Fortune, 27 March 2010.
- 62 T Giorgis, Court sentences prominent businessman to 15 years, Addis Fortune, 12 July 2010, <http://allafrica.com/stories/201007130369.html> (accessed 13 March 2011).
- 63 A politically well-connected Djiboutian described Boreh to the author of this situation report as 'un opposant de circonstance', meaning a political opportunist, who used Guelleh's power for his own profit and seems to be currently trying to take advantage of Guelleh's weak spot. He added that, despite all his money and knowledge, Boreh will 'never be a serious force in Djiboutian politics'. Personal interview, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, January 2011. Moreover, one of the reviewers of this situation report commented that 'Boreh has been entirely created by the current head of state and is without any sociological and cultural link with the Djiboutian mentality. He is more at ease with the Arab and English settings in the Gulf area and East Africa'.
- 64 Economist Intelligence Unit, Djibouti, 8; Indian Ocean Newsletter, President Guelleh is wary of Boreh, 1291, 28 August 2010, 3; Indian Ocean Newsletter, More of Soprim's property seized, 1263, 6 June 2009, 6; Mr Boreh breaks his silence while US, French and AU kept their lips-tight, 21 March 2011, <http://labo22.wordpress.com/2010/03/21/mr-boreh-breaks-his-silence-while-us-french-and-au-kept-their-lips-tight/> (accessed 29 March 2011).
- 65 Interview with General Philippe Lefort, the former commander of the French military forces stationed in Djibouti, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, July 2008; Mesfin, The Eritrea-Djibouti border dispute; C Ouazani, Djibouti: quand le conflit s'ensable, Jeune Afrique, 2505, 2009; S Ghorbal, Djibouti-Erythrée: amorce d'une décrispation, Jeune Afrique, 2478, 2008; D Mataillet, Djibouti-Erythrée: bruits de botte, Jeune Afrique, 2473, 2008.

- 66 The 6 000-strong Djiboutian National Army is 'not only small in numbers but also defective in terms of equipment and few experienced officers in the various headquarters and fighting as well as support units'. Personal interview, Djibouti City, Djibouti, December 2009. Djiboutian Air Force helicopters (Djibouti has one AS 355 Ecureuil and three Russian-made Mi-8/17 Hip which are easy to maintain and versatile under the kind of difficult condition encountered in Djibouti) were hectically on duty in providing food and cold bottled water for the soldiers who have little or no experience of full-scale conventional wars and had alarmingly started 'to leave their post and go home': Indian Ocean Newsletter, High command worried by desertions, 1263, 6 June 2011, 3.
- 67 It is worth noting that in January 1999 France established a 520-strong Khor Angar mission in Djibouti in order to protect it from any fallout of the Ethiopian-Eritrean war. It also sent two anti-defence frigates Le Cassard and Jean-Bart armed with the Mistral surface-to-air missiles. It should also be noted that, if Djibouti accuses Eritrea of direct armed attack, it is entitled to invoke French military assistance.
- 68 According to a former Eritrean high official, it was impossible for President Issayas to hide Eritrea's humiliating military defeat in 2000 which dealt a shattering blow to the exceptionalist myth of Eritrean invincibility. Personal interview, Washington DC, United States, December 2010.
- 69 Before May 1998, two-thirds of landlocked Ethiopia's merchandise transited through the Eritrean port of Assab with a total traffic of around 3 million tons annually. Overnight, Ethiopia diverted this traffic to the port of Djibouti 910 kilometres east of Addis Ababa, which has the capacity to handle 10 million tons of cargo and 500 000 containers annually and has consequently become Ethiopia's main gateway for imports and exports. In fact, Ethiopia's cargo accounts for 83 per cent of the total cargo traffic at the port. Ethiopia, which annually spends around 150 million USD for port service, has been assessing the ports of Berbera, Bossasso, Port Sudan and Mombasa as alternatives. For Djibouti City, the port represents the most important source of revenue, the largest single employer for the population, 58 per cent of whom live in the city itself, and is used as a naval port by France, the US, Germany, Spain and Japan. Since 2000, the port's operations have been managed by Dubai Ports World in terms of a 20-year management and concession agreement. Ethiopia and Djibouti signed a Port Utilisation Agreement in April 2002 which has been renewed. In 1997, total tonnage of transit to and from Ethiopia cleared through Djibouti was 278 350 tons. In 1998, this figure rose to 1,2 million tons, a 333 per cent increase. The volume then rose from 3,9 million in 2007 to 4,6 million in 2008 and it was estimated to have exceeded 5 million in 2009. There are concerns that the fees of the Djibouti port are quite high, including demurrage. Congestion is another problem, ostensibly emanating from the lack of adequate facilities such as giant cranes. This congestion is expected to be alleviated by the large container terminal which has been built at Doraleh at a cost of 400 million USD and which opened for service in December 2008, as well as the delivery of nine Chinese cranes to the port of Djibouti in November 2008.
