

JIS



The Journal of
International
Service

Vol. 1, Issue 1

Fall 2020



School of
International
Service

American University
Washington, DC





JOURNAL *of* INTERNATIONAL SERVICE

2

2020-2021

Board of Editors

EXECUTIVE BOARD

Editor-in-Chief

KATHERINE LEE

Managing Editor

KATHRYN URBAN

Associate Editor

KYLE SALLEE

Operations Director

MATTHEW SANSONE

Communications Director

MONICA MIDDLETON

STAFF

Editors

PRATEET ASHAR

WENDY ATIENO

KEYA BARTOLOMEO

SHANNON SHORT

PETER WHITENECK

Fellows

SABRINA CAMMISA

DENTON COHEN

FACULTY ADVISOR

PROFESSOR NANCY SACHS

Myriad of Security Challenges in the Horn of Africa Jeopardizing Economic Progress

Matthew Sansone

American University

Africa's rapid surge of economic and political growth over recent decades has greatly expanded its presence and influence on the global stage. The modernization and growing prosperity of African nations, exemplified by rapid urbanization and increased availability of modern technology, is remarkable. However, this development is threatened by instability, violence, and poor governance. East Africa in particular faces major security, economic, and political challenges, especially in the Horn of Africa. With terror groups vying to supplant existing governments, piracy plaguing a major international trade route, tension arising from cultural and religious friction, and geostrategic competition between world powers, the Horn of Africa faces a host of security challenges that must be addressed to make room for economic and political prosperity. While working on the ground to address the security situation in the region, I saw firsthand how piracy, terrorism, internal conflict, and great power competition affect the communities and stifle their efforts for progress. But I also saw how these nations cooperate to overcome these issues and work towards bringing peace and prosperity to the region.

East Africa is rife with history; it is home to the first ancestors of humanity and to ancient empires and cultures. It is also a region of the world that has long been a place of territorial conflict. East Africa has been fought over for millennia, from the Nubians in the north, Swahili civilizations along the coast, the Abyssinian empire in the horn, to the modern nation states that exist today. These modern states in the region of East Africa known as the Horn of Africa include Ethiopia, Somalia, Djibouti, and Eritrea. These countries face a host of security challenges including piracy, terrorism, hunger, government instability, and refugee crises. The instability of the region can be traced, in part, to the fall of the Siad Barre government in Somalia in 1991.ⁱ This event left Somalia fractured and fragmented, leaving it vulnerable to be used as a haven by terror organizations and piracy groups alike. These groups usurp the control of territory

from legitimately elected governments, waging war to wage implement their own version of law and order and threatening trade and stable governance in the region. I have observed each country in the region manage these threats both individually and collectively, demonstrating their understanding that security and stability of one country is a vital priority for all the others.

The largest country in the Horn of Africa, both in terms of population and land area, is Ethiopia.ⁱⁱ It is also politically important as it is home to the headquarters of the African Union, a pan-African institution based in its capital of Addis Ababa. One of Ethiopia's major security challenges is its relationship with neighboring Somalia, an historically fraught relationship marked by many fights over their shared, one thousand-mile border.ⁱⁱⁱ A particular area of dispute is the Ogaden region, which Ethiopia claims as its own. Somalia, a Muslim-majority country, has long held that the predominantly Islamic Ogaden should rightfully be part of Somalia, instead of the Christian-majority Ethiopia. This dispute has been the cause of several wars between the neighbors.^{iv}

Despite these historical and cultural differences, Ethiopia and Somalia agree that defeating al-Shabaab, an al-Qaeda affiliated terror group, and bringing peace and stability to the Horn is a priority. Al-Shabaab was founded in Somalia in 2005 in the wake of the collapse of the Somali state.^v Facing this group that threatens the region at large, Ethiopia and Somalia have embraced bilateral cooperation. This joint effort is summarized by a statement from the office of Ethiopia's Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed, which cautioned that, "...The two countries needed to remain vigilant in counterterrorism efforts and give equal attention to address the underlying causes of violent extremism, namely regional conflict, lack of trade, investment and poverty."^{vi} The threat of terrorism and extremism not only presents a threat to the security of both nations, but also continues to strain resources and economic progress.

