PETER WOODWARD

THE HORN OF AFRICA
Politics and International Relations

The Horn of Africa

INTERNATIONAL LIBRARY OF AFRICAN STUDIES

The Horn of Africa:
State, politics and international relations

PETER WOODWARD

Contents

Acknowledgements

Abbreviations

CARE	CARE International
CART	Combined Agency Relief Team
COPWE	Commission for Organizing the Party of the Working People of Ethiopia
DFSS	Democratic Front for the Salvation of Somalia
DUP	Democratic Unionist Party
ECOWAS	Economic Community of West African States
ELF	Eritrean Liberation Front
ELF-PLF	Eritrean Liberation Front-People's Liberation Forces
EPLF	Eritrean People's Liberation Front
EPRDF	Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front
EPRP	Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Party
ERA	Eritrean Relief Association
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization
FLN	Front de Libération National
FRUD	Front pour la Restauration de l'Unité et la Démocratie
GONGO	government-organized non-governmental organization
GUNT	Government of National Unity
ICRC	International Committee of the Red Cross
IFAD	International Fund for Agricultural Development
IGADD	Inter-Governmental Authority on Drought and Development
IMF	International Monetary Fund
MEISON	All Ethiopia Socialist Movement
NDA	National Democratic Alliance
NFD	Northern Frontier District
NGO	non-governmental organization
NIF	National Islamic Front
NUP	National Union Party
OAU	Organization of African Unity
OLF	Oromo Liberation Front
OLS	Operation Lifeline Sudan
ONLF	Ogaden National Liberation Front
OPEC	Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries
PA	Peasant Association

PDF	People's Defence Force
PDO	People's Democratic Organization
PDP	People's Democratic Party
PDRY	People's Democratic Republic of Yemen
PFDJ	People's Front for Democracy and Justice
PLO	Palestine Liberation Organization
PMAC	Provisional Military Administrative Council (Dergue)
POMOA	Provisional Office of Mass Organization
RCC	Revolutionary Command Council
REST	Relief Society of Tigre
RRC	Relief and Rehabilitation Commission
SALT	Strategic Arms Limitation Talks
SACDNU	Sudan African Closed District National Union
SANU	Sudan African National Union
SCF	Save the Children Fund
SDA	Somali Democratic Alliance
SDM	Somali Democratic Movement
SNM	Somali National Movement
SPLA/SPLM	Sudan People's Liberation Army/Movement
SPM	Somali Patriotic Movement
SRC	Supreme Revolutionary Council
SRRA	Sudan Relief and Rehabilitation Association
SRSP	Somali Revolutionary Socialist Party
SSDF	Somali Salvation Democratic Front
SSU	Sudan Socialist Union
SYL	Somali Youth League
TGE	Transitional Government of Ethiopia
TMC	Transitional Military Council
TPLF	Tigrean People's Liberation Front
UN	United Nations
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
Unicef	United Nations (International) Children's (Emergency) Fund
UNITAF	United Nations Task Force
UNOSOM	United Nations Operation in Somalia
UNSERO	United Nations Sudan Emergency Relief Office
USC	United Somali Congress
USF	United Somali Front
WFP	World Food Programme
WPE	Workers' Party of Ethiopia
WSLF	Western Somali Liberation Front

Introduction

In recent years there has been a spate of books on the Horn of Africa, as well as numerous papers, articles and conferences. These have been not only historical in character but have also sought to offer solutions to the problems of the Horn.[1] Yet at the time of completing this book in the 'problems' of the Horn seem as complex and 'unresolved' as ever, despite the independence of Eritrea and greater peace in Ethiopia.

The 'Horn of Africa' is not an indigenous term; it springs from a glance at a map rather than any perception of inhabitants of that area of north-east Africa. Indeed, there is no agreement on exactly what it is; the concept of the Horn has grown from an early concern about Somalia's relations with Ethiopia, to take in all of the latter's problems, and then increasingly to include Sudan as well. The reason for this expansion lies primarily in the perception that there seems to be a history of common problems in the region: disputes over borders both between states and within them; widespread and prolonged civil war threatening not only governments but the survival of states themselves; economic regression that appears to owe something at least to domestic policy failure, as well as the vagaries of the world economy and environmental decay; in addition to the famines that seemed to grow in scale and regularity. (Indeed, in assessing food shortages and environmental degrada –ân in Africa the ter m 'greater Horn' has been used to include neighbouring East African states threatened with food deficits as well.)

