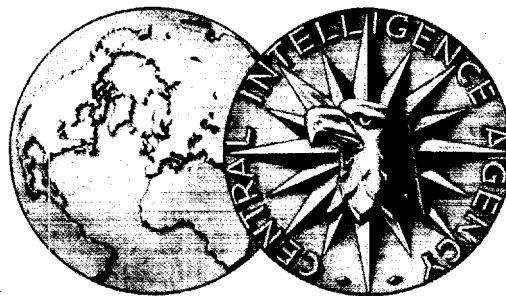


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NOTE ON THE BOUNDARY BETWEEN ITALIAN SOMALILAND AND ETHIOPIA



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DECLASSIFIED~~CONFIDENTIAL~~NOTE ON THE BOUNDARY BETWEEN ITALIANSOMALILAND AND ETHIOPIA1. Summary and Conclusion.

The Ethiopian-Italian Somaliland boundary has never been delimited satisfactorily in spite of two attempts to do so. Neither the accord of 1897 nor the Convention of 1908 defines the line clearly enough to form the basis for demarcation. An entirely new agreement should be drawn up for this purpose. Pending such agreement, the line reportedly shown on the map used by the Emperor Menelik II in 1897 should take precedence over other conjectural lines as the tentative boundary northeast of the Uebi Scebeli River.

The line drawn in 1897 by the Emperor Menelik was accepted by the Italian government. Heretofore there has been an impression that the 1897 accord consisted of this map and a written description of the line, and that the two were contradictory. It seems, however, that the map was the only official document of the accord other than the Italian telegram of acceptance. The contemporary written descriptions appear to have been no more than official statements made in Italy by Italians. These could not be considered as legally binding on Ethiopia.

Even if the Italian statements could be considered as having legal validity, they do not necessarily disagree as seriously as formerly supposed with the information said to be on the Menelik map. According to the Italian statements, the boundary was to be a line roughly parallel to the coast at a distance of about 180 miglia inland, whereas the map was thought to represent a line lying nearer the coast. The Italian statements, however, were probably intended to give only a general idea of the proposed boundary without describing it in detail. It is also possible that the 1897 Italian statements used the word miglia in its colloquial sense to mean "kilometers".

No reproduction of the Menelik map appears to be available in Washington and a definitive statement regarding the boundary as shown on the map must await a search of Italian archives. However, according to secondary descriptions, the line extended from the Von der Decken Falls on the Giuba (Juba) River to the British Somaliland boundary at the intersection of 8°N., 48°E. This intersection is approximately 180 kilometers from the nearest point on the coast.

Article IV of the Convention of May 16, 1908 between Ethiopia and Italy defined the boundary northeast of the Uebi Scebeli as that accepted by the Italian government in 1897. There are some confusing statements in this article about a division between tribes, but in the

Note: This report was submitted on 1 July to the intelligence organizations of the Departments of State, Army, Navy, and the Air Force for information, at which time comments were solicited.

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main the intention of the article seems to be to confirm the Menelik line.

Italian cartography is inconsistent in the treatment of this line. Several maps published by Italian government agencies before 1925 showed a line northeast of the Uebi Scebeli from near Belet Uen to the point 8°N., 48°E., e.g., an approximation of the Menelik line as described above. The line was generally shown as indefinite, however, and was marked as undelimited or undemarcated. After 1925 Italian maps usually omitted the boundary entirely.

At the time the Ualual (Wal Wal) incident was before the League of Nations in 1935, the Italian government insisted that the question of the location of the boundary was not under discussion. Consequently the arbitration commission dealing with the incident was not empowered to deal with the boundary question. The Ethiopian government, in asserting its claim to sovereignty over Ualual at this time, made contradictory statements regarding the location of the boundary, probably because of a lack of first-hand knowledge.

The Department of State does not seem to have had any occasion to take a position regarding the boundary in the past, and until recently, at least, the British government does not seem to have done so either.

2. The Problem.

The basic documents to be examined in any attempt to determine this boundary are the so-called agreement between the Emperor Menelik II and the Italian representative Nerazzini of about June 1897, and the Italo-Ethiopian Convention of May 16, 1908 which was supposed in part to amend and in part to confirm the 1897 understanding. Neither of these instruments is satisfactory as a basis for delimitation: the first, because of its informal and incomplete nature; and the second, because its description did not conform to geographic reality in many cases. The discrepancies between the text of the Convention of 1908 and the actual location of tribes, water courses, etc. is discussed at some length in Department of State, OIR Report No. 4288, "Undemarcated Boundaries of the Italian Colonies and their Cartographic Presentation". It is evident that a new agreement will have to be drawn up before there can be any demarcation of the boundary on the ground.