Today, Ethiopia is addressing the regional security challenges in Somalia by focusing on combatting terrorism and integrating partner forces to combat terrorism and promote stability in the Horn. During my time in Africa, I worked with a coalition force consisting of the African Union, regional partners, and the United States. The goal of this coalition was to create stability and eliminate the terror groups residing in Somalia. I learned that Ethiopia plays a vital role in supplying troops and arms to counter-terrorism missions, coordinating the coalition forces, and providing counter insurgency training to troops from regional states.^{vii} Because Somalia functions as a safe-haven for terror groups, threats to stability frequently spill over into Ethiopia's borders. As such, it is in Ethiopia's interest to coordinate cooperative security measures to preserve its own stability and further its economic development.

Another security challenge faced by Ethiopia is that of maintaining a stable border with neighboring Eritrea. Since a war between them in the late 1990s, the border has been disputed between Ethiopia and Eritrea as each lay claim to land possessed by the other. The countries continue to be in a tense standoff, with their shared border being the most volatile region as intermittent skirmishes have broken out there between the two.^{viii} Even today, civil unrest in Ethiopia's Tigray region is crossing the border into Eritrea, causing increased fears of a wider regional conflict.^{ix} With rebel forces in Tigray launching rockets into Eritrea, the violence threatens to engulf the region.^x Between managing its borders and coordinating military responses in the region, security challenges will continue to engage Ethiopia with its neighbors and foster greater interregional cooperation.

Many of the security threats in the Horn of Africa originate in Somalia. Somalia is home to a multitude of terrorist organizations and piracy gangs, that threaten war and instability. The existence of such groups creates secondary effects in the region such as civilian displacement

and poverty. Somalia is currently embroiled in a civil war where the government and partner forces, including the United States, are allied against a multitude of terror groups. From my own experience on the ground, the main coalition efforts are being directed towards eliminating al-Shabaab and any remnants of the Islamic State (IS) left in the country. Both groups continue to threaten the population and create instability.

Al-Shabaab is the main terrorist threat to the Horn of Africa, attacking countries in the region and seizing Somali territory from the federal government. The group wages war through fear, kidnapping citizens, bombing civilian and military targets, and assassinating political dissidents. In territory controlled by al-Shabaab, the group uses militants and fear to govern and extort the Somali people to give them desperately needed crops and money. In these territories, I witnessed these militants collecting tolls and implementing their own version of Sharia law, which they impose with an iron fist. Not only does al-Shabaab pose a grave threat to the region as a whole, its tactic of bleeding the Somali population dry is stifling efforts of economic development, leaving much of the region mired in poverty.

Recently, the government of Somalia has been making gains against the group with help from neighboring Ethiopia, forces of the African Union Mission to Somalia (AMISOM), and the United States military. Their aim is to continue to root out Islamic extremists and stabilize the territory reclaimed from terror groups. The coalition forces work together, although not always without issue, to combat al-Shabaab and liberate the areas under their control to bring peace to this volatile region. Based on my experiences, al-Shabaab has been pushed out of the major cities in Somalia, but they continue to hold vast swaths of territory in the country. They are also consolidating their gains by installing loyal, regional leaders in conquered territory, executing any clans that oppose them, and ordering their militants to maintain control and stability of any

held territory. I have even seen evidence that al-Shabaab continuously moves its leadership and recruit training sites to avoid detection by coalition forces. To defeat this enemy, coalition forces should focus on cutting the supply lines that service these terrorists when in hiding and further chipping away at al-Shabaab-controlled lands. Once removed, Somalia and its coalition partners must actively address the underlying issues that motivate recruits from joining these groups.

