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Strengthening & Enhancing Regional Security Through Collaborative Efforts in the Horn of Africa.

Abstract

The Horn of Africa is a region marked by political instability, conflicts and significant security challenges, often exacerbated by internal and external pressures. With its strategic location, diverse populations and complex socio-political dynamics, the region faces a multitude of threats, including extremism, piracy and interstate conflicts. These challenges hinder economic development, political stability and regional integration.

This paper explores the potential for enhanced collaboration amid the nations of the Horn of Africa to address these security challenges and promote sustainable peace. It investigates the role of regional organizations such as the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) in facilitating cooperation and underscores the importance of trust-building measures, shared security frameworks and inclusive approaches that incorporate civil society perspectives.

The research concludes that effective regional security collaboration in the Horn of Africa requires both political will and comprehensive strategies that address the underlying causes of insecurity while fostering unity and cooperation among the region's nations.

Keywords

Horn of Africa, regional security, collaboration, IGAD, extremism, piracy and maritime security & the role of civil society.

Introduction

Geographically, the Horn of Africa is located at the strategic crossroad between Africa, Europe, and the Middle East. The region also has proximity to the strategic waterways Red Sea, Bebel-Mandeb and Gulf of Aden. Literally, the Horn of Africa consists of Ethiopia, Somalia, Eritrea and Djibouti. However, from the point of geopolitical proximity and transnational causes, the Horn region comprises three more nations Kenya, Sudan and South Sudan. (YIMER & ERKO, 2023).

This region is one of the most geopolitically sensitive in the world, due to its proximity to key international shipping routes and its historical and ethnic complexities. Over the years, the Horn of Africa has faced numerous security challenges, including terrorism, piracy, border disputes and governance issues. (Asiva Noor Rachmayani, 2015).

In consequence, any kind of political tension from the Atlantic to the Pacific and from Hormuz Strait to the Eastern Mediterranean has a profound impact on the political and security dynamics of the Horn region regional subsystem. (SHELEMO, 2023).

In the past two decades, if one has to consider the Horn region from the point of external actors' privileged position in dictating the political and security narrations of the region, the regional order and/or the regional subsystem is becoming more volatile and multipolar as never before. (Robinson, 2024).

The growing active role of emerging Middle East actors (i.e., Saudi Arabia, U.A.E., Qatar, Iran and Turkey), on the one hand and the traditional global players in the region (i.e., U.S.A., Britain, France and Russia), on the other, complicated the political, ideological and economic volatility of the Horn region that sometimes end up with broken order. (*Regional Powers*, 2023).

The instability in the region has not only affected the security of individual states but has also had wider implications for international peace and security. Given these challenges, regional cooperation is crucial to mitigating security risks and promoting stability. While efforts have been made, particularly through the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD), these initiatives have often faced difficulties due to a lack of trust, political fragmentation and the influence of external actors. (*REGIONAL OVERVIEW*, 2020).

This paper examines the potential for strengthening security collaboration in the Horn of Africa and proposes strategies for fostering more effective co-operation.

Security Challenges in the Horn of Africa

To understand the necessity of regional security collaboration, it is essential to first identify and analyze the key security challenges facing the Horn of Africa. One of the most significant security threats in the Horn of Africa is terrorism, particularly the actions of Al-Shabaab, a militant group based in Somalia with ties to Al-Qaeda. Al-Shabaab has been responsible for numerous attacks in Somalia and neighboring countries, including Kenya and Uganda. The group capitalizes on Somalia's weak central government and uses ideologies to recruit followers from communities. (Birhan, 2024).

The rise of Al-Shabaab and Al-Qaeda-linked militant group, is one the most significant security threats in Somalia. AS has taken advantage of the absence of a strong central government to establish its stronghold in southern Somalia. the group uses violence, intimidation and radical ideologies to control large swathes of territory, including rural areas and often targets government institutions, military personnel and civilians through bombings and assassinations. (Challenges & Lemonnier, 2017).

There is still a serious problem with violent extremism in the Horn of Africa, which is a significant contributor to the instability that is occurring in the region. According to the conflict analysis that has been released by major donor states to the Horn of Africa and the African Union, terrorism and violent extremism are considered to be a significant danger to the stability of the region. The issue of terrorism is a global one, although the severity of the problem varies greatly from country to country. Despite the fact that Kenya, Uganda, and Tanzania have only lately been affected by terrorism, Somalia is the country that has been hit the most by the crisis (Sipri, 2019).