The present report is concerned primarily with that section of the boundary from the River Uebi Scebeli northeastward to its point of juncture with the boundary of British Somaliland, because certain American interests in eastern Ogaden may be affected by the location of the boundary. An attempt will be made to determine the intent of the understanding of 1897, on the assumption that this understanding may form the basis for any future agreement.

3. Evaluation of Documents Dealing with the Boundary.

In 1897 Nerazzini received from Menelik a map on which the Emperor had drawn the southeastern boundary of Ethiopia as desired by him. The map used was the German Spezial Karta von Afrika, sheet Abessinien (6), compiled by Herman Habenicht. Nerazzini reported to the Italian government that according to the tentative agreement with Menelik, the boundary would start at the frontier between Italian and British territory in the Somali country and extend to a point on the Giuba (Juba) River at the Von der Decken Falls (above the town of Bardera), giving to Italy a zone about 180 miglia in depth from the Indian Ocean. This, according to Nerazzini, was the line traced on Menelik's map. The proposed accord is said to have been published officially by the Italian Stefani Agency on 9 August 1897. This release stated that the proposed boundary was traced at about 180 miglia from the coast, intersecting the Giuba River north of Bardera, and that Italy remained at liberty to accept or reject the terms of the agreement, the frontier in the meantime remaining in status quo de facto. On 3 September 1897 the Italian cabinet ministers directly concerned addressed a telegram to Menelik accepting the proposed boundary.¹

Apparently no official text was drafted embodying the terms of the Menelik-Nerazzini accord and bearing the signatures of both parties. If such a document exists it seems not to have been published. The only available information about the accord is from the two secondary Italian sources - Nerazzini's report and the press release of the Stefani Agency. These give information about the agreement and purport to describe the boundary in general terms, but they do not include an official text. The Ethiopian government had no part in their drafting. Therefore the documents cannot be considered as having legal validity, or as being binding on Ethiopia. The only document mutually agreed to by both parties which shows or describes the boundary is the Menelik map. The line shown on this map should, for the above reasons, be considered more authoritative than the description of Nerazzini and the Stefani Agency.

The Convention of May 16, 1908, promulgated as law by Italy on 17 July 1908, represented a substantial concession of territory by Ethiopia to the west of the Uebi Scebeli. Article IV, however, provided that from the Uebi Scebeli the frontier should proceed in a north-easterly direction, "following the line accepted by the Italian Government in 1897", that all the territory belonging to the tribes toward the coast should remain dependent on Italy, and that all the territory of Ogaden "and all that of tribes toward the Ogaden" should remain dependent on Ethiopia.² The apparent intention of this article was to confirm the Menelik-Nerazzini line, but an element of uncertainty is

1. Carlo Rossetti, Storia Diplomatica dell'Etiopia durante il Regno di Menelik II. (Torino, 1910) pp. 404-405.

2. Rossetti; see also Sir Edward Hertslet, The Map of Africa by Treaty. (1909 edition) v. III, pp. 1223-1224.

introduced by the reference to tribes. It is scarcely conceivable that a straight line from the Uebi Scebeli to the British Somaliland boundary, which was presumably intended in the 1897 accord, would coincide with a line separating tribes "toward the coast" from those "toward the Ogaden", and it is probable that tribal base areas and tribal grazing lands overlap in such a manner that no such line of separation could be drawn. However, since no tribes are named, and since the reference to tribes is so ambiguous, the portion of the article confirming the 1897 accord seems to take precedence over the other portions. Although the 1908 convention included a provision for demarcation of the boundary on the ground, the line was never surveyed or marked.

No primary source giving the line as it was shown on the Menelik map is available. Search in Washington has failed to reveal any reproduction of the Menelik map. The descriptions of the 1897 line given by the Stefani Agency and Nerazzini are of little value for drawing the line on a map because they do not state the exact point on the British Somaliland boundary at which the line ends. However, it is stated by Manlio Magini, an Italian student of East African frontier changes, that the line extended from the Von der Decken Falls on the Juba to the intersection of the parallel 8°N . and the meridian 48°E .¹ This line is shown on State Department Map No. 10652, "Southeastern Ethiopia, Status of Boundaries - 1946", and is labeled "Boundary shown on Menelik's map, 1897". Northeast of the Uebi Scebeli this line and the line indicated as "Boundary according to Convention of May 16, 1908", which is shown identical to it on this map, should take precedence over other lines as a tentative boundary.