In addition to the list of inflictions experienced by the peoples of the three adjacent countries – Somalia, Ethiopia and Sudan – there is a sense that there are connections between their plights, and that these connections are not just confined to the Horn but reflect both regional and wider international influences that have in various ways contributed to the situation. As Otto Hintze remarked at the start of the century, in examining the politics of states one must also consider 'The external ordering of states – their position relative to one another, and their overall position in the world'.[2] Much of Africa has been experiencing major problems, politically, economically and socially, but few other regions of the continent appear as devastated as these three adjacent

countries, and it appears to be more than coincidence. In the last decade certain states in southern Africa have been similarly blighted by violence and famine in which over and beyond the indigenous seeds of conflict have lain regional issues, especially the attempted defence of racist rule in South Africa, as well as superpower rivalry. The combination of indigenous conflicts, ambitions of a regional character and superpower rivalry has proved a particularly lethal cocktail in Africa, and one that has left a complex and bitter aftermath in the context of the post-Cold War world.

The connections between intra-state, regional and wider inter-national issues themselves are not simply of any one particular character, but they do appear to have multiplied with the passing of time. The first 'problem of the Horn' as a region concerned the international boundaries bequeathed by the departing imperial powers, especially with regard to Somalia's irredentist claim to Ethiopia. That was a dispute between two states over the legitimate border between them and was taken up vociferously by Somalia from its independence in 1960, leading on eventually to a major war in 1977–78 as Somalia's troops attacked Ethiopia. While that was the only major international dispute among the states of the Horn it came to be perceived as part of a wider question of borders and societies. Somalia's actions arose from its claim that the disputed territories are inhabited by Somali peoples; elsewhere in the Horn other peoples disputed the legitimacy of the states and governments that ruled them. At approximately the same time as the Somalis were first making their claim, civil war was breaking out in the area of Eritrea in northern Ethiopia. The war there was to grow in the 1970s, particularly following the overthrow of the Emperor Haile Selassie, and was to be accompanied by other conflicts within Ethiopia, most notably in Tigre. At the same time as civil war was starting in Eritrea in the 1960s, another conflict was opening in the southern Sudan, and though it ended by negotiation in 1972, a new and more virulent war broke out in the same region eleven years later in 1983. Somalia was spared outright civil war until much later but by the 1980s it too was experiencing rising conflict, and from 1988 it intensified to the point at which insurgents eventually overthrew the longstanding president, Mohamed Siad Barre, in 1991. The civil wars of the three countries not only put them into a similar category, thus contributing to the perception of an unstable region, it also appeared that there were links between them. Partly on a tit-for-tat basis, it appeared that Ethiopia and Sudan were at least acquiescing in, and sometimes abetting, cross-border activities of the respective guerrilla forces their governments were facing; and in the 1980s a similar situation developed with Ethiopia and Somalia.

The Horn also began to distinguish itself as a region of famine. Behind famine lay not only civil war, but deep economic problems and issues. However, it was inevitably the identification of the phenomenon of famine, and especially its visual images of apparent passive helplessness in suffering, that gripped the headlines. Televized images of famine in northern Ethiopia first flashed around the world in 1973. In 1984–85 famine in northern Ethiopia and northern Sudan once more hit the headlines, and the world responded to Bob Geldof's dramatic invitation to run to raise money. Disasters of no lesser scale followed in subsequent years, though international perception and response was not again to be so dramatic until the intervention in Somalia in 1992. Famine was both a contributor to political instability and a reflection of it: it helped bring down Haile Selassie in Ethiopia in 1974; it contributed similarly to the overthrow of Ga'afar el-Nimeiri in Sudan in 1985; and it was intensified by the struggle to overthrow Siad Barre in Somalia in 1991. Together with civil war it also generated flows of refugees from one country into another, sometimes in opposite directions at the same time: people from Eritrea and Tigre sought refuge in eastern Sudan, while further south on the same border southern Sudanese were fleeing from war and famine into Ethiopia. In the short term famine turned into a race against time and the elements to mobilize international donors and relief agencies to staunch the mounting death tolls. In the long term it presented challenges not only to improve famine predictions and relief, but also to the whole character of domestic and international politics and economics in which such disasters were possible.