Over the past few years, the Somali terrorist group al-Shabab has been the source of the majority of threats, and as a direct consequence, two significant military operations have been conducted across the border. AS has carried out a number of high-profile assaults in Kenya over the course of the last ten years, and it also carries out a number of low-level attacks on a consistent basis in the counties that border Kenya and Somalia (Khudaykulova, 2023).

Since Ethiopia supported the Somali Transitional Federal Government (TGF) in 2006 to regain control over Mogadishu from the Islamic Court Union (ICU) and its radical military wing AS, which has since evolved into the AS as it is known today, Ethiopia's involvement in Somalia has historically been significant in relation to the Ethiopian Security Service (AS) (*Bpsomalia0407.Pdf.Crdownload*, n.d.).

The rise of extremist groups in the region has exacerbated existing political and social tensions. Terrorist groups often exploit grievances related to ethnicity, religion and governance, making it difficult to address the root causes of extremism. Regional cooperation, therefore, becomes crucial for intelligence sharing, counterterrorism measures and the establishment of a united front against terrorism. (*Peace and Stabilisation Programme The Horn of Africa*, 2023).

In addition, during this time period, Ethiopia has been confronted with significant internal political conflicts as well as armed conflicts on multiple fronts. This is because violence broke out in northern Ethiopia in the year 2020 between government forces of the Ethiopian National Defense Force (ENDF) along with allied militias and the Eritrean Defense Forces on one side, and the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF) on the other. Despite the fact that the Ethiopian government and the TPLF signed an agreement on Permanent Cessation of Hostilities on November 2, 2022, which represents a significant step forward by effectively putting an end to the conflict in northern Ethiopia, the continued implementation of the agreement will be essential for the maintenance of peace and stability in Ethiopia (Rynn & Hassen, 2021).

As of March 2023, the government and the TPLF have taken a number of positive steps in the implementation of the agreement. These steps include maintaining the cessation of hostilities, de-arming TPLF combatants, increasing humanitarian access to Tigray, and increasing the delivery of certain public services throughout the region. Additionally, an interim regional administration has been appointed in Tigray. The violence resulted in a significant number of people being displaced in the regions that were affected, and by March 2023, some of those who had been displaced had returned to the region from whence they had originated (United Nation, 2023).

Throughout the course of the conflict, multiple egregious abuses of human rights were documented, and the humanitarian situation in Tigray, which was made worse by the fact that humanitarian actors were denied access, resulted in widespread suffering and loss of life, as well as widespread criticism from international players (AfricanUnion, 2022).

Piracy and Maritime Security

The Gulf of Aden and the Indian Ocean are vital shipping routes for international trade, but they have also become hotspots for piracy. Somali pirates, taking advantage of the region's weak governance and maritime security, have disrupted international shipping, leading to substantial economic losses. Somali piracy attacks surged between 2005 and 2011. (Guidance et al., 2024).

As long as there has been seaborne trade, there has also been maritime piracy. At the present day, pirates also prey on ships in the Straits of Malacca, as well as in the waters of Southeast Asia, the Caribbean seas, and the Gulf of Guinea. However, what makes Somali pirates stand out from other pirates is the great frequency of their attacks. The issue of piracy in this region is not limited to the marine sector; rather, it is a reflection of the more widespread security and governance challenges that Somalia faces (Bahadur, 2011).

Over forty countries are participating in military counter-piracy operations, either in their own capacity or through three coalitions. These include the European Union Naval Force Somalia, which is conducting Operation Atlanta, the Standing Naval Group of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), which is conducting Operation Ocean Shield, and Combined Task Force 151. The international community has come together to combat the surge of piracy that has occurred off the Horn of Africa. Over the course of the past decade, the United Nations Security Council has passed thirteen resolutions in order to provide support for anti-piracy efforts in the Horn of Africa. It is not just the United Nations that has taken action to combat piracy off the Horn of Africa; the European Union (EU), the African Union (AU), the League of Arab States, and NATO have also taken action (Haile & Juba, 2016).