- 70 Qatar to deploy troops between Djibouti and Eritrea, Somalilandpress, 10 June 2010.
- 71 Permanent Mission to the United Nations, Letter addressed to the president of the Security Council, 7 June 2011.
- 72 China lauds Djibouti, Eritrea border deal, Xinhua, 12 June 2010.
- 73 B Malone, Peace agreement between Djibouti and Eritrea, Reuters, 8 June 2010; UN backs Qatari mediation in Eritrea-Djibouti border row, Agence France Presse, 7 June 2010; Qatar mediating Eritrea-Djibouti border dispute, Agence France Presse, 8 June 2010.
- 74 J Clarke, Ethiopia doubts Eritrea's intentions in border deal, Reuters, 28 June 2010; Mesfin, The Eritrea-Djibouti border dispute, 9.
- 75 The Issa clan is located in Ethiopia, Djibouti and Somaliland. The 19th traditional leader of the Issa clan, Ugaz Mustaphe Mohammed Ibrahim from Djibouti, was elected in 2009 after some heavy lobbying from Djibouti. The Ugaz has great political influence and is considered to be the leader of all Issas. Owing to their dominant position in Djibouti and their links in the Ethiopian Somali region, Somaliland and Somalia, the Issas possess a large amount of weapons, pass through state borders with ease and secure considerable profits from illicit trade of second-hand clothes, perfumes, electronic items, *khat*, shisha, cigarettes, sugar, powder milk, pasta, food oil and rice. Indeed, the Issas have established a very strong contraband hub at Gedamaytu. In Ethiopia, the Issas are involved in a long-standing conflict with the Afars, mainly because of resource utilisation, control of trade routes and boundary contentions. The apparent flashpoints of the still unresolved Afar-Issa conflict are Adayitu, Ambule, Gedamaytu and Undufu, inhabited mainly by the Issas but without a proper administration from either the Afar or Somali regions despite the establishment in 1998 of joint security committees. The Afars generally blame both the Ethiopian government and the Afar regional government for their failure to respond effectively to the fact that the Issas have gradually penetrated and taken control of Afar grazing land in the Middle Awash Valley, resulting in drought, famine and cattle deaths. According to Afar sources, the Issa expansion into Afar traditional territory was militarily backed by the Djiboutian government. The Afars accuse Ethiopia's government of giving in to the Issas because of geo-political considerations and wider security preoccupations. The Ethiopian government appears to take into account Ethiopia's dependence on the port of Djibouti, which is dominated by Issas. It also needs the Issas when setting up self-defence forces recruited from Somali clans hostile to the Ogaadeen clan from which the Ogaden National Liberation Front mainly draws its support.
- 76 An alarmed Djiboutian government notified the US and French embassies that Eritrea was training Djiboutian Afars, arming and then sending them back into Djibouti in order to overthrow it. These claims were conveyed to the two embassies starting from February and March 2009. It has to be noted that there is no clear and convincing evidence that the Afar rebellion was directed by Eritrea, which has a propensity to support most

- of the Horn of Africa's rebel movements but is not usually sympathetic to Afar insurgency mainly due to the concern that it could politicise its own restive Afar population. But, surprisingly enough, credible sources indicate that the Afars who carried out attacks inside Djibouti may have actually come from the Ethiopian side, as Ethiopian Afars secretly assist the Djiboutian Afars who inhabit the northern and south-western two-thirds of Djibouti and those along the latter's border with Ethiopia. All in all, the fluidity of borders and the presence of vast uncontrolled territory as well as clan corridors are expedient for the rapid cross-border movement of Afar fighters and make the task of controlling hit-and-run raids very difficult. It similarly yields to contraband trade, the illicit trafficking of weapons and the infiltration of insurgents, which invites the involvement of neighbouring countries on grounds of security. Interviews with the US and French ambassadors to Djibouti, Djibouti City, Djibouti, December 2009.
- 77 Djibouti inflation rises to 3,8 per cent in February, Reuters, 30 March 2011.
- 78 Indian Ocean Newsletter, IOG worried about security, 1262, 23 May 2009; Indian Ocean Newsletter, A succession of armed incidents, 1278, 30 January 2010; Indian Ocean Newsletter, Armed FRUD recruiting galore, 1301, 22 January 2011, 3; A McGregor, Djibouti facing local insurgency and threats from Somali Islamists, *Terrorism Monitor*, 7(29) (2009), 3.
- 79 The five-year lease with the US was renewed in 2006. In 2009, taxiway sections connecting to the Djibouti-Ambouli international airport runway, which CJTF-HoA utilises, were expanded. M Terrell, Camp Lemonier fast tracks 34 million USD in airfield projects, 17 June 2009, http://www.navy.mil/search/display.asp?story_id=46257 (accessed 21 March 2011).
- 80 The camp staff performs all the base operating support functions which include facilities upkeep, construction, berthing and food services. They are also responsible for expeditionary medical support, security, base tours and distinguished visitor coordination activities.
- 81 The Air Component Coordination Element staff coordinates theatre airlift requirements, the Civil Affairs Teams are deployed throughout the CJTF-HoA area of responsibility in support of theatre objectives, the Engineer Units (Navy Mobile Construction Battalion and Army well-drillers) execute humanitarian assistance projects and the Mil-to-Mil Training Teams build the capacity of region's countries through instruction of tactics, techniques and procedures.
- 82 The CIA flies missions from Djibouti using the Predator which is a pilotless drone equipped with Hellfire missiles. The CIA missions include a strike on a car in November 2002 carried out by a Predator attack in Yemen which killed Abu Ali Al Harithy, who was a well-known al-Qaeda operative. In January 2007, AC-130 aircraft reportedly attacked what the US had identified as al-Qaeda outposts in southern Somalia near its border with Kenya. In May 2008, another strike in the central Somali city of Dusamareeb killed Aden Hashi Ayro, who was the Afghanistan-trained influential commander of Al Shabab and was involved in terrorist attacks, including the murder of four foreign aid workers, a British journalist and a prominent Somali peace activist. From Djibouti, the US has been watching three al-Qaeda suspects in particular who took refuge in Somalia. The three are Fazul Abdullah Mohammed (a national of the Comoros who was indicted by a US court in New York for the attack on the US embassies in Kenya and Tanzania in 1998), Abu Talha Al Sudani (a Sudanese who was accused by the US of leading an al-Qaeda cell in East Africa) and Saleh Ali Saleh Nabhan (a Kenyan who was on an FBI wanted poster in connection with the bombing of a hotel and the missile attack on an aircraft in 2002 in Kenya). Nabhan was killed by a special forces helicopter assault undertaken in September 2009. M Gordon, US turns Horn of Africa into a military hub, New York Times, 17 November 2011, <http://query.nytimes.com/gst/fullpage.html?res=9902E4D61330F934A2572C1A9649C8B63> (accessed 20 March 2011).
- 83 The entire area for which CJTF-HoA is responsible is enormous as it includes a total land mass of 7 298 346 square kilometres, approximately 6,7 times larger than the land masses of Iraq and Afghanistan combined. CJTF-HoA has liaison officers in Ethiopia, Kenya, Djibouti and Yemen.
- 84 CJTF-HoA has a cross-agency and multi-national intelligence section (CJ-2) which operates day and night at the Sensitive Compartmented Information Facility in order to gather up-to-date information about terrorist activities in its area of responsibility. CJ-2 gathers information through a variety of sources including signals and electronic monitoring, photography, higher headquarters including AFRICOM's Intelligence Knowledge Development based at Molesworth, the United Kingdom, the internet and also person-to-person contact with local informants. After receiving the information, country analysis teams, which cover the seven primary countries, put together reports making up the daily intelligence summary provided to the CJTF-HoA commander and his staff. The intelligence estimates and analyses are then passed on to the personnel monitoring and managing operations across the Horn of Africa and the Arabian Peninsula from the Joint Operations Center. The action taken in response to credible intelligence could range from monitoring possible terrorist threats to actually sending troops into a certain area in order to eradicate a specific threat. It should however be noted that American soldiers simply do not understand the complexities in the Horn of Africa and cannot correctly read even the internal political situation of a single country mainly because they lack deep knowledge of that particular country's history and thus gut instinct. They have found it difficult to deal with the variety of terrain, cultures, languages and efficiency levels of militaries and to uncover the many hidden causes of conflicts and the operation of the region's murky politics operating in a framework of both hostility and conspiracy theory. P Fitzgerald, Intel troops keep CJTF-HoA informed, Marine Corps News, 6 September 2003; US lacks intelligence on Horn of Africa, United Press International, 28 February 2007.
- 85 A harbour security force was established in 2009 between the CJTF-HoA Navy component and the Djiboutian Navy. The establishment of the harbour security force enhanced the security operations for the

- port, increasing capabilities to protect vessels transiting through the port in addition to providing training and operational opportunities between US and Djiboutian personnel. The harbour security force consists of personnel from different US Navy installations. M Rockwell-Pate, Harbour security force established in Djibouti, 31 July 2009, <http://www.army.mil/-news/2009/07/31/25345-harbor-security-force-established-in-djibouti/> (accessed 21 March 2011).
- 86 There is a high possibility that France could significantly reduce its military presence in Djibouti in the coming years. V Liebl, Military options to revise the French military presence in the Horn of Africa, *Comparative Strategy*, 27(1) (2008).
- 87 The naval component of the French military presence is ALINDIEN (L'Amiral Commandant les Forces Maritimes Françaises de l'Océan Indien) which is generally tasked with the operational control of all the naval forces deployed in the Indian Ocean, mainly stationed in Djibouti and La Réunion and protecting the movement of France's strategic supplies. ALINDIEN is also particularly tasked to gather intelligence on and oversee operations against piracy in the north-western area of the Indian Ocean. Since February 2008, the commander of ALINDIEN (loosely defined as Commanding Officer of French Joint Forces for the Indian Ocean Region) has been Rear Admiral Bruno Nielly who, along with his 30-strong staff, operates permanently from a command and replenishment ship, BCR Var, a Durance class tanker. Alindin: l'amiral itinérant, *Défense et Sécurité Internationale*, 39 (2008), 70–75.
- 88 France ups payment for its Djibouti base, Middle East Online, 2003, <http://www.Middle-east-online.com> (accessed 11 March 2011).
- 89 France's interests in Djibouti are purely strategic: (1) Djibouti is strategically located at the southern entrance to the Red Sea, facing Yemen across the narrow but critical strait of Bab-el-Mandeb, a passage which is heavily travelled by oil tankers and warships on their way to and from the Gulf; (2) Djibouti provides a convenient staging post between France and its territories in the Indian Ocean, used for refuelling and other support services; (3) Djibouti is home to an intelligence-gathering signals station enabling France to monitor communications and military activities in the Horn of Africa, the Middle East and the Indian Ocean; (4) Djibouti is France's most useful forward base for military operations including multilateral missions in the Middle East, Afghanistan and the eastern part of Africa, especially its airbase providing a tactical support point; (5) Djibouti is an exceptionally low-cost training site for desert warfare (Centre d'Aguerrissement et d'Instruction au Désert de Djibouti and Centre d'Entraînement au Combat d'Arta-plage) with flat terrain and huge shooting ranges (Champ de Tir de Maryam-Koron). Mesfin, The Eritrea-Djibouti border dispute, 17. See also, B Guillerez, Djibouti: centre névralgique de la Corne de l'Afrique, *Défense Nationale*, 32 (1976); G Malelot, Raisons de la présence française à Djibouti, *Revue Française d'Etudes Politiques Africaines*, 85 (1973); T Marks, Djibouti: France's strategic toehold in Africa, *African Affairs*, 73(290) (1974); Liebl, Military options to revise the French military presence in the Horn of Africa; J-D Geslin, La carte française, *Jeune Afrique*, 2003, 1999; D Hazard, Paris veille, *Jeune Afrique*, 2002, 1999; Indian Ocean Newsletter, What is the French base for?, 1267, 8 January 2009.
- 90 A credible source indicated that 'the maximum that could happen is that Guelleh could reshuffle the cabinet including the nomination of a new Prime Minister and a change in the personnel and status of some ministers in order to keep in check internal party rivalries'.
- 91 Criticism has been muted as the US and France did not even comment on the opposition political parties' boycott of the April 2011 presidential elections and the expulsion of Democracy International. Africa Confidential, One man, one vote, 52(7), 2011, 10.