While donor governments, primarily from the West, sought to appear as rescuers of benighted Africa, an awareness of a further dimension of regional consciousness was also growing. The Horn was an area of significant international rivalry. It all started quietly enough with American interest in the strategic position of Ethiopia, but later escalated into a broader rivalry along the south-eastern flank of the oil-producing Middle East, as well as a major international waterway, the Red Sea. The Soviet Union was welcomed in Sudan in 1969, only to be hurriedly ejected two years later, but then appeared to dig in much more firmly in Somalia in the 1970s. Following the Ethiopian revolution of 1974 there unfolded a dramatic tango of the superpowers, as a result of the catalyst of the Somali–Ethiopian war of 1977–78. The outcome was a change of partners that saw Ethiopia embrace the Soviet Union, while United States involvement in Somalia and Sudan rose significantly. At the same time there was a realization that the various civil wars in particular were also involving a number of Middle East countries, conservative and 'radical', and including Israel. The

question behind all these outside interventions was the contribution
they were making to the cycle of insurgent guerrillas and repressive
governments which itself was contributing to the economic decay and
ultimate human degradation of famine. (Of course the 'Middle East'
was not just an 'external' dimension of the Horn: Sudan was much
shaped by the coming of Arabs and Islam into the north, while Islam
was a major theme in the history of Ethiopia (with Coptic Christianity)
and Somalia. It suggested in all a kind of Afro–Middle Eastern sub-
region.) By the late twentieth century the Horn was becoming a sub-
region defined not only by its historical position, but by the scale and
intensity of its problems; not just coincidentally located in neigh-
bouring countries but in various ways inter-connected. Conversely,
moves to improve the situation would also require the tackling of
problems at a regional as well as a state level.

   While the problems briefly outlined above constitute the broad
agenda for this book there are still issues of outline and approach.
Though it is common to see Africa's problems as largely contemporary,
few writers would doubt that there is an historical legacy.[3] Independ-
ence in the cases of Sudan in 1956 and Somalia in 1960, or the
revolution that brought down Haile Selassie in 1974, were not wholly
new starts. It has been common to refer back to the period of im-
perialism, but while that had a great impact, the preceding history of
the region requires review as well. Largely for reasons of geography
the Horn has had an important and relatively well-charted history, and
in particular state formation and decay partly reflect ancient patterns
and processes of change. Thus the opening chapter reviews salient
background including pre-imperial history as well as the impact of
Western imperialism on the Horn.

   At the same time as deep roots to some of the problems of the
Horn, the recent experiences of political instability, conflict and civil
war, and even state collapse, have also to be assessed in their own
contemporary terms. The immediate origins lie within the individual
states as recognized by the international community, and thus the
contemporary developments need to be assessed individually. However,
as already indicated, the positions of the three countries with regard
to each other are a significant dimension of the conflicts within each
of the individual states, and thus a chapter is devoted to consideration
of the character and importance of neighbour-state relations and cross-
border movements. Neighbour relations, however, are only one dimen-
sion of international politics. The strategic position of the Horn with
regard to the Red Sea, the Arabian Sea, the Indian Ocean and the
Gulf has long meant that the waters surrounding it have been less a
barrier than a link: less an isolating factor than a communications

route both into and out of the Horn. The international actors with an interest in the Horn have been both regional powers and superpowers. Superpowers are the more obvious and more recorded of these foreign influences, but regional powers also have their own motives for involvement, as well as sometimes acting as proxies for superpowers.

Popular attention to the Horn has been galvanized by the worst of all disasters, famine, and while the experiences underlying famine vary from country to country, there also seem to be two themes in common – war and drought. Thus while the former is covered mainly within the political consideration of each country, the latter will be discussed as a regional phenomenon, together with the relief efforts and longer-term development policies attempted.

This book does not attempt to offer an overall theory of the problems of the Horn, an ambitious exercise that has already been attempted. John Markakis' pioneering comparative study focused upon the domestic socio-political causes of conflict in the three states centring on class analysis. He emphasized in particular the growth of conflicts between new Westernized ruling classes and exploited or neglected pastoralists, with the former retreating into forms of 'garrison socialism' against which the oppressed peoples responded with growing civil wars.[4] Instead, the approach attempted here is to present the three states as having significantly different rather than similar historical experiences and political structures. But there are comparisons to be made that will help to illuminate both the similarities and contrasts in their political and military conflicts, as well as state decay, while their own interaction, coupled with the growing regionalism within which the international political community has set the Horn, has also impinged significantly on developments.