In the past it has been assumed that the official descriptions of the line, such as those of the Stefani Agency and Nerazzini, were in conflict with the line shown on Menelik's map. Italian writers themselves within recent decades have called attention to this supposed discrepancy.² The wording "180 miglia" has been interpreted to mean 180 miles, whereas the line on the Menelik map reportedly represented a line much nearer the coast than this. It is possible to show, however, that the textual description and the map are not necessarily in conflict. Von der Decken Falls on the Giuba are roughly 150 English miles from the nearest point on the coast and the intersection of 8°N . and 48°E . is about 115 miles from the coast. A straight line connecting these two points would be about 180 English miles from the coast only along its middle portion. Neither the Nerazzini nor the Stefani reports stated specifically that the line was exactly 180 miles (or miglia) from the coast at all points. They merely stated that it was about 180 miglia from the coast. Thus, Nerazzini, even if he had been thinking in terms of miles, might have estimated the distance from the middle portion of the line to the coast, and in writing his report might have made a general statement, not intended to be taken too literally.

1. Manlio Magini, Vanazioni territoriali nell' A.O. dal 1880 al 1938. (Firenze, 1939) p. 48.

2. Magini, p. 51.

Another possibility is that Nerazzini was thinking in terms of kilometers rather than miles. The Italian word miglio is sometimes used colloquially to denote "kilometer" and it has been suggested that "180 kilometers" is actually what was intended by the wording of the Nerazzini and Stefani reports.¹ The point 8°N., 48°E. is approximately 180 kilometers from the nearest point on the coast. In short, although the Nerazzini and Stefani descriptions may not be taken as having legal validity, there is reason to believe that they agree, in general, with the line as shown on the Menelik map. Any assumption that these two descriptions call for a line every point of which is exactly 180 miles from the coast is incorrect.

4. Treatment of the Line on Italian Maps.

As pointed out in Department of State, OIR Report No. 4288, Italian maps are very inconsistent in showing the line. This is understandable since the documents dealing with the line are confused and misleading. It is well to point out, however, that a number of maps published by Italian government agencies before 1925 favored a line approximating the Menelik line as the latter is described above.

A map of the Ministry of Colonies published in 1917² shows a line extending from Belet Uen on the Uebi Scebeli northeast to 8°N., 48°E. This line is designated "Italo-Ethiopian Convention, May 16, 1908 (undemarcated)". The same line is shown on another map published by the same agency in 1918.³ It is a broken line, indicating its indefinite character. A map published for the Italian Somaliland government in 1917⁴ differs from the above maps. It shows the line northeast from the Uebi Scebeli intersecting the British Somaliland boundary at 8°N., 47°E. and including Galadi in Italian Somaliland. This map does not distinguish between demarcated and undemarcated boundaries. Even as late as 1925 a Ministry of Colonies map⁵ represented the line as ending at 8°N., 48°E. Later editions of this same map, in common with most Italian maps of east Africa published in the later Fascist period, show no boundary between Italian Somaliland and Ethiopia.

1. M. A. Ethiopia, Report R-303-45, Oct. 10, 1945; Council of Foreign Ministers Document, CFM/D/L/47/I.C. Com.
2. Ministero delle Colonie, Direzione Generale Affare Politici, Ufficio Cartografico, Somalia Settentrionale, scale, 1:2,000,000, (Rome?), 1917.
3. Ministero delle Colonie, Direzione Generale degli Affari Politici, Ufficio Cartografico, Somalia e Paesi Limitrofi, scale, 1:4,000,000, (Rome?), 1918.
4. Governo della Somalia Italiana, Carta della Somalia, scale, 1:2,000,000, compiled in Mogadiscio, 1917.
5. Ministero delle Colonie, Ufficio Studi e Propoganda, Servizio Cartografico, Africa Orientale, carta dimostrativa fisico-politica, scale, 1:2,000,000, Rome and Bergamo, 1925.