One of the major causes of the fighting in Somalia stems from the country's culture, which considers its history and clan system of extremely high importance. Somalia has a high context culture. It is heavily dependent on implicit communication, a shared history, and interpersonal relationships derived from close knit communities that prioritize the survival of the group above that of the individual.^{xi} Over time, these communities developed into a clan structure that now permeates Somali society. The clan dynamic makes it difficult for any one group to unify the country and bring peace. Somalis hesitate to listen to or follow a member of a rival clan, even if that member holds a high government office such as the Prime Minister. This refusal to engage in cross-clan communication makes it a monumental task to unite Somalis, even against al-Shabaab, which represents a singular threat to Somalia as a whole.

There must be a cultural mend in Somalia among the clans so that they can stop fighting amongst each other and work together for the benefit of their shared nation.^{xii} As a high context culture, Somalis are immensely proud of where they come from and fiercely loyal to their homeland. This pride and shared history have the potential to serve as unifying forces for the Somali people, should they be willing to set aside the legacy of a divisive clan system.^{xiii} During my time in country, I saw al-Shabaab take advantage of the divisions within Somalia and region, enabling them to carry out their agenda of fear and control. By exacerbating existing divides among the people, al-Shabaab aims to prevent the Horn of Africa from reaching a point of

stability. Al-Shabaab as a group has thrived off of the instability of the region and uses it to their advantage to carve out territory and achieve their goals of implementing their own version of Islamic law. To make Somalia whole again and quell this volatile region, al-Shabaab must be defeated. Somalia can do this through internal unity and the assistance of international and regional partners.

Further complicating the security situation is rampant piracy off the coast of Somalia, which is home to one of the most strategic maritime trade routes in the world. Billions of dollars of cargo sail past Somalia and through the Gulf of Aden each year.^{xiv} Pirates are yet another source of chaos within Somalia that is proliferating instability across the region, affecting its neighbors and disrupting efforts towards peace and stability. The Horn of Africa sits on a major international maritime trade route with approximately 12% of global trade transported past Somalia and through the Gulf of Aden, the maritime access point for the Suez Canal or Indian Ocean.^{xv} The volume of high value goods traversing Somali waters makes this route a prime target for pirates that aim to seize and exploit merchant vessels. Somalia is notorious for piracy, including the seizing of cargo ships and their crews. These pirates threaten the stability of international trade that travels through the Gulf of Aden. With an estimated 4.8 billion barrels of oil a day entering the Strait of Bab al-Mandab and flowing through the Gulf of Aden, Somalia's waters are of major strategic value.^{xvi} The seas off Somalia's coast is also home to over 50% of the world's piracy^{xvii}. In order to combat the prevalent piracy in the area, countries from all over the world deploy their navies to patrol and protect these sea lanes. This international anti-piracy effort in the region has proved to be effective, as piracy in the Gulf of Aden and around the Horn of Africa is declining.

One effect of declining piracy in the Horn has been the increased importance of Djibouti on the world stage. Djibouti is the smallest country in the region, but its strategic location means that it is punching above its geopolitical weight. Djibouti is located on the Bab al-Mandab Strait, the closest point of the Horn of Africa to the Arabian Peninsula and the main artery between the Indian Ocean and the Mediterranean Sea via the Suez Canal. Because of its position on one of the world's most important waterways, Djibouti is a key player in keeping open sea lanes free from pirates and terror groups. Global powers, including the United States and China, have based naval assets in Djibouti, using the country as a strategic port for anti-piracy operations in and around the Gulf of Aden. In addition to dealing with the security threats from piracy operations and terror groups, Djibouti is also grappling with emerging as a battleground in Africa for the competing interests of the United States and China.

China and the U.S. have differing visions for the strategic landscape of the continent and also differ in their approach to engage with it. Djibouti has become a strategic base for both countries to carry out their respective agendas. The United States has a military base in Djibouti which it uses as a hub for addressing security threats in the region. From my experiences, the U.S. prioritizes security and stability in the region and is working with partner nations in the Horn of Africa to combat piracy and terror threats, secure sea lanes, and promote improved governance. China also has a presence in Djibouti, but its operations are instead focused on economic and diplomatic investments in the region. Djibouti is one of several nations in Africa that signed onto China's Belt and Road initiative. The Belt and Road initiative is a Chinese economic and development initiative with the goals of promoting cooperative development and providing infrastructure assistance throughout the world.^{xviii} Although those are the goals outlined as the primary purpose of the BRI, some U.S. analysts believe that the BRI is actually a