In 2003, a resolution passed by the United Nations Security Council formed the United Nations Monitoring Group on Somalia with the purpose of documenting violations of the arms embargo. Since then, the group's mandate has grown to include monitoring piracy. A resolution passed by the United Nations in 2009 called for the establishment of the Contact Group on Piracy off the Coast of Somalia. The purpose of this group was to facilitate coordination among the sixty countries and twenty international organizations that are trying to deter piracy. The international mobilization is supplemented by a number of other measures that are institutional, national, and regional in nature. These initiatives include the Djibouti Code of Conduct, the Regional Anti-Piracy Prosecutions Intelligence Coordination Centre, and the Indian Ocean Commission Anti-Piracy collaboration program (Aidi, 2020).

The Horn of Africa is characterized by internecine intrastate and interstate conflict. These conflicts have their roots in the interlinked and mutually reinforcing dynamics of the history and pattern of state formation, the nature of the political systems, social structure and economic underdevelopment prevalent in the region. Conflicts have been endemic in the region. (Olika, 2011).

These conflicts, however, have generally been confined to dry land, with the maritime domain (the Red Sea, the Gulf of Aden and the Western Indian Ocean), remaining almost unaffected. Efforts to combat piracy, such as naval patrols and international cooperation, have yielded some success. (M. G. & Kewir, 2023).

However, the root causes such as poverty, lack of governance and political instability remain largely unaddressed. Regional cooperation on maritime security is essential to combat piracy and protect international trade routes.

Interstate & Intrastate Conflicts and Border Disputes

Horn of Africa countries, including Djibouti, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Somalia, and Sudan, have been faced with both internal and external warfare. Since the fall of Barre in 1991, Somalia has been defined by the absence of an overarching state, as well as changing levels of hostilities (which have typically been clan-based) amongst diverse factions. This characteristic has been shared by all countries in the Horn of Africa. In parallel with this, Somalia has witnessed the expansion (and dispersion) of a variety of governance systems that are designed to address issues pertaining to order, security, and predictability (Yusuf, 2022).

In this regard, the Union of Islamic Courts was the most successful organization. It did provide a vision of an overarching power that was somewhat independent from the clan structure. On the other hand, this led to the formation of religious ideological conflict lines, which drew the attention of players from the outside (Borchgrevink, A., Lie, 2009).

The most notable example is the Ethiopia-Eritrea border conflict, which lasted for over two decades and caused significant loss of life and economic hardship. Though peace was achieved in 2018 with the signing of a peace agreement, tensions remain and the region's stability is still fragile. Similarly, disputes over borders and resources between Somalia and Kenya have further complicated regional security dynamics. (Conflicts, n.d.).

Conflict often involve a combination of territorial disputes, ethnic tensions and competition for resources. Addressing these conflicts requires cooperation among neighboring states and a shared commitment to resolving disputes through diplomatic channels rather than military means. (Sharamo & Mesfin, 2011).

In addition to external threats, the Horn of Africa is plagued by internal conflicts. For instance, Somalia has been in a state of instability for decades, with multiple factions vying for control.

In Ethiopia, tensions between ethnic groups and the political marginalization of certain communities have led to violence and unrest. (Ahmed & Bhatnagar, 2008).

Weak governance structures in these states, combined with corruption, lack of accountability and limited state capacity, have made it difficult to address the root causes of conflict. Strengthening governance at the national level is essential, but it also requires regional cooperation to support the rebuilding of state institutions and ensure effective governance. (Yemane & Borowy, 2023).

The Role of Regional Organizations in Security Collaboration

Within the framework of the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD), the Economic Community was founded in the year 1996. It took the role of the Intergovernmental Authority on Drought and Development (IGADD), which was a multinational body that was established in 1986 by Djibouti, Ethiopia, Somalia, Sudan, Uganda, and Kenya with the purpose of concentrating on development and environmental control. The offices of the International Government for the Advancement of Democracy (IGADD) were eventually moved to Djibouti as a result of a member-state agreement that was signed in January of 1986. Djibouti, Ethiopia, Somalia, Sudan, Kenya, and Uganda were the founding members of the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) in the year 1986 (Back, 2024).

Eritrea (1993) and South Sudan (2011) are the two other countries that become members of the group at a later location. All of these regions were included in this membership, including the Great Lakes, the Nile valley, and the Horns of Africa. A proclamation was made by the Assembly of Heads of State and Government in Addis Ababa in April 1995 to revitalize the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGADD) and strengthen collaboration among member states. The "Letter of Instrument to Amend the IGADD Charter/Agreement" was signed by the Assembly of Heads of State and Government on March 21, 1996 in Nairobi. This letter renamed the organization as the "Intergovernmental Authority on Development" (Weldesellassie, 2011).

The reinvigorated Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) was created on November 25, 1996, in Djibouti, the Republic of Djibouti, by the IGAD Assembly of Heads of State and Government. Included in this revived IGAD were expanded areas of regional cooperation and a new organizational structure. As a result of its revitalization, the

Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) has undertaken a number of initiatives throughout the region. For instance, in September of 2006, the African Union Peace and Security Council gave its approval to a request made by the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) to send an IGAD Peace Support Mission to Somalia (IGASOM) (Adolph, 2016).

On February 21, 2007, the United Nations Security Council passed Resolution 1744, which authorized the deployment of a new African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM) in place of the International Government of Assistance for Somalia (IGASOM). Through the AMISOM project, the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) is a primary backer of the Federal Government of Somalia. In 2008, the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) broadened its scope of activities to include measures aimed at enhancing the conditions of investment, commerce, and banking among its member nations. A significant emphasis was placed by the organization on the deployment of innovative programs and approaches (Williams, 2013).

The Authority's most powerful policy-making body is the Assembly of Heads of State and Government. It meets once a year to set the goals, rules and initiatives for IGAD. In a rotating process, a chairman is chosen from among the member states. The Secretariat is headed by an Executive Secretary appointed by the Assembly of Heads of State and Government for a term of four years' renewable once. (Establishing et al., 1996).

The Secretariat assists member states in developing regional projects in priority areas, facilitates the coordination and harmonization of development policies, mobilizes resources to carry out regional projects and programs approved by the council, and strengthens the national infrastructure required to carry out regional projects and policies. (Maalim, 2013).

IGAD's mandate includes promoting peace, security and stability in the region through regional cooperation. While IGAD has facilitated peace agreements, such as the Ethiopia-Eritrea peace agreement, its capacity to address the region's security challenges remains limited by political fragmentation and the lack of a unified security framework. (Policy, 2022).

To strengthen security collaboration in the Horn of Africa, IGAD must be empowered with greater resources, political support and institutional capacity. The organization should play a more active role in mediating disputes, coordinating military interventions and providing platforms for dialogue. (Dea & Ababa, 2022).

One of the main obstacles to effective security cooperation in the Horn of Africa is the lack of trust between regional governments. Historical conflicts, such as the Ethiopia-Eritrea war and ongoing territorial disputes have created deep mistrust among states.

(22_Smidt.Pdf.Crdownload, n.d.).

To overcome trust-building measures are essential. These measures could include joint military exercises, cross-border dialogue and confidence-building initiatives aimed at reducing tensions and promoting cooperation. The establishment of a regional security framework, which includes regular communication and transparency between member states, is crucial for building trust. (César & Cardoso, 2016).

The Role of Civil Society

Civil society comprises a diverse array of non-state actors, including community groups, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), faith-based organizations, trade unions and professional associations. While governments play a central role in regional security efforts, civil society organizations (CSOs) must also be involved in the process. (Ali, 2024).

CSOs can provide valuable insights into local dynamics, promote peacebuilding at the grassroots level and advocate for the inclusion of marginalized groups in peace processes. (Baikady et al., 2020).

Civil society involvement ensures that security strategies are not imposed from above but are designed to reflect the needs and perspectives of the local populations. This approach is vital for ensuring the sustainability of peace efforts. (Cussen & Shiferaw, 2014).

Civil society as the “arena outside the family, state and market” where individuals and groups organize to advance shared interests. The concept is fluid, evolving across historical and cultural contexts and is often shaped by political systems and societal norms. Civil society organizations (CSOs) are organizations in the society that work outside the state and are made up of several individuals coming together. (Allen, 1997).

Despite their contributions, CSOs face significant challenges, including limited funding, restrictive government policies and threats to activists' safety. Many post-conflict governments view CSOs with suspicion, imposing legal barriers and restricting their operations.

International partnerships and donor support have been essential in countering these hurdles, enabling CSOs to continue their vital work. (Abdulahi, 2022).

To enhance the impact OF CSOs in post-conflict countries must focus on capacity building, fostering local ownership and developing sustainable funding models. As key actors in the global governance landscape, their role in promoting democracy, peace and social cohesion remains indispensable in addressing the complex challenges of post-conflict reconstruction. (Vega, 2018).

Globally, examples underscore the diverse roles of civil society. In Eastern Europe, civil society was central to the fall of authoritarian regimes in the late 20th century, leveraging grassroots movements to demand democratic reforms. In Africa, CSOs have championed human rights and anti-corruption initiatives, as seen in Ghana and Senegal, where they have influenced electoral reforms and policy transparency. (Hassan, 2024).

Civil society fosters inclusivity by engaging marginalized groups and ensuring their voices are represented in governance processes. For example, in South Africa, CSOs facilitated community dialogues during the transition from apartheid, creating platforms for diverse stakeholders to contribute to nation-building. (Abdulai & Quantson, 2009).

Citizen participation is critical in conflict-affected states, where trust in government institutions is often eroded. In such contexts, civil society bridges the gap between citizens and the state, fostering dialogue and rebuilding trust. (Negmatova, 2024).

CSOs are increasingly utilizing technology to expand their reach and impact. Digital platforms allow them to engage broader audiences, monitor government actions and advocate for transparency and accountability. For instance, the Ushahidi platform, initially developed to map post-election violence in Kenya, has evolved into a critical tool for crisis management and civic participation worldwide. (Kireia, 2022).

In conflict-affected regions, insecurity poses severe risks to civil society actors. In Somalia, CSO staff often operate under constant threat of violence, limiting their reach and deterring community engagement. These challenges necessitate international support to enhance the security and resilience of civil society networks. (Mugi, 2020). Somalia's civil society has its roots in clan-based governance structures, which have historically played a role in conflict

resolution and resource management. However, the protracted civil war and state collapse have fragmented these structures, leading to a proliferation of NGOs and advocacy groups focused on humanitarian assistance and peacebuilding. (“Civil Society and the State in Africa,” 1995).

Despite their contributions, Somali CSOs face significant challenges, including limited institutional capacity, lack of coordination and dependency on external donors. These issues undermine their ability to implement sustainable governance initiatives. (Hersi, 2018).

However, there is no agreed meaning of the concept. The role of civil society plays in addressing terrorism appears to be limited. It may be that civil society organizations in the Horn do not want to venture into such a globally political territory. (Periodic & Report, 2020).

CSOs have been affected by the same politicization and securitization of aid that has affected humanitarian INGOs who have been sounding the alarm about shrinking humanitarian space in Somalia. It would be useful to understand the impact of these trends on local civil society. (Fisher, 2014).

Proposed Strategies for Strengthening Regional Security Cooperation

IGAD must be supported in its efforts to mediate conflicts, facilitate peace agreements and coordinate regional responses to security challenges. This could involve enhancing its peace and security division, increasing financial resources for peacekeeping missions and strengthening its diplomatic capacity. IGAD should also work more closely with the African Union (AU) and other international partners to create a coordinated approach to regional security. (*Policy* 2024).

This proposal should include joint operations against extremist groups, piracy and cross-border crimes. Cross-border security cooperation is essential for addressing issues such as piracy, terrorism and border disputes. Regional governments should establish joint border security patrols, share intelligence and coordinate responses to cross-border threats. Security is closely linked to development. (*IN THE EAST AND HORN OF AFRICA*).

The Horn of Africa’s security challenges cannot be resolved without addressing the underlying socio-economic factors, such as poverty, unemployment and lack of education. Regional governments should invest in education, infrastructure and healthcare to address these challenges. (Melvin, 2019).

Additionally, regional cooperation on trade, agriculture and energy can help reduce competition for resources and promote economic stability. Moreover, countries in the Horn of Africa should work together to create economic zones along their borders that foster trade and cooperation. This can help reduce tensions and promote peaceful coexistence.

Conclusion

The Horn of Africa faces complex security challenges that require coordinated regional efforts. While significant obstacles remain, the region's nations have the potential to overcome these challenges through increased cooperation, stronger institutions and a shared commitment to peace and stability. The role of IGAD, trust-building measures and the inclusion of civil society are key factors in achieving sustainable security in the Horn of Africa.

The success of regional security efforts in the Horn of Africa hinges on the political will of regional leaders to prioritize collective action over national interests. By working together, the countries of the Horn of Africa can create a more secure, prosperous and stable future for their people and contribute to global peace and security.

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