State collapse has risen as a theme in the study of a number of states in Africa in particular. As a theme it has grown under a variety of labels. Early functionalist views of political development brought the corollary from some more cautious writers of possible dysfunctional tendencies.[5] Later, where civil war in particular broke out, came the suggestion of 'broken-backed states'. While in the 1980s the distinction was drawn in the African context, above all between the 'juridical' state, recognized internationally, and the 'empirical' reality which fell well short of it.[6] The latter point has clear links to Migdal's later discussion of strong and weak states in the Third World, identifying the former as states capable of controlling societies, and the latter with the effective resistance of numerous 'weblike' social organizations.[7] (Migdal also stresses the significance of the international environment in the rise of the phenomenon of states in various regions of the world.) By the 1990s state collapse was looking increasingly like the

obverse of state-building of the kind associated so particularly with
the rise of the nation-state in Western Europe in the nineteenth century
and transmitted by various means internationally as a modern in-
dependent state. Such a state enjoys sovereignty over its recognized
territory. It is able to control its borders, regulating movements of
peoples and goods across them. Within its borders it has a virtual
monopoly of coercive powers, and with growing legitimacy. It is able
to make policy and implement it through the machinery of the state.
It has the capacity to extract the resources to perpetuate the functioning
of the state, and at the same time promotes the necessary economic
capacity in society to ensure the symbiotic continuation of both state
and society. The latter goal is facilitated by opportunities for popular
accountability of the state and participation therein by the populace,
most commonly through some form of representative government,
frequently liberal democracy. The liberal element is in turn strength-
ened by the recognition and promotion of civil society, broadly
understood as social organizations that link and represent the people to
the state, but which do not in themselves seek to acquire direct political
power. Finally, states exist by dint of their international recognition
and relations with other states and international organizations. State
collapse, then, has focused increasingly on the partial or total failure of
one or more of these characteristics of the model state.[8]

Yet collapse, to whatever extent and for whatever reasons, may be a
reminder of the artificiality and newness of a virtually worldwide set
of state structures, related to each other in a dynamic system of
international relations. While there have been states of various kinds
for millennia, the division of the whole of the occupied territory of
the globe into an internationally recognized world of states is very
new. Empires, states and stateless societies had existed for a long time
in partial or total ignorance of each other; nor, until the Peace of
Westphalia in 1648, could one really speak of 'international relations'.
It has taken the two world wars of the twentieth century and their
aftermath to bring us to a complete world of states in the inhabited
continents, but one in which many are new and of imperial delineation
and initial shaping rather than a product of indigenous societies them-
selves. State collapse in such new and artificial states raises issues
about the stability of a particular pattern of states, and even about the
survival of any state in some areas. Yet can the modern world return
to areas of 'statelessness': for all the states acknowledged capacity to
damage society, especially through violence and exploitation, does it
not yet remain in some shape or degree also a necessity for develop-
ment? Thus, as well as reviewing aspects of decay, there will be an
attempt to consider some of the political issues, both domestic and

international, raised in trying to think of resolving problems of states in the Horn. With the ending of the Cold War and the collapse of the Marxist-Leninist alternative state model, attention has focused on democratization in particular. This may indeed be the main issue where the state itself has been maintained. It may also be an important part of the discussion of countries in which there has been partial or total state collapse, but in such cases it will clearly not be a sufficient discussion, for the other aspects of the state referred to above will also be an essential undertaking. Nor is it necessarily the case that state collapse will give rise to a consideration of the rebuilding of the same state: in Africa, as in the former USSR, the possibility of a new state structure may also arise.

The political map of the Horn has already changed with the independence of Eritrea; and other issues of new statehood have been raised most notably in the former British Somaliland in northern Somalia, and in southern Sudan. Constitutional issues have resurfaced, but go well beyond any simple proclamation of 'democracy', especially in fields such as the incorporation of ethnicity, decentralization and federalism. As well as constitutional issues, as already indicated, state collapse has raised issues of the rebuilding of basic institutions, such as police, and systems of administration and justice. Recovery involves social and economic as much as political issues. Relations between the neighbouring states of the Horn, as well as broader regional relations, will be as relevant to recovery as they have been to decay. And finally, the changed international environment with the end of the Cold War has already had a very different impact, albeit one that has been deeply ambiguous, and is unlikely to be the final act in international involvement in this troubled region.

