Volume VI | Issue III | May-June 2023

The HORN Bulletin

Xi Jinping's Global Civilization Initiative

China's Global Aspirations and Power Projection

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The HORN Bulletin is a bi-monthly publication by the HORN Institute. It contains thematic articles mainly on issues affecting the Horn of Africa region.

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Abstract

This article explores the persona of China's President Xi Jinping, analyzing his ambitions for global leadership and the competitors vying for influence in Africa through the perspective of the Global Civilization Initiative. The author highlights two rival categories challenging Xi's aspirations: former colonial powers, supported by their North American counterparts, and assertive middle powers. Nonetheless, Xi emerges as a grand strategist who surpasses his mentors and contemporaries on the global stage, drawing inspiration from Mao Zedong and Deng Xiaoping. The article also examines China's involvement with Africa and its significance in China's ascent as a global power. Additionally, it discusses Xi's strategies for global success, including

Xi Jinping, general secretary of the Communist Party of China (CPC) Central Committee and Chinese president, attends the CPC in Dialogue with World Political Parties High-Level Meeting via video link and delivers a keynote address in Beijing, capital of China, on March 15, 2023 (Photo Credit: Xinhua)

the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and the doctrine of global Common Shared Destiny.

Introduction

Of all the men currently straddling the global stage as leaders, few are as captivating as China's Xi Jinping. He has dreams of being a world leader, although he is not the only aspirant for that position. His competitors, at least in influencing Africa, are in two categories. First, are former colonial powers, supported by their North American extensions in Canada and the United States. Second, are the middle powers whose leaders, such as Recep Tayyip Erdogan of Turkey and Japan's Fumio Kishida have become increasingly assertive on the world stage. They would like their countries and themselves, as individuals, to be recognized as great. Other middle countries include Brazil where Lula da Silva is on a comeback to the global stage and India with Narendra Modi asserting his presence.

Xi, a child of the revolution, thrives on the achievements of Mao Zedong and Deng Xiaoping as creators of modern China. Mao gets credit for ending the Century of Humiliation and for establishing New China in 1949 as a player in the world political arena. Deng vitalized the Chinese economy with his 'Socialism with Chinese Characteristics' that accepted capitalistic economic principles while holding on to political communism. The two made the centrality of the Communist Party of China (CPC), a national creed not to be tampered with. Xi embraces this national creed in his domestic and international activities.

Xi appears to have been ahead of his rivals when reassessing ways of protecting national interest. Combining the gifts of the other two builders of modern China, Mao and Deng, Xi is a grand strategist that seemingly surpasses his mentors and contemporaries on the world stage. He is, according to The Economist and Forbes magazines, the most powerful man on earth (Ewalt, 2018). He achieved that by having a historical consciousness which enabled him to adopt two winning political strategies, the ability to be domestically ruthless while projecting the image of global common sense and amiability. Although he and his father had gone through 're-education' in Mao's Cultural Revolution, he stayed in the CPC and systematically rose up the party power structure until he became 'numero uno' or what Chinese officials call Number One, the Core (Hartcher, 2022).

Global Development Initiative and Global Security Initiative

Xi is prone to issuing grand pronouncements, not just for the Chinese, but also for the rest of the world. His Global Development Initiative in 2021 and Global Security Initiative in 2022 as world unifying concepts on development and security challenges, laid the foundation for his 2023 Global Civilisation Initiative which the *Global Times* baptized 'Xivilisation'. In going to Athens, Greece, to launch his Global Civilisation Initiative at a conference of world political parties, Xi was making an effort to link China with Greece thereby creating a China-Greek cultural symbiosis. It created a meeting of the mind between Confucius and Socrates (Liuliu, 2023) while ignoring Ptahhotep who lived almost 2000 years before in Egypt (Encyclopedia Britannica, n.d.).

Xi's effort to link the Greeks to the Chinese is commendable and inspires intellectual discussions. CPC scholar Wang Xuebin, for instance, thinks that the three pronouncements "are solid pillars of a global community with a shared future…. The three are inseparable, embodying our systemic thinking and transmitting our wisdom and philosophy to the world" (Liuliu, 2023). Since civilization is nothing more than organized living, however, the question that comes up is about which organized living is better or more advanced than the rest. 'Xivilisation' is supposedly ahead of the others in that it advances global intercultural interrelatedness the Chinese version stands out because of its antiquity, Greece probably comes next. Still, the Egyptian one is older than either the Chinese or the Greek, and it is inexplicably missing.

Xi likes history and repeatedly refers to China's claims of having the longest continuous and identifiably centralized organized living in the world, running for roughly 4,000 years as unique. In that period, China had its great moments as well as times of regret. It produced thinkers on governance, warriors of renown, and mariners. Among the thinkers was Confucius who, around, 485 BCE, advised rulers to be virtuous, respectful and considerate to people, or be overthrown. "Without the trust of the people," he declared, "no government can stand" (McAuthur, 2010). Seeing something Confucian in himself, Xi has been busy promoting Confucian institutes in different parts of the world as a way of spreading the Chinese civilisation which is essentially Xivilisation. In doing so, China appeals to other countries by pointing to historical connections such as the voyages of Zheng He, the Hui mariner who travelled to East Africa in the 15th Century and returned to China with a giraffe. In addition, Chinese sailors left walking and talking evidence of their presence in Lamu.

Xi would like to avoid the blunders of the Ming Dynasty, in which China claimed to be superior to the rest of the world and became inward looking. Unconcerned with what others did, China developed complacency, in the belief that others were barbarians who should learn from and pay tribute to the Middle Kingdom. It relaxed, lowered its guard, and was vulnerable to Euro conquest leading to a loss of independence and sovereignty. After the English-induced 'Opium War' in the 1840s, China entered a period it calls "a Century of Humiliation" in which Euro-powers annexed Chinese ports and even made China itself forbidden to the Chinese.

Being forbidden in their country inspired Sun Yat-Sen to launch his Chinese pride-instilling movement (Wang, 2018). Among his followers were the founders of the Communist Party of China which eventually ended the "Century of Humiliation" in October 1949 when Mao Zedong proclaimed the New Era at Tiananmen Square in Beijing and started building a New China (Munene, 2013). That New China was to determine its policies under the guidance of the Communist Party of China and that was made clear to all institutions, including the military (Zhongqing). China, however, remained isolated from both the capitalist and communist camps partly because it tended to be confrontational, and closed-minded, and tried to export "revolution" and its version of communism. Xi knows all this and the mistakes that were made.

Mao's New China identified with the colonized in Africa and in return post-colonial Africa helped China to get out of its psychological frame of being forbidden. African countries pressured the United Nations to legitimize Communist China as the real China in 1971. As a result,

"Xi has been busy promoting Confucian institutes in different parts of the world as a way of spreading the Chinese civilisation which is essentially Xivilisation

new perspectives about China emerged, the Chinese people stopped being novelties and the notion of being "forbidden" outside China disappeared. China had created new realities.

Deng was the other pre-Xi leader whose vision was to make China a global power without turning the Chinese political system into a replica of the West. It was crucial, he insisted, that "China stick with the socialist road and the leadership of the party. Only Socialism can save China and turn it into a developed country" (Miller, 2016). Advising the Chinese to hide power, he adopted capitalistic ways that he called "socialism with Chinese characteristics" after which the economy skyrocketed (Brown, 2017). He also oversaw the writing of the 1982 constitution in which leaders would serve for only two five-year terms and leave for their deputies to take over (Buckley & Wu, 2018). When political agitators at Tiananmen Square in 1989 threatened the Communist Party of China, he simply crushed them and made it clear that the communist system of governance was not up for debate (Brwon, 2017).

Thus, Mao and Deng created new realities by establishing New China that went out to devour global natural resources. China became the leading creditor nation, an economic stimulant to its rivals, and a new centre of power in a growing multi-polar world (Yizhou, 1999). It attracted investments in China while also investing outside, including in Africa. Despite this fact, there is a persistent myth that African countries developed an interest in China, at times called *Look East,* in the post-cold War times. This myth ignores serious engagements between African states and China that were clear in the 1970s and 1980s when serious friction developed between African states and the Euro-powers. Stadia diplomacy in Africa became the diplomatic in-thing for China in the 1980s as the Chinese proved their construction prowess in different countries. The Kasarani Sports Complex in Nairobi, built for the 1988 All Africa Games, is one such example.

There was, therefore, a convergence of geopolitical interests in the 1980s as China looked for openings in Africa. Caught up in *post-modern colonialism* that ignored African countries while actively protecting the interests of the master states through "international" proxies, African states tried to escape Euro political and economic pressures by looking for alternatives and China became that alternative. In the 1980s, in response to Euro hostilities, therefore, African states developed serious "Look East" policies for China long before the end of the Cold War.

China's Rise Under Xi

In the 21st Century, Xi helped to make China rise to the top and become second to the United States in terms of economic power by going out to where the resources are (Roussett, 2018) and by being friendly rather than insulting to host countries. Unapologetic about China's power, Xi made this fact clear while touring Mexico in February 2009 as vice president. He said: "There are some foreigners who had eaten their fill and had nothing better to do, pointing fingers at our affairs. China does not, first export revolution; second, export poverty and hunger; or third, cause unnecessary trouble for you. What else is there to say?" (Chen, 2009).

Xi became president and would not go against the basic principle established by Mao, the supremacy of the Communist Party of China in China, or go against Deng's Socialism with Chinese Characteristics but he was determined to go beyond them. He had a "grand strategy" to make China the world's geopolitical capital, using "soft power with Chinese Characteristics" (Chen, 2009). As Wang Huning, a member of the Politburo Standing Committee, categorically stated in 2017, "China will be a global leader in national strength and international influence" (Nantulya, 2018). Xi is the man for the job.

Making China rise to the top, however, put it in a precarious position of being "the High Land", as Wang Yizhou claims (Ying, 2009) which is the envy of other powers and the subject of assorted geopolitical chess games. Subsequently, there is intense competition and, asserted Wang Yizhou of Peking University, "frictions are unavoidable" (Yizhou, 1999). The frictions call for Beijing to flex its naval muscles to warn chaos engineers who use proxies in Asia (Roy, 2012). All institutions, including the military, are subject to the guidance of the Communist Party of China (Zhongqing, n.d.). CPC official Sr. Col. Wang Yongsheng argued in July 2012, "Our army belongs to the Party but it also belongs to the state and to the people" and cannot be depoliticized (Jie, 2012).

For global success, Xi mounted the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), to go along with his constant stress on the doctrine of global Common Shared Destiny as a way of relating to other countries, big or small. Xi's desire to reshape

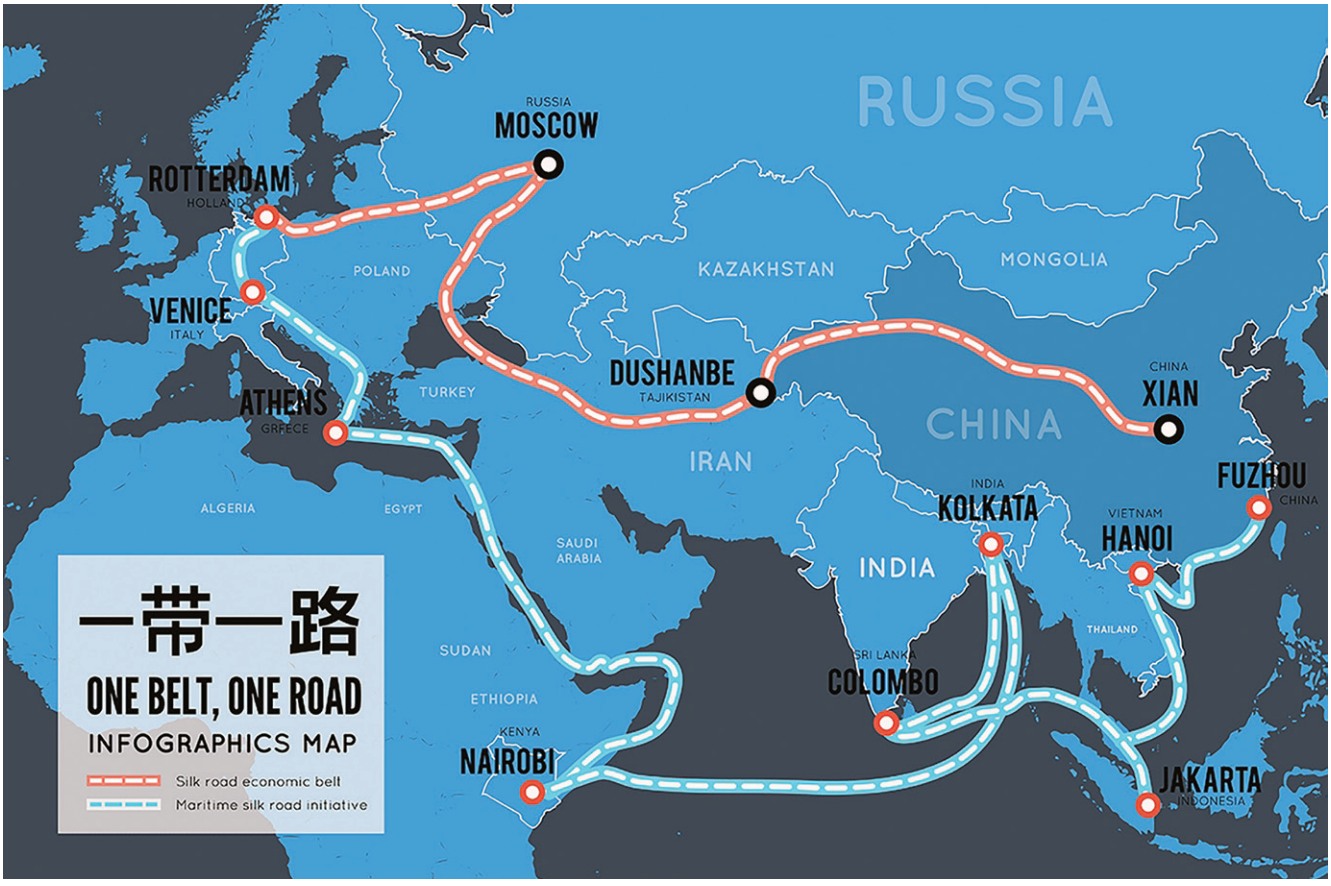
world geopolitics uses two interconnected initiatives. BRI, as a tool for projecting China's global power, delivers infrastructure and is thus critical to advancing the other initiative, the idea of common destiny. It helps to make Beijing the centre of geopolitics and to avoid the mistakes of the Ming Dynasty.

Xi's Quest for Global Success

Xi's contribution, therefore, is in making China a global power in every way. In the process, Xi discarded Deng's injunctions about hiding power or the two-term five-year presidential limit (Brwon, n.d.). Abandoning "revolutionary" exports and escaping isolationism, China systematically penetrated the rest of the world because Xi's BRI and the global Common Destiny strategy attracts, rather than repels, other states. This attraction turns Beijing into a geopolitical "core" thereby making other powers seem like reluctant peripheries. China, therefore, is no longer a "forbidden" country whether from within or without (Munene, 2018).

Xi's display of the new Chinese power promotes both global investments and common concerns. Although its main target is Europe, with Africa playing a supportive and not primary role, BRI touches every corner of the globe. In addition, Xi's promotion of the "Shared Common Destiny" agenda portrays him as eager to embrace such global concerns as climate change, pollution reduction, and "free trade" (Brown, n.d.) with Chinese characteristics. He is media savvy and uses the refurbished China Global Television Network (CGTN) with the three broadcast capitals of Beijing, Nairobi, and Washington, to give news with Chinese characteristics. It competes with Britain's BBC, America's CNN, and Qatar's Al Jazeera in global believability. Xi's "grand strategy" of ensuring Chinese global presence succeeded (Munene, n.d.).

In success, China is the focus of envy from rivals, mostly Western powers displaying a tinge of racism when dealing with other peoples. Racial disdain was applied to thinking about China as being of a lesser concern than whitish Russia which at times also tended to look down on China. The sense of triumphalism that followed the collapse of the Soviet system was geopolitically so blinding and intoxicating that the West assumed it could force its wishes on the rest. A few influencers like Chicago's John Mearsheimer kept warning that



An illustration of The Belt and Road Initiative, known within China as the One Belt One Road or OBOR (Photo Credit: Asia Society)

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China was a greater challenge to Western powers than Russia (Steinsson, 2014). Those warnings were ignored in Washington's Roman-like obsession with doing a 'Carthage' on Moscow (Munene, 2023). Western powers are subsequently all bogged down in Ukraine, confused, and unable to get out of the geo-economic mess that they find themselves in. The threat of possible nuclear exchange seemingly constrains both sides, creating a virtual stalemate. China appears to take advantage of that stalemate.

In taking advantage of the blunders in the West, China provokes two reactions. First, the rest of the world had to pay attention to the blunders of the American-led *Conceptual West* and also to China's increasing global presence. The West, argued Harvard's Stephen Walt in February 2022, was 'sleepwalking' into the Ukraine disaster (Walt, 2022). In the 1990s, when NATO started violating its commitment not to expand to the Russian border, Yale's John Lewis Gaddis, Charles Hills, and Paul Kennedy noted American neglect of common sense and insensitivity to the security concerns of others in part because they lacked respect for history. They mounted 'grand strategy' program in the hope that future American leaders would stop what Gaddis believed was confusing 'brawn for brain' which aroused global resentment. Even the European Union tried distancing itself from the US by "creating its own independent policies" rather than following the United States blindly (Norton, 2022). German Chancellor Olaf Scholz talked of *Zeitenwende* or 'epochal change', to acknowledge that China exists and also escape historical inhibitions for Germany to play its proper global role (Anheier, 2022). China, in contrast, despite having developed advanced hard power, tended to stress the 'brain' and common-sense approach.

The beneficiary of American confusion of brawn for the brain, therefore, was China's Xi, the grand strategist, who understood American weaknesses so well. As vice president, he had thoroughly studied American arrogance as a geopolitical weakness and in Mexico in 2009, commented on the arrogance of 'well-fed foreigners' pointing fingers at China (Chen, 2009). He is conscious and protective of China's past as symbolized by the Century of Humiliation, the role of the Communist Party of China, (CPC), in creating the New China, and the need for China to claim its space in the global arena.

Xi, aware of changing geopolitical realities, had thus started the process of reassessing China's geopolitical position in a changing world. China stressed the indivisibility of domestic and external operations in security and issued national security policy documents on how the world was evolving. Its 2014, Overall National Security Outlook (ONSO), "stressed the need to accurately grasp new features and trends of the changing national security situation." And its 2022 Global Security Initiative (GSI), noted the linkage between domestic and external national security threats (Blanc hette, 2022). Xi called for countries to respect "legitimate security concerns of all countries [and] … independent choices of development paths and social systems." He noted that "drastic changes in the international landscape, especially attempts to blackmail, contain, blockade, and exert maximum pressure on China" (Heer, 2022).

China was thus to pay serious attention to all types of threats to its survival as a geopolitical entity. The emphasis is on national security, argued Cao Shiquan, President of People's Public Security University of China, with "ensuring political security as the primary task." To the Central Organisation Department, "In the body of national security, political security is the heart" which means safeguarding the leadership in the Communist Party of China. Political security requires ideological solidity to defend against "ideological infiltration by Western capitalist countries that conspire to undermine and subvert the socialist system."

Fear of sabotage of the socialist system is a constant concern that informs political behavior in China. It explains President Xi's April 2018 advice to the CPC to "enhance its sense of worry and prepare for danger" (Blanchette, 2022). In one town, the local CPC resolved to wage 'Tough Battle to Prevent and Defuse Major Risks' so as to "Prevent and crack down on 'colour revolutions'

…. Prevent and crack down on infiltration activities by overseas Catholic forces. Strengthen Catholic patriotism" (Blanchette, 2022).

In the process of safeguarding his domestic political control within China and globally projecting his shared common values doctrine, Xi forced others to think around China. Subsequently, those in the West turned to pontificating about, and how to respond to, China's perceived threat to their global interests. In October 2022, US President Joe Biden issued his National Security Strategy claiming that "our world is at an inflection point" and asserted his intention to lead the world and "to position the United States to outmaneuver our geopolitical competitors …. We will not leave our future vulnerable to the whims of those who do not share our vision …. I am more confident than ever that the United States has everything we need to win the competition for the 21st Century" (Biden, 2022). Xi differed with Biden's assessment as he rejected an "outdated Cold War mentality and zero-sum mindset …. We see no benefit in any rhetoric or act that plays up geopolitical conflict or major power competition" (CGTN, 2022).

For the *Conceptual West,* however, containing China's growing global presence became the inthing rather than being outdated. Josep Borrell, European Union's foreign affairs chief, worries about Europe losing the battle of the narratives and the 'jungle' invading Europe as the global 'garden' (Eijking, 2022). To him, this is a "time of exceptional change …. ve in a world of power politics… a 'moment of creation' of a new world … war is changing a lot of things …changing the European Union." The changes include EU "creating its independent policies" rather than following the United States blindly. EU Commission President Ursula von der Leyen sees China and Russia as the real threats in a "war for the future of the world" (Norton, 2022). French President Emmanuel Macron repeated to Biden what he in 2018 told Donald Trump that Europe, particularly France, is not a vassal of the United States on geopolitical matters. Macron, noticing the loss of credibility on the part of the West, would like to redeem French credibility; acting independently on global matters (Reuters, 2018).

While Macron would like to accommodate Xi and even cut deals, the United Kingdom, caught between the United States and Europe, worries about its declining influence and would like to weaken ties with China. The UK issued its March 2021 "Global Britain in a Competitive Age: the Integrated Review of Security, Defence, Development and Foreign Policy" which reportedly aimed at being a policy road map designed to make Britain "active in shaping the open international order of the future" in a world in which is China a "systemic competitor" (Aspinall, 2021). In response to China as a systemic competitor, Britain will tilt to the Indo-Pacific and establish "a greater and more persistent presence than any other European country" (Rogers, n.d.). To British Premier Rishi Sunak, "China poses a systematic challenge to our values and interests," and then declared the 'golden era' of UK-China relations 'over' and dismissed as 'naïve idea' the belief that more trade would lead to political reforms in China (BBC News, 2022).

Despite such efforts to contain China, however, Xi advances 'Xivilisation' through peace-making 'Xiplomacy' that unites hostile countries and also by providing an alternative to the American-based SWIFT financial system. First, as a global peacemaker, Xi seeming success is beyond what competing leaders could achieve. He managed to bring together previously antagonistic Iran and Saudi Arabia to have 'a handshake heard around the world.' Being the only leader with access to both Moscow and Kiev, he also has talked both Russia and Ukraine into thinking of how to reach a possible settlement in their war (Bisley, 2023). Although China's efforts to settle a dispute over the Nile between Egypt and Ethiopia have not been successful (Saied, 2022) the image of Xi as a peacemaker persists. Only the *Conceptual West* has a problem acknowledging the real reality.

The real reality is that Xi is 'the key player' in world politics and the rest are simply responding. There is an emerging rival alliance system to the Conceptual West whose centre is in China, an Asiatic country which is not white and was previously the victim of *Conceptual West* imperialism. Together with other victims such as India, Brazil, and

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President Xi Jinping hosts the BRICS Summit via video link in Beijing, China, in 2022 (Photo Credit: Rao Aimin/Xinhua/Getty Images)

South Africa, China responds by ganging up on BRICS whose policies allow members to escape Washington's predatory inclinations. In addition, the turning of the SWIFT global financial system into a geopolitical weapon against those differing from Washington encouraged many countries to look for alternative financial systems; the growing BRICS system seems to provide that alternative. Moscow, with its Ukraine crisis, finds solace largely in the Global South which questions NATO/EU logic. As a target of Western pressures, Russia is part of the Beijing-led BRICS alliance system.

Although Xi is a global colossus, pushing his views on the world, and trying to avoid China's past blunders. His Global Civilisation Initiative or Xivilisation is part of his grand strategy to make China the centre of the Universe by avoiding the mistakes made in the Ming Dynasty. While building on Mao and Deng as creators of modern China, he sees himself as going beyond the two and probably having historical connectivity with Confucius. He is a history buff but his horizon suffers the same ignominy as the *Conceptual West* which tends to make Athens with its racial and geopolitical arrogance the starting point for everything, as if there were no others before the Greeks. Like the *Conceptual West* that he tries to outdo, Xi is blind to African civilization.

Conclusion

In advancing the concept of the Global Civilization Initiative, however, Xi has done well to promote the idea of cultural and common shared values, if only he could be more inclusive than he is. His 'Xiplomacy' peace efforts and his BRICS alliance system, as an alternative to the global dominance of the *Conceptual West* (Munene, 2023) allow him to stand shoulders above rival leaders. By appearing to promote peace in conflict-prone zones, outside China's sphere of influence in Asia, Xi advances his image as the most powerful person on earth. When his special peace envoy to the Horn of Africa, Xue Bing talked of helping the region to get rid of external interference, he worried about the return of power politics and Cold War mentality that tends to sideline peace and development (Athumani, 2023). Global peace and development are supposedly key components of Xi's Global Civilisation Initiative that increases China's global dominance.

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The Highs and Lows of Ethiopia's Relations with the Arab Gulf Countries and Iran

By Prof. Michael B. Bishku, Ph.D.

Abstract

Ethiopia currently has good relations with both the Arab states of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) – established in 1981, and whose members include Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates (UAE), Qatar, Kuwait, Oman and Bahrain, with the first four countries being the most interactive with Ethiopia – as well as the Islamic Republic of Iran, though that has not always been the case historically. And unlike its neighbors, Sudan, Eritrea, Djibouti, and Somalia, Ethiopia has avoided taking sides as well as switching them in the rivalry largely since the 1990s between Saudi Arabia and its ally the UAE on one side and Iran on the other over influence in the Horn of Africa. The purpose of this article is to examine Ethiopia's relations with Iran and GCC-member states Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Qatar and Kuwait individually, as the interactions of these countries located in two neighboring regions have become very important in modern geopolitics since the mid-twentieth century. From that time until the 1970s, the major countries Ethiopia, Saudi Arabia and Iran were all conservative monarchies concerned with the actions of "radical" states in the region; since then, especially in the post-Cold War era, relations have become more complex.

Introduction

Ethiopia currently has good relations with both the Arab states of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) – established in 1981, and whose members include Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates (UAE), Qatar, Kuwait, Oman and Bahrain, with the first four countries being the most interactive with Ethiopia – as well as the Islamic Republic of Iran, though that has not always been the case historically. And unlike its neighbors, Sudan, Eritrea, Djibouti, and Somalia, Ethiopia has avoided taking sides as well as switching them in the rivalry largely since the 1990s between Saudi Arabia and its ally the UAE on one side and Iran on the other over influence in the Horn of Africa. This rivalry has been connected in part to ongoing conflict in Yemen; furthermore, these Middle Eastern countries – in addition to Turkey – regard the Horn as being the "gateway" to connections with the rest of the continent of Africa. The purpose of this article is not the review the current Saudi-Iranian rivalry – which will most likely continue, albeit at a low level, despite the Chinese-mediated March 2023 agreement restoring Saudi-Iranian diplomatic relations broken off in 2016 – but rather to examine Ethiopia's relations with Iran and GCC-member states Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Qatar and Kuwait individually, as the interactions of these countries located in two neighboring regions have become very important in modern geopolitics.

Ethiopian-Saudi Relations until the End of the Cold War

Haggai Erlich notes that the June 1934 initiative of Ethiopia's Emperor Haile Selassie (reigned 1930-1974), motivated by the threat of Italian aggression in the Horn of Africa, to establish relations with Saudi Arabia under the rule of King Ibn Saud (reigned 1932-1953)

> was as an effort to build an old, but barely operational, bridge. The Red Sea occasionally had connected the Arabian Peninsula with Islamic communities in the Horn of Africa, but it was much less a bridge to the Christian state. The history of diplomatic relations between Ethiopia's emperors and the various Islamic rulers of Arabia was much like a collection of rare episodes…. By this time [the mid-1930s], Ethiopia had grown stronger as a 'Christian empire'…. Centered on Najd [a region located in the central part of the peninsula], the Saudi house had almost no record of Red Sea orientation [though it did control the Holy Cities

Ethiopia-Addis Ababa is the headquarters for the Africa Union (AU) initially called Organization of Africa Union (OAU) (Photo Credits: Hailu Wudineh TSEGAYE/Shutterstock)

> of Mecca and Medina since 1925]. Based on the *Wahhabiyya* [a puritanical form of Sunni Islam], the Saudi kingdom was hardly receptive to the idea of accepting Christian Ethiopians as regional partners (Erlich, 2007, p. 39).

However, reluctancy went beyond religion as there were important geopolitical and diplomatic matters to consider. In 1930, Ibn Saud annexed Asir to his kingdom, a claim that was challenged by Yemen's Imam Yahya (reigned 1918-1948), with whom Italy had signed a treaty of friendship in 1926. In reaction, the Saudis invaded Yemen in 1934, but withdrew in return for some disputed lands and a twenty-year truce. Soon after, the Italians began to regard Ibn Saud as the most prominent leader in the Arab world (Arielli, 2013, pp. 30-31). In 1932, Italy had signed a treaty of friendship and commerce with Saudi Arabia. Two of Ibn Saud's advisers on foreign affairs were a Syrian Yusuf Yasin and a Lebanese Druse Fuad Hamza, both were admirers of Italy and felt that that country would help the Arabs rid the Middle East of British imperialism. They and Ibn Saud were in close contact with a Syrian Druse Amir Shakib Arslan, who had become an Italian agent and published articles in the Arab press including ones criticizing severely Ethiopia's treatment of its indigenous Muslim population, influencing Ibn Saud to rebuff the appeals of cooperation from Ethiopian delegations twice in 1935 before the Italian invasion of Ethiopia in October (Erlich, 2007, pp. 46-49).

Meanwhile, the Saudis sold the Italians camels for their army in Eritrea and following the invasion of Ethiopia, while Saudi Arabia proclaimed a policy of strict neutrality, it refused to implement sanctions against Italy as it was not yet a member of the League of Nations. The Saudis explained to that body in January 1936 that as a "Muslim power and a custodian of the Holy Places" it was "it [was] incumbent on them to maintain friendly relations with all powers having Muslim subjects" (Arielli, 2013, pp. 61-64). A month later, Saudis began training as combat pilots in Italy and in May, the Italians sent Saudi Arabia a few military aircraft as a gift (Erlich, 2007, p. 57). However, in April 1936, the Saudis signed a treaty of alliance with Iraq – which also had one with Britain – as insurance against a possible military threat from Italy to the kingdom. From the time of the Italian invasion of Ethiopia until the outbreak of World War II, Saudi Arabia manoeuvred between Britain and Italy (Arielli, 2013, p. 65). Ethiopia was eventually liberated by the British in an operation which lasted until November 1941, though Emperor Haile

Selassie returned to Addis Ababa in May of that year having spent most of his time in exile in England.

According to a statement from the embassy of Ethiopia in Britain, its government and Saudi Arabia established relations in 1948; it also points out that "cultural bonds are deep-rooted, strong and ancient … [and] go back to the time of the Prophet [Muhammad] when he told his family and followers to take refuge in Ethiopia when threatened by persecution in Mecca" (Embassy of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia in Britain, 2023). In 1950, when the United Nations was considering the fate of the former Italian colony of Eritrea, the Saudis argued for independence, but that world body under pressure from the United States approved a federation with Ethiopia in which Eritrea was to have autonomy in all matters except foreign affairs, defense, and currency, but Ethiopia proceeded to weaken that territories status (Yohannes, 1991, p. 117). Despite Saudi Arabia taking such a position on Eritrea and Ethiopia's actions in that territory, in January 1958, Saudi Arabia's King Saud (reigned 1953-1964) visited Addis Ababa where he "expressed his warm approval of the state of Islam in Ethiopia"; Erlich contends that this is actually when formal bilateral relations were established (Erlich, 2007, p. 99). Emperor Haile Selassie reciprocated by visiting Riyadh in January 1960, during which there were discussions over promoting economic ties as well as a statement issued for the bilateral pursuit of regional stability. By this time, there were mutual concerns, especially over the actions of Egypt's pan-Arab nationalist President Gamal Abd al-Nasser, who had a distaste for conservative monarchies that were regarded as pro-Western regimes (Erlich, 2007, pp. 97-98).

In July 1960, the Eritrean Liberation Front (ELF) was established with a training base in Egypt that was shifted to Syria in 1963 with support continuing from other Arab nationalist states. A year earlier, Egypt launched a war in Yemen against the royalist government there, which was defended by Saudi Arabia. This conflict prompted Ethiopia to annex Eritrea (Erlich, 1994, pp. 130-133 and 139). The 1967 Arab-Israeli War would change the political environment. In need of financial assistance as that war and its Yemen intervention had been very costly, Egypt engaged in rapprochement with Saudi Arabia. As Israel had occupied the Palestinian territories of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, Saudi Arabia reoriented its foreign policy and became "a leader in the Islamic world in pressing for Palestinian rights" (Riedel, 2017). During the 1960s, Ethiopia had developed close relations with Israel and Saudi Arabia by the latter part of the decade was determined to attempt to pressure Ethiopia to end its ties with Israel as soon as possible. At the same time, some economic ties developed with Ethiopia exporting shoes and vegetables to Saudi Arabia, but not buying Saudi oil, while the respective security services exchanged information (Erlich, 2007, p. 112). In June 1971, Ethiopia's Foreign Minister Katama Yifru made an official visit to Saudi Arabia, where a joint communiqué was issued calling for Israel's withdrawal from the territories occupied during the 1967 War; Ethiopia subsequently endorsed all United Nations and Organization of African Unity (OAU) resolutions condemning Israel, but secretly with American support increased security and intelligence cooperation (Erlich, 2007, p. 114). Ethiopia finally broke off relations with Israel on October 23, 1973, and in doing so was more influenced by African unity rather than Arab pressure. It was the eighteenth country in Africa to take such action and the ninth to do so since that year's Arab-Israeli War began (Bishku, 1994, p. 47). Saudi King Faisal (reigned 1964-1975) congratulated Emperor Haile Selassie for breaking with Israel, while voicing his opinion that Zionism "aims to control the world" (Erlich, 2007, p. 119). However, Erlich points out that while the Saudi monarch promised to financially reward Ethiopia:

> in practice, no real help was to come…. The Saudis created a world oil crisis, which greatly added to Ethiopia's economic plight. Stricken by drought and famine, aggravated by the mishandling of decaying, corrupt regime, Ethiopia's economy could barely cope with an abrupt 50 percent rise in oil prices in January 1974 alone (Erlich, 2007, p. 119).

These and other factors led to the Ethiopian Revolution which resulted in the emperor being deposed in September 1974 by a group of army officers known as the *Derg*, which shortly thereafter adopted a Marxist ideology.

In July 1960, the Eritrean Liberation Front (ELF) was established with a training base in Egypt that was shifted to Syria in 1963 with support continuing from other Arab nationalist states

Saudi Arabia began supplying small arms, antiaircraft batteries, and land mines to Osman Saleh Sabbe's small splinter group in the ELF (Erlich, 1983, p. 70), whose leader abandoned pan-Arabism and adopted political Islam. Saudi Arabia, along with Egypt under President Anwar Sadat (1970-1981) regarded the Eritrean conflict as a struggle between a revolutionary Marxist state and a "movement led by … advocates of Arabism and Islamic solidarity" (Erlich, 1983, p. 69). Conversely, the Derg "accused the Arabs of subversive activities that aimed to merge Eritrea into the Arab League" (Oded, 1987, p. 118). By 1981, Libya under the rule of Muammar Qadhafi (1969-2011), an adversary of Saudi Arabia who saw himself as a successor to Nasser in promoting pan-Arab nationalism, switched his support from the Eritreans to the Derg, signing an alliance together with Marxist South Yemen (Pateman, 1986, p. 33) in what was considered by them to be a "joint struggle against imperialism" (Henze, 1991, p. 164). That same year, the ELF was militarily defeated by the Eritrean People's Liberation Front (EPLF), which eventually achieved both de facto and de jure Eritrean independence in 1991 and 1993, respectively.

The EPLF shifted away from Marxism and never embraced the pan-Arab or Arab nationalism of the ELF. During the 1980s, in exile in Saudi Arabia, Sabbe became increasingly irrelevant and died in 1987 (Erlich, 2007, pp. 144-145). That same year, Saudi Arabia and Ethiopia engaged in diplomatic rapprochement as Mengistu Haile Mariam, leader of the Derg, became dissatisfied with assistance from the Soviet Union. Mengistu's support for the international action against Iraq's invasion of Kuwait in 1990 greatly pleased Saudi Arabia's King Fahd (reigned 1982-2005) (Erlich, 2007, p. 166). After Mengistu went into exile in Zimbabwe in 1991, and the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) and the EPLF assumed full control of Ethiopia and Eritrea, respectively, relations improved greatly. Indeed, the EPRDF's National Security Policy Strategy Document stated that "The Middle East is a region that significantly influences our security and economic development in a substantial way," while Ethiopia's embassy in London emphasizes on its website that its government attaches "special importance to Saudi Arabia in particular" (Embassy of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia in Britain, 2023).

Before then, during the Ogaden War of July 1977-March 1978 – which began with Arab League-member Somalia's invasion of that Somali-populated province of Ethiopia, but ended with significant Soviet military assistance in the form of advisors and armaments as well as Cuban troops coordinating together with their Ethiopian counterparts to drive the Somalis back across the international border – Saudi Arabia provided Somalia some US$400 million and military supplies, while Somalia severed its previous alliance with the Soviets; threats from Saudi Arabia and Egypt prevented Ethiopian troops from crossing the border (Erlich, 2007, p. 149). Those two Arab countries together with Morocco and France were members of the so-called Safari Club, established in 1976 to check the spread of communism in Africa (Bishku, 2019, p. 5). However, with the end of the Cold War, that organization ceased to exist.

Ethiopia's Relations with Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Qatar and Kuwait in the Post-Cold War Era

Since 1991, Saudi Arabia and Ethiopia have had shared interests in the security of the Horn of Africa, such as in fighting against terrorism and in interdicting human and drug trafficking (Embassy of the Federal democratic Republic of Ethiopia in Britain, 2023), and in promoting economic bilateral relations. Eritrea's separation has facilitated the strengthening of ties with Saudi Arabia and other GCC states, especially the UAE, Qatar and Kuwait. Ethiopia's "measures to ensure religious equality … [and a] foreign policy shift from outward-looking to inward-looking approach also supported the relationship." Emphasis was placed on trade and economic development as the government needed foreign direct investment (FDI) and markets for agricultural products (Jenber, 2021, pp. 271-272). Ethiopia has offered investment opportunities in agriculture, manufacturing and service sectors while allowing the Saudi Arabia and the other GCC countries to minimize their oil and/or natural gas dependence and diversify their respective economies. Nevertheless, trade and investment was very limited until the early 2000s following the end of the Eritrean-Ethiopian border conflict (1998-2000) (Jenber, 2021, pp. 272-273; and Meester, van den Berg and Veerhoeven, 2018, p. 41).

In 2021, Saudi Arabia's exports to Ethiopia totaled US$174 million, with US$45.8 million in refined petroleum (26.4 percent), US$18.6 million in ethylene polymers (10.7 percent), and US$16.3 million in nitrogenous fertilizers (9.4 percent) being the main products. During the same year, Ethiopia's exports to Saudi Arabia totaled US$248

million, with US$160 million in coffee (64.3 percent), US$32.6 million in sheep and goat meat (13.1 percent), and US$27.6 million in bovine meat (11.1 percent) being the main products; Saudi Arabia ranked as the fourth largest market for Ethiopian exports (OEC, 2023). In 2021, the UAE's exports to Ethiopia totaled US$794 million, with US$165 million in refined petroleum (20.7 percent), US$117 million in jewelry (14.8 percent), and US$71.7 million in cars (9.02 percent) being the main products. During the same year, Ethiopia's exports to the UAE totaled US$1.05 billion, with US$860 million in gold (81.8 percent), US$68.9 million in oily seeds (6.56 percent), and US$57.1 million in sheep and goat meat (5.43 percent) being the main products; the UAE was the largest market for Ethiopian exports (OEC, 2023). The UAE and Saudi Arabia received 97 percent of Ethiopia's meat exports – 60 percent and 37 percent, respectively (Ali, 2021) In 2021, Kuwait's exports to Ethiopia totaled US$460 million, with US$458 million in refined petroleum (99.6 percent) being the main product. During the same year, Ethiopia's exports to Kuwait totaled US$7.81 million, with US$2.67 million in coffee (34.2 percent), US$2.36 million in sheep and goats (30.2 percent) and US$1.67 million in cut flowers (21.4 percent) being the main products. In 2021, Qatar's exports to Ethiopia totaled US$4.01 million, with US$1.42 million in polyacetals (35.5 percent) and US$1.22 million in ethylene polymers (30.5 percent) being the main products. During the same year, Ethiopia's exports to Qatar totaled US$10.2 million, US$3.58 million in sheep and goat meat (35.1 percent), US$2.98 million in coffee (29.2 percent), and US$1.49 million in bovine meat (14.6 percent) being the main products (OEC, 2023).

Between 2000 and 2017, Saudi Arabia had 233 investments in Ethiopia, more than the UAE with 104, Kuwait with 16 and Qatar with 12 valued at almost US$8.6 billion. These were primarily in agriculture – to ensure food security – and manufacturing, but also included construction, gold mining, real estate and hotels, and are spread throughout the country with the majority in Addis Ababa and the Oromia region; they have been responsible for creating almost 300,000 jobs. The largest was an Emirati sugar plantation worth about US$3 billion (Meester, van den Berg, and Verhoeven, 2018, pp. 41-51 and 56). The biggest single investor in Ethiopia has been the multi-billionaire Sheikh Muhammad Hussein al-Amoudi, who has a Saudi father and Ethiopian mother and owns some 69 companies, most notably MIDROC Ethiopia

Crown Prince Mohammad bin Salman chats with Ethiopia's Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed at the signing of the 2018 peace agreement between Eritrea and Ethiopia. (Photo Credit: Picture alliance/AA|Bandar Algaloud/Saudi Kingdom Council/Handout)

Soldiers supported by Iran, keep vilgil in the streets. Iran remain a key partner in Ethiopia government-Tigray conflict (Photo Credit: Getty Images)

Investment Group (Embassy of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia in Britain, 2023). He was detained from November 2017 until January 2019 at Riyadh's Ritz-Carlton Hotel along with many other Saudi business and political elite by Crown Prince Muhammad bin Salman's crackdown on alleged corruption ("Mohammed Al Amoudi," 2017; and Kalin and Maasho, 2019).

While economic ties have been beneficial for both the Arab Gulf states and Ethiopia, there have been periodic political problems that have arisen. Between 2008 and 2012, Ethiopia severed diplomatic relations with Qatar, which at the time had close ties with Eritrea and was believed to be supporting Islamic militants in Somalia; Ethiopia also was angry over Al-Jazeera's coverage of its internal affairs. Saudi Arabia's and the UAE's use of Assab in Eritrea as a naval and airbase during its intervention in Yemen against the Iranian-backed Houthis, which began in 2015 irritated Ethiopia (Jenber, 2021, pp. 276-277). However, relations were not disrupted due to those countries' extensive investments in Ethiopia and the fact that there is a very large Ethiopian workforce in Saudi Arabia, including many who were undocumented, estimated in 2017 to be over 400,000 (Fakude, 2017, p. 7). As for the entire Ethiopian workforce in GCC states, Ethiopia's Ministry of Foreign Affairs estimates that there are more than one million (Jenber, 2021, p. 282.). Since 2013, Saudi Arabia has expelled illegal migrants. However, in 2019, the Saudi Fund for Development provided a US$140 million loan for road construction, water supply, solar plants and sanitation development ("Ethiopia to get $140 mln,"2019), while a year earlier the UAE provided Ethiopia's Central Bank with US$1 billion to ease that country's foreign exchange shortage ("United Arab Emirates gives Ethiopia $1 billion," 2018). Also, in 2018, Saudi Arabia facilitated an agreement between Ethiopia and Eritrea that reopened embassies, telephone lines and land borders between the two countries as well as restoring direct flights (Keynoush, 2020, p. 11).

Ethiopia's Relations with Iran

Ethiopia established relations with Iran in 1950 (Biyadgilign, 2018, p. 290). In 1958, Ethiopia became part of Israel's secret Peripheral Alliance, together with Iran and Turkey whose purpose was to "stand up steadfastly to Soviet expansion through Nasser" by sharing intelligence ("Ben-Gurion to Eisenhower," 1958). However, Iran did not permanently open an embassy in Ethiopia until one month after the Emperor Haile Selassie visited Tehran for three days in September 1964. On that trip, while,

he was greeted at the airport by Shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi, the prime minister, the minister of foreign affairs, and other political and military officials, and high-level negotiations and several banquets took place, no important accords were signed, though the Emperor did invite the Shah to visit Addis Ababa (Steele, 2021, pp. 1380-1382). That occurred in a six-day trip in June 1968 and would be the Shah's first and only official visit to Sub-Saharan Africa. For the Shah, closer relations with Ethiopia were regarded as the first step in developing ties with other Sub-Saharan African countries, which he saw as an important market for his country; and during 1968, Iran opened embassies in four additional states: Kenya, Tanzania, Côte d'Ivoire, and Nigeria, where Iran owned a share of that country's national oil company. For Emperor Haile Selassie, his concern was with the spread of Soviet weapons in Africa coming from Arab states such as Egypt, Iraq and Syria, countries which Iran had its share of disagreements. Also, he regarded the Shah, as the leader of "an Islamic country and a non-Arab regional power" as a good intermediary with Saudi Arabia and Israel; the latter's continued occupation of Arab territory brought instability to the region and Saudi Arabia's pressure to break ties with Israel was a major annoyance (Steele, 2021, pp. 1382-1385). In fact, Ethiopia purchased oil from Iran rather than Saudi Arabia due to the latter's attitude (Erlich, 2007, p. 112).

In 1971, for the ceremonies of 2,500th anniversary of the founding of the Persian Empire, the Shah regarded Emperor Haile Selassie as a most special guest being photographed next to the Shah at all major event s both for symbolism and the fact that the two had developed a close personal relationship. Furthermore, during the early 1970s, the Shah "saw the security of Ethiopia as essential to minimizing Soviet infiltration in the Middle East and East Africa" and told U.S. and Israeli officials that he regarded Iran, Ethiopia and Israel as an essential "triangle," which "if buttressed by US support will be a stabilizing influence" in those two regions (Steele, 2021, pp. 1386-1387). However, with overthrow of Haile Selassie in 1974, the Derg subsequently cut diplomatic ties with Iran, while the Shah cooperated with the "Safari Club" in supporting Somalia in the Ogaden War of 1977-1978 by providing German-made mortars acquired from Turkey (Bishku, 2019, p. 5). When the Shah was overthrown in 1979, the Derg was one of the first to recognize the Islamic Republic of Iran, which supplied Marxist Ethiopia with military equipment (Biyadgilign, 2018, pp. 29-30).

After Mengistu went into exile in 1991 and the EPRDF government assumed control in Addis Ababa, relations continued with Iran, and Ethiopia finally established an embassy in Tehran in 1994, but closed it down in 1998 due to financial reasons (Biyadgilign, 2018, pp. 38 and 54). Nevertheless, from 1992 to 2018, Iran had 21 investment projects in Ethiopia, more than either Kuwait or Qatar. Some 12 of these were in manufacturing and three in agriculture, and just like the Arab Gulf states most were based in Addis Ababa and the Oromia region (Biyadgilign, 2018, pp. 45 and 49-50). Bilateral trade grew from US$19 million in 2004 to US$35 million in 2007 (Farrar-Wellman, 2009). However, by 2016, Ethiopian exports to Iran only totaled US$2 million, while Iranian exports to Ethiopia totaled US$12 million; the following year, Ethiopia's direct and indirect exports to Iran totaled over US$50 million (Keynoush, 2021, pp. 61-62). Official statistics do not reflect an accurate account of bilateral trade volume. Officially, in 2021, Iran's exports to Ethiopia only totaled US$1.55 million, with US$1.08 million in petroleum coke (70 percent) being the main product. During the same year, Ethiopia's exports to Iran totaled US$1.53 million, with US1.52 million in dried legumes (99.3 percent) being the main product (OEC, 2023). Nevertheless, Iran's ambassador to Ethiopia, trying to put a positive spin on things, stated to a reporter from the Ethiopian News Agency that his country had "made lots of progress despite the sanctions and pressures" ("Ethiopia, Iran Need to Further Boost Bilateral Relations," 2022).

While trade, at least officially, has been minimal, Iran reportedly provided Ethiopia with Mohajer-6 drones during the summer of 2021 in the midst of the 2020-2022 war in Tigray, which the Ethiopian government denied.

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The U.S. informed the U.N. of this development noting that it was in violation of Security Council Resolution 2231 (Hernandez, 2022). Bellingcat, the Netherlands-based investigative journalism website, noted at that time:

> Whether Ethiopia and Iran have struck any military deals remains to be seen. However, in July and August of this year [2021], open-source flight trackers flagged the presence of Iranian cargo aircraft at various civil and military airbases across Ethiopia. One of these aircraft was sanctioned by the US Treasury in 2020 for alleged links to the Iranian Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRCG). The content of these flights is unknown.

Bellingcat reviewed images of what appeared to be Mohajer-6 drones at Semara airport when Ethiopia's Prime Minister Ahmed Abiy was visiting ("Ethiopia suspected of using Iranian drones, 2021). Interestingly, just months earlier, in February 2021, Ethiopia arrested 16 members of an Iranian cell that was planning an attack on UAE's embassy in Addis Ababa ("Ethiopia arrests 16in an Iranian cell, 2021).

Conclusion

Throughout many centuries, Ethiopia's relations with the Islamic rulers on the Arabian Peninsula had been in Haggai Erlich's words "a collection of rare episodes." In fact, during the 1930s, Saudi Arabia flirted with Italy as that European country subsequently attacked and occupied Ethiopia until that African country was liberated by Britain. It was not until the mid-twentieth century that formal diplomatic relations were established between Ethiopia and Saudi Arabia; the situation with Iran was similar. All three countries were conservative monarchies throughout most of the Cold War period until the 1979 Revolution in Iran. They had a mutual concern with the actions of "radical" countries in the Middle East and Africa stirring up nationalistic forces antagonistic to these monarchical states and having connections with the Soviet Union. When Ethiopia fell under the rule of the Marxist Derg following the overthrow of Emperor Haile Selassie until the end the end of the Cold War, the Middle Eastern states focused upon in this study were either adversarial or detached in the case of the countries of Arab Gulf and imperial Ethiopia or cooperative in the case of the Islamic Republic of Iran. During the post-Cold War era, the UAE, Qatar and Kuwait became involved in affairs of the Horn of Africa, while Saudi Arabia and its ally the UAE engaged in rivalry with Iran. Ethiopia, unlike its neighbors in the Horn has been successful in avoiding taking sides in the rivalry of its Middle Eastern neighbors and has been able to develop beneficial economic relations though there have been political disagreements from time to time.

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Decoding the 'Information Operations' Ecosystem in Conflicts in the Horn of Africa

By Daniel Iberi

Abstract

This article examines how actors in conflicts within the Horn of Africa and Great Lakes regions have utilized information operations to their strategic advantage. Through desktop research and analysis of secondary data, the study focuses on the Tigray war in Ethiopia, the Eastern Congo conflict in the Democratic Republic of Congo, and the threat of al-Shabab in Somalia. The research highlights the significant role of social media in shaping the narrative during the Tigray conflict. Tigrayan activists and the Ethiopian government utilized platforms like Twitter and Facebook to propagate their perspectives and counter disinformation. In the Democratic Republic of Congo, the Congolese government and the M23 rebel group utilized social media to influence public opinion through manipulated images and rumors. Al Shabab in Somalia employs propaganda, recruitment efforts, and psychological operations to manipulate public sentiment and advance their agenda. To address these challenges, the article proposes the promotion of independent fact-checking mechanisms, comprehensive regulations targeting misinformation, investment in media literacy programs, increased transparency from tech companies, support for independent journalism and fact-checking initiatives, responsible journalistic practices, and engagement of civil society in peacebuilding and awareness campaigns.

Introduction

The ongoing Russo-Ukrainian war extends beyond conventional warfare involving tanks, artillery, and fighter jets. It also encompasses a digital battleground, where both Russia and Ukraine and their allies employ tactics like propaganda and manipulated media content to promote deceptive narratives. The objective is to shift responsibility away from each other.

On one hand, Russia employs a range of tools in its information operation campaigns. According to Algarni (2023), Russia uses APT28, a Russian nation-state group, to promote content that undermines trust in the Ukrainian government and Western support for Ukraine. Ghostwriters are enlisted to write for hacked websites and social media accounts, spreading fabricated narratives and critical opinions of NATO. Russia also utilizes cyber forces to hack and counter the Ukrainian war narrative on platforms like YouTube and Twitter. Internet operations involve focusing on criticizing political issues in the United States, defaming candidates in elections, discrediting NATO, and promoting Russian foreign and military policies (Algarni, 2023). Additionally, cyberattacks are a significant aspect of Russia's information warfare strategy.

On the other hand, Ukraine has employed various tools and strategies in its information warfare and operations. The Ukrainian communication and information strategy has been successful in garnering Western sympathy and support through highlighting the heroic stories of Ukrainian soldiers and civilians, portraying Russia as an aggressor, and emphasizing shared values with the West. Ukrainian cyber groups such as Cyber Hunta, Cyber Hundred8, Null Sector, and the Ukrainian Cyber Troops have engaged in hacking activities to expose Russian involvement and protect Ukrainian websites from pro-Russian hackers. The Ukrainian government has utilized platforms like Telegