

government defender of Ogaadeen interests, using cash and coercion to force Ogaadeeni to abandon the ONLF and instead support his agenda.

Over the years he branded himself as a spokesman of Ogaadeen (and Darood more broadly) interests not only within SRS, but across the Somali inhabited territories. Abdi Iley's pro-Ethiopian Somali nationalism did not benefit the Issaq and other numerically smaller kinship groups. He marginalized the Issaq who had once controlled some of the highest positions in the SRS and federal government. During his presidency (2010-2018) only one Issaq, Ahmed Mohamed Koorre, who headed the Bureau of Sports and Youth, held an appointment at regional level. The Issaq had little to no influence within the ruling Ethiopian Somali Democratic Party (ESDP, formerly SPDP). Abdi Iley oversaw the creation of more than 10 new districts within the Ogaadeen dominated areas of the SRS. With each new district the Ogaadeen gained political weight in regional politics. Conversely, the Issaq received Darroor district (part of Jarar administrative zone) and were dislocated from Aware district, which they had shared with members of the (Ogaadeen) Reer Issaq sub-clan.

Abdi Iley's security forces, in particular the *liyu* police, were involved in managing cross-border trade with Somaliland. The [Ethiopian side of the Tog'wajale border town](#), which is located some 65 km east of Jigjiga, was under strict *liyu* police control. Their presence and interference in cross-border trading disrupted cross-border interactions, making the lives of Somaliland electronics and Ethiopian contraband traders difficult. At times *liyu* police crossed into Somaliland and on two occasions, its forces attacked civilians near Salahley and Tog'wajale. *Liyu* police disruption of trade between SRS and Somaliland was particularly notorious at the Magaalo Qaran checkpoint, which is half-way between Jigjiga and the Somaliland border. *Liyu* policemen regularly harassed passengers and small-scale traders at the checkpoint. These aggressions included forcing passengers to strip off their clothes, throwing away their luggage and carry-ons, sexually harassing female travelers and beating or arbitrarily arresting passengers. Leading Somaliland politicians blamed the SRS for the continuous harassment of Issaq traders at the checkpoint. For example, UCID party chairman Faisal Ali 'Waraabe' expressed his concern about *liyu* police harassment in an interview with BBC Somali service.

Formally a regional police force, in reality *liyu* policemen were predominantly recruited among the Ogaadeen. In addition to fighting ONLF and furthering Abdi Iley's security agenda, the *liyu* police at times sided with particular Ogaadeen clan lineages. From the Issaq viewpoint the special police was little more than a government sanctioned Ogaadeen clan militia. Confrontation between *liyu* police and the Issaq community came to a head in Raqda *kebele* of Gashamo district in [March 2012](#). Revenge killings between *liyu* police and local villagers led to the summary execution of 10 Issaq villagers at the hands of the police. In response Issaq elders and representatives in the diaspora demanded that the Ethiopian government hold the perpetrators accountable. A UK delegation of Issaq representatives met with the Ethiopian ambassador and later on sent a delegation to SRS, which met with Abdi Iley who assured them that similar actions would not recur.

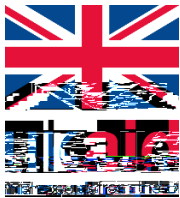
Tensions between the *liyu* police and Issaq communities both within and beyond the SRS continued, however. In June 2016 the police force [killed 21 villagers](#) and detained several more in Jamac Dubbad, some 30 km southeast of Gashamo after a dispute between a *liyu* policeman and an Issaq trader. This event had the potential to trigger full blown inter-clan conflict between the Issaq and Ogaaden. Dozens of Issaq sultans and traditional leaders gathered in Hargeisa's KAAH hotel in the aftermath of the attack. They agreed that their clansmen in the border area should retaliate against the *liyu* police, even if it meant attacking Ethiopian federal defense forces. In the end escalation was avoided as Somaliland's political elite convinced the elders to back off from confrontation with Abdi Iley's *liyu* police. They feared that conflict would disrupt and distract from the Somaliland presidential election, which had been postponed from March to November 2017. Similarly, on the Ogaadeen side

the ONLF leadership opposed conflict with the Issaq, which would mean a de facto rapprochement between the ONLF and its arch enemy, the Abdi Iley regime.

Détente and unfinished business

The downfall of Abdi Iley in August 2018 led to an immediate improvement of cross-border trading between SRS and Somaliland. Restrictions and harassments at the border stopped and trade flows smoothed after his deposal. The harassment of Somaliland traders at Magaalo Qaran checkpoint stopped. Most of the *liyu* police stationed at the border were replaced with military or other police forces. Incoming president Mustafa Mohammed Omar favoured free trading with neighbouring Somaliland. An Ogaadeen himself, the new president has pursued an inclu()JTJETy2i /P ÅMCID 1t4(i)-3(d)1s

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