State and Politics

I

The Historic Horn

The pre-modern era

The Horn's geography has been central to its political, social and economic development for centuries. Within the Horn this includes its major river system, the Nile; and while the Nile is seen as having its source in Lake Victoria, the majority of the water that flows down to Egypt starts from the rains on the Ethiopian highlands, and especially drainage into Lake Tana. The Ethiopian highlands have themselves constituted an obstacle to external penetration which has contributed to the emergence of a distinct civilization in that part of Africa. Away from the Nile and the highlands, the major feature of the region has been its plains, ranging from the rain-watered central belt of *bilad as-sudan* (the land of the blacks) to the arid lands of the Somalis in the tip of the Horn and the deserts of the Sahara to the north. In contrast to the riverain and highland settled agriculture of Sudan and Ethiopia respectively, the plains have encouraged the evolution of nomadic and semi-nomadic pastoral communities.

The region's wider geography has also been significant. The Nile, the Red Sea, the Gulf of Aden and the Indian Ocean have all exposed the region to outside influences. The ancient world of the Egyptians, Greeks and Romans had an impact, as the medieval world of Islam did later. The degree of penetration and control varied. Sometimes it amounted to influence, at others to conquest, but above all it reflected the Horn's position on the periphery of wider world developments that contributed to, rather than determined, the course of events within the Horn. And at the same time as influences impinged from outside the region, so it was also an area of human evolution for millennia. The first large-scale society to develop was the civilization of Meroe centred north of the junction of the Blue and White Niles. Emerging in the third century BC it was itself an offshoot of declining pharaonic Egypt (which had in turn drawn extensively on its African hinterland), though it became a distinct civilization. Though Meroe declined, its long-term significance was its contribution to the tradition of state

formation. The skills of mining and metallurgy, coupled later with the introduction of the horse, gave rise to the formation of conquest states ruling over pre-existing agricultural societies which spread south into central Africa, and west across the Sahel. In the Sahel in particular, these states were associated with trade, including trans-Saharan trade involving slaves and commodities.

Meroe was to last for several centuries, but an aspect of its decline was the rise of its rival Axum, a trading empire based in the northern highlands of Ethiopia in the present-day province of Tigre. Axum rose in the second and third centuries AD, becoming a Christian kingdom in the process, and its influence spread not only on the African side of the Red Sea but into Arabia as well, especially the most fertile and populated part of the peninsula, generally known as 'Arabia felix' as Pliny dubbed it. Axum was to become the first step in a long history of statehood in the Ethiopian highlands. A succession of wars and counter-wars were to have at their core the expansion southwards of what had become by the fourth century AD the Christian, semitic state dominated by Tigreans and Amharas. Successive monarchs had the capacity to raise military forces and operate a basic administration, with the spiritual backing of the Coptic Christian church. This state formation was made possible by the existence of a settled society based on arable agriculture which encouraged a regionalized identity under local lords rather than the existence of a more shifting local or 'tribal' community. Though the parallels are far from exact, it is understandable that to European observers Ethiopia has often conjured up images of a 'feudal' society, which was very distinct from the land tenure systems found in most of the rest of pre-colonial Africa. And as in other 'feudal' societies, the degree of state formation was intermittently questioned by regionally based instability. Ethiopia rose to create the glories of the city of Gondar in the seventeenth century, but later the power of the monarchy declined. The country descended into a period of turbulent struggles among local notables, a time often referred to as the 'age of the princes', until in the mid-nineteenth century awareness of growing external threats contributed to the attempted unification, undertaken from the Emperor Tewodros onwards.

This general picture had been interrupted by a challenge in the sixteenth century from the pastoral Cushitic people of the south-east, the Galla (now known as Oromo), who swept into the highlands and occupied large areas. This was swiftly followed by a short-lived conquest by a Muslim from the Somali coast, Imam Ahmed Gran (the left-handed). Though eventually driven back, it served to reinforce the relationship between the Ethiopian state and the Coptic Christian church on the one hand, and its rivalry with the Muslim communities

on the other. These included the highlands (the Oromo) and the Somalis to the east: as early as the thirteenth century a series of Muslim sultanates encircled the medieval Ethiopian empire to the south and south-east; and in the nineteenth century Muslim sultanates and kingdoms developed among the Somalis and Oromos respectively. In addition, there was the increasingly Muslim northern Sudan and Red Sea coast where, after being checked by the medieval Coptic Christian states of Nubia that had succeeded Meroe, Islam expanded southwards from the fourteenth century, including into the lowlands of what is now Eritrea.

The history of the Horn of Africa has thus long involved the rise and fall of states, with the Ethiopian state sustaining the greatest longevity overall. As well as temporal change there has also been lateral movement. The Ethiopian state has moved its centre southwards, while in Sudan successive states rose and fell in different latitudes of the Nile, from Meroe north into Nubia, and later, from the sixteenth century, to the Funj kingdom based at Sennar on the Blue Nile. Probably founded by people from the south, possibly Shilluk, the Funj became the first Islamic state in Sudan and spread its power widely in what is now central Sudan.

Mobility has been a feature not only of state-building but of the stateless societies as well. Nomadic and semi-nomadic pastoralism, largely beyond the confines of indigenous state formation, has also been a marked feature of the region. The Somali peoples in the tip of the Horn are the most obvious example. The arid lowland areas were home to a Cushitic-speaking Muslim people who, away from the few small coastal trading cities, lived a pastoral life. While sharing in the perception of a common ancestor, as well as religion, culture and language, the Somali people were also highly divided by clan, sub-clan and family, in their harsh environment. Similarly segmented were the pastoralists of Upper Nile. Lying south of the penetration of the successive states on the Nile and of Islam, the Dinka and Nuer peoples in particular were to come to be regarded as classic acephalous, or stateless, societies.

Naturally, this mobility was in no way to correspond to the later borders drawn by colonial powers for these were to reflect European rivalries rather than the ethnographic character of Africa. Probably, the classic disparity in the region was to be the case of the Somalis, who were to find borders imposed which left many of them outside independent Somalia in Ethiopia, Djibouti and Kenya. But that is to jump ahead. For the moment it is the variety of the Horn which is to be emphasized. From historic states to acephalous societies, from settled agriculturalists to nomads, from trade to self-subsistence, from

the competing 'religions of the book' to African traditions and customs, all have contributed to the makings of the modern conflicts. And while these conflicts have deep indigenous roots, so too they have regional and wider international dimensions for which there are long historical precedents. But before considering those parallels between pre-colonial and contemporary events, the important phase of Western imperialism in the region must be reviewed.

The imperial era

The rise of 'world systems' had been significant down the centuries in influencing developments in the Horn, albeit in a peripheral way. The ancient pharaonic, Greek, Roman and Byzantine systems flowed continuously from one to the next. There was something of a space, with major indigenous development, including Nubia and Axum, before the subsequent emergence of a new system, that of the Islamic world. The third major 'world system', the rise of the West, had already had an impact in the form of the Portuguese in Ethiopia and elsewhere on the coast from the end of the fifteenth century, but it was the nineteenth century that brought the competition for territory that was to create the map of Africa. First on the scene was a curious imperial hybrid, the Egyptian khedivate of the Ottoman empire. Mohamed Ali, the Ottoman soldier of Albanian origin who seized power in Egypt following the vacuum created by the brief occupation of Napoleon I's French forces from 1798–1801, was acting on his own rather than in the sultan's interest when he sought to build a Turco-Egyptian empire; and was inspired not just by oriental despotism, but by the example of European modernization, the economic aspects of which he sought, unsuccessfully, to replicate in Egypt. His dream of an east African empire fell well short of fulfilment but did lead to the conquest of Sudan in 1820, which successive khedivates ruled until the revolt of Mohamed Ahmed el-Mahdi from 1881 to 1885, ending in the downfall of Khartoum and the death of Britain's and Egypt's agent, General Gordon. In addition to Sudan, Egypt controlled a string of posts on the Red Sea coast.

The concern of Europe, especially France and Britain, for the Ottoman empire and for Egypt in the second half of the nineteenth century was one important factor leading to increased intervention. Another was the enormous strategic significance attached to Egypt and the Red Sea once the Suez Canal had been built in 1869 by a Frenchman, Ferdinand de Lessops, and then bought by Britain; in 1882 Britain also seized control of Egypt (though still nominally a part of the Ottoman empire). This strategic rivalry for Egypt has been