Chinese national security initiative meant to expand its economic and military footprint across the world. Currently, China is investing in Djibouti's infrastructure by helping the country build up and modernize its port. This economic investment has led to an increase in Chinese naval forces in the country. The Chinese positioned their own naval base in Djibouti, right next door to a major US naval base, Camp Lemonnier.^{xix} Working out of the port of Djibouti, the Chinese navy takes part in escort missions through the Gulf of Aden, houses peacekeepers on the continent, and evacuates civilians from nearby violent hotspots like Yemen and Somalia.^{xx} This presence has created friction with US forces, who consider the Chinese activity as a security threat: a way for the Chinese to spy on US activity and gather intelligence on US naval capabilities, up close and personal. With the United States and China competing for influence, it will be a challenge for Djibouti to further its own security interests while being the battleground for superpower geostrategic competition.

The Horn of Africa is one of the most volatile and unstable regions in the world, possessing a plethora of security issues that act as a barrier to achieving peace and stability. The national, regional, and global dynamics further compound the complexity of these challenges. While many of these issues are local in nature, such as the spread of terror organizations throughout Somalia, the interconnectedness of East Africa means enables these threats to affect neighboring countries; this is further demonstrated by the recent news that an outbreak of civil unrest in Ethiopia is actively spilling over into Eritrea. Some issues also have international implications, such as competing interests from outside powers and piracy along high-volume sea routes, which affect trade. Despite the myriad of challenges, however, the region has a hopeful future. Together with the help of regional and international partners, the deep-rooted issues of the Horn of Africa can be overcome. But these immediate security threats must be alleviated in order

for economic development initiatives to thrive and ensure that East Africa—and Africa as a whole—continues to grow and prosper.

ⁱ Colonel Goitom Farus Belay, *A Review of Ethiopia's Security Challenges in The Horn of Africa* (U.S. Army War College, 2013).

ⁱⁱ “The World Factbook: Ethiopia.” Central Intelligence Agency. Central Intelligence Agency, February 1, 2018. <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/et.html>.

ⁱⁱⁱ Colonel Goitom Farus Belay, *A Review of Ethiopia's Security Challenges in The Horn of Africa* (U.S. Army War College, 2013).

^{iv} Nasir, Mohammed Ali. *Ethio–Somaliland Relations Post-1991: Challenges and Opportunities* (International Journal of sustainable development, 2011).

^v Hansen, Stig Jarle. *Al-Shabaab in Somalia: the History and Ideology of a Militant Islamist Group*. London: Hurst, 2016.

^{vi} *Ethiopia-Somalia: Strengthening Relations* (Africa Research Bulletin, 2018)

^{vii} Colonel Goitom Farus Belay, *A Review of Ethiopia's Security Challenges in The Horn of Africa* (U.S. Army War College, 2013).

^{viii} *Eritrea-Ethiopia: Border Impasse* (Africa Research Bulletin, 2017).

^{ix} Cara, Anna. “People Go Hungry in Ethiopia's Tigray as Conflict Marches On.” AP NEWS. Associated Press, November 18, 2020. <https://apnews.com/article/international-news-coronavirus-pandemic-ethiopia-united-nations-kenya-5becfca36751f5bccf5b21b79de1398d>.

^x “Ethiopia Says It Has Seized Another Tigray Town as Conflict Embroils Eritrea.” CNN. Cable News Network, November 16, 2020. <https://www.cnn.com/2020/11/16/africa/ethiopia-seized-town-tigray-embroils-eritrea-intl/index.html>.

^{xi} Weaver, G. R. (2014). *Intercultural relations: communication, identity and conflict*. Boston: Pearson.

^{xii} Hesse, Brian J, *Introduction: The myth of 'Somalia'* (Journal of contemporary African studies, 2010).

^{xiii} Hesse, Brian J, *Introduction: The myth of 'Somalia'* (Journal of contemporary African studies, 2010).