One unofficial map of the pre-Fascist period¹ is of particular interest because the author or compiler, Carlo Rossetti, was a student of Italo-Ethiopian relations and presumably had access to all the official documents. The 1907 edition of this map represents the Ethiopian-Italian Somaliland boundary as extending in a curve from Lugh, on the Giuba River, to approximately 8°N., 47°E., placing Galadi in Italian Somaliland. The line is shown as indefinite and bears the notation "to be delimited" (*da delimitarsi*). The 1909 edition of the same map shows a definite boundary, labeling it as the line established by the Convention of May 16, 1908. This line, however, includes more territory northeast of the Uebi Scebeli in Ethiopia than does the line shown on the 1907 edition. Galadi is shown in Ethiopia and the line intersects the British Somaliland boundary at 8°N., 48°E. Rossetti thus appears to have concluded that the intention of the 1908 accord was to place the line approximately 180 kilometers from the coast at its northeastern end. A reproduction of the 1909 edition of the Rossetti map is attached to this report. The Ethiopian-Italian Somaliland border as represented on the 1907 edition has been added to the attached copy of the 1909 edition.

A book² by a former governor of Italian Somaliland, Giacomo de Martino, published in 1913, includes a small map on which the line is shown in close agreement with that of the 1909 Rossetti map.

5. Later Positions of the Italian and Ethiopian Governments.

After the early 1930's, the Italian government did little or nothing to clear up the ambiguities of the Ethiopia-Italian Somaliland frontier, doubtless because of its ambitions for conquest. As stated above, the official Italian maps of this period omitted the boundary completely. At the time of the Ualual (Wal Wal) controversy, Italy admitted that the location of the frontier was governed by the Convention of May 16, 1908, but asserted that the boundary had never been demarcated because of Ethiopian negligence and obstruction.³ The dispute was referred by the Council of the League of Nations to an arbitration commission having rather limited powers. Upon the insistence of Italy, the Council decided, in July 1935, that frontier questions or the legal interpretation of agreements or treaties concerning the frontier did not fall within the jurisdiction of the arbitration commission.⁴

1. Carlo Rossetti, Schizzo Dimostrativo della situazione politica nell' Affrica Orientale, scale, 1:5,000,000, Novara, 2nd edition, 1907, 3rd edition, 1909. The 1909 edition is included in the Rossetti work cited above.
2. Giacomo de Martino, La Somalia Nostra. (Bergamo, 1913), p.9.
3. Dispute Between Ethiopia and Italy, Request by the Ethiopian Government. Memorandum by the Italian Government on the Situation in Ethiopia. League of Nations Doc. No. C. 340. M. 171. 1935. VII (Geneva, 1935), pp. 6-7.
4. Pittman B. Potter, The Wal Wal Arbitration. (Washington, 1938), pp. 13-15.

The attitude of Ethiopia regarding the location of the line was also confused. When the boundary between British and Italian Somaliland was surveyed and marked on the ground in 1929-1931 the work was carried west along parallel 8°N . to meridian 47°E . When the British Somaliland-Ethiopia boundary was similarly demarcated in 1931-1934 the Ethiopia members of the mixed commission agreed to start the work at the point where the British-Italian commission had stopped and proceed northwest, but with the understanding that the point 8°N ., 47°E . should not necessarily be considered as the trijunction point of the British, Italian and Ethiopian territories.¹ During the discussion of the Ualual case before the League, the Ethiopian government published a statement to the effect that the boundary was based on the Convention of 1908 which in turn accepted the line agreed upon in 1897. After quoting a description of the 1897 line similar to that of the Stefani press release of 1897, the Ethiopian statement continued: "The frontier between Somaliland and Abyssinia is therefore demarcated by a winding line keeping parallel at a distance of 180 miles to the sinuosities of the coast-line of the Indian Ocean." The same statement, however, declared that the Ethiopian government maintained that the point at which the Anglo-Italo-Ethiopian frontiers met was 8°N ., 48°E .² This point, of course, is only about 115 English miles from the nearest point on the coast (although roughly 180 kilometers from the coast). The Ethiopian representatives seem to have relied upon the conflicting Italian sources in drafting this statement, possibly not having pertinent material in their own archives.

6. Positions of United States and British Government Agencies.

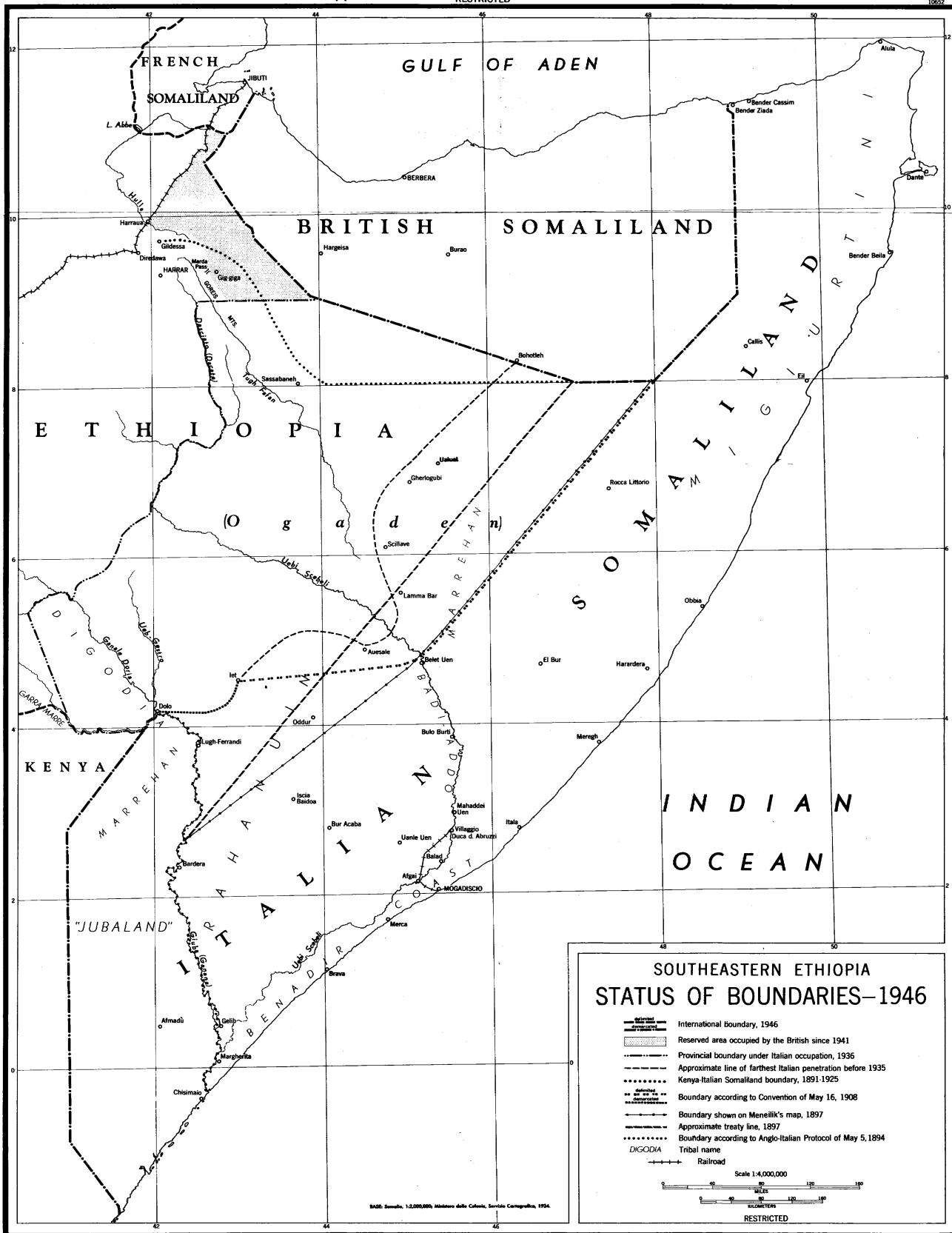
Inquiry of the Visa Division and the Special Adviser on Geography of the Department of State has failed to reveal any instance when the Department was required to take a stand on this question in the past.

The British government apparently tried to avoid taking a stand in favor of either party in regard to the question of the location of the trijunction point of Ethiopia, British Somaliland, and Italian Somaliland at the time the southern boundaries of British Somaliland were demarcated. Recent official British maps favor the line ending at 8°N ., 48°E .³ However, these maps carry a note to the effect that boundaries have not been demarcated in all cases and their representation

1. Geographical Journal (London), vol. 87 (April, 1936) pp. 289.
2. Dispute Between Abyssinia and Italy...Memorandum by the Imperial Abyssinian Government on the Incidents at Walwal Between November 23rd and December 5th, 1934. League of Nations Doc. No. C. 49. M. 22. 1935. VII. (Geneva, 1935), pp. 5-6.
3. East Africa Survey Group, Africa, 1:1,000,000, sheet Belet Uen, NB 38, E.A.F. No. 1177 (First East Africa Edition, 1942); East Africa Survey Group, East Africa, 1:500,000, sheet Rocca Littorio, NB 383, E.A.F., No. 705 (Second Edition, 1942).

cannot be regarded as official. It was said in 1945 that the point 8°N., 48°E. was accepted in British official circles as the correct meeting point of the three frontiers.¹ More recently, however, the British governor of Italian Somaliland stated that the boundary would have to be determined by agreement between Ethiopia and whatever power or administration takes over from the British military administration in the former Italian colony.²

1. M.A., Ethiopia, Report R-320-45, October 15, 1945.
2. CFM/D/L/47/I.C.COM.

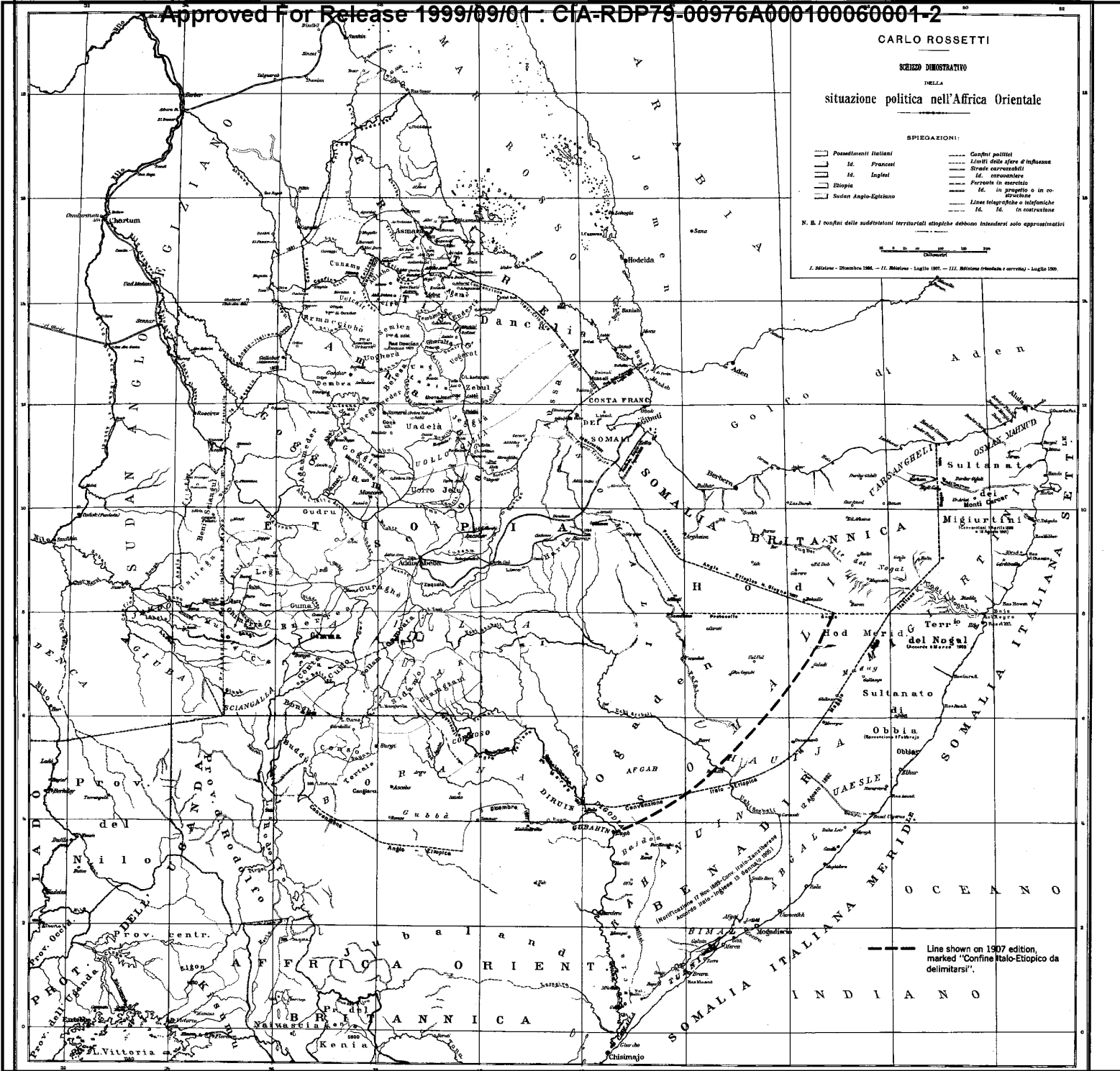


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