^{xiv} Farah Robleh Hamza, Jean-Philippe Priotti, *Maritime trade and piracy in the Gulf of Aden and the Indian Ocean (1994–2017)* (Journal of Transportation Security, 2018).

^{xv} Burlando, Alfredo, Cristea, Anca D., Lee, Logan M, *The Trade consequences of maritime insecurity: Evidence from Somali piracy* (MPRA, 2014).

^{xvi} Lejla Villar, Mason Hamilton, *Three important oil trade chokepoints are located around the Arabian Peninsula* (U.S. Energy Information Administration, 2017).

^{xvii} Farah Robleh Hamza, Jean-Philippe Priotti, *Maritime trade and piracy in the Gulf of Aden and the Indian Ocean (1994–2017)* (Journal of Transportation Security, 2018).

^{xviii} Paul Nantulya, *Implications for Africa from China's One Belt One Road Strategy* (Africa Center for Strategic Studies, 2019).

^{xix} Jacobs, Andrew, and Jane Perlez. “U.S. Wary of Its New Neighbor in Djibouti: A Chinese Naval Base.” The New York Times. The New York Times, February 25, 2017. <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/02/25/world/africa/us-djibouti-chinese-naval-base.html>.

^{xx} Jacobs, Andrew, and Jane Perlez. “U.S. Wary of Its New Neighbor in Djibouti: A Chinese Naval Base.” The New York Times. The New York Times, February 25, 2017. <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/02/25/world/africa/us-djibouti-chinese-naval-base.html>.

Works Cited

Colonel Goitom Farus Belay, *A Review of Ethiopia's Security Challenges in The Horn of Africa* (U.S. Army War College, 2013).

“The World Factbook: Ethiopia.” Central Intelligence Agency. Central Intelligence Agency, February 1, 2018. <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/et.html>

Nasir, Mohammed Ali. *Ethio–Somaliland Relations Post-1991: Challenges and Opportunities* (International Journal of sustainable development, 2011).

Hansen, Stig Jarle. *Al-Shabaab in Somalia: the History and Ideology of a Militant Islamist Group*. London: Hurst, 2016

Ethiopia-Somalia: Strengthening Relations (Africa Research Bulletin, 2018)

Eritrea-Ethiopia: Border Impasse (Africa Research Bulletin, 2017).

“Ethiopia Says It Has Seized Another Tigray Town as Conflict Embroils Eritrea.” CNN. Cable News Network, November 16, 2020. <https://www.cnn.com/2020/11/16/africa/ethiopia-seized-town-tigray-embroils-eritrea-intl/index.html>.

Farah Robleh Hamza, Jean-Philippe Priotti, *Maritime trade and piracy in the Gulf of Aden and the Indian Ocean (1994–2017)* (Journal of Transportation Security, 2018).

Weaver, G. R. (2014). *Intercultural relations: communication, identity and conflict*. Boston: Pearson.

Hesse, Brian J, *Introduction: The myth of 'Somalia'* (Journal of contemporary African studies, 2010).

Burlando, Alfredo, Cristea, Anca D., Lee, Logan M, *The Trade consequences of maritime insecurity: Evidence from Somali piracy* (MPRA, 2014).

Lejla Villar, Mason Hamilton, *Three important oil trade chokepoints are located around the Arabian Peninsula* (U.S. Energy Information Administration, 2017).

Paul Nantulya, *Implications for Africa from China's One Belt One Road Strategy* (Africa Center for Strategic Studies, 2019).

Cara, Anna. "People Go Hungry in Ethiopia's Tigray as Conflict Marches On." AP NEWS.

Associated Press, November 18, 2020. <https://apnews.com/article/international-news-coronavirus-pandemic-ethiopia-united-nations-kenya-5becfca36751f5bccf5b21b79de1398d>.

Jacobs, Andrew, and Jane Perlez. "U.S. Wary of Its New Neighbor in Djibouti: A Chinese Naval Base." The New York Times. The New York Times, February 25, 2017.

<https://www.nytimes.com/2017/02/25/world/africa/us-djibouti-chinese-naval-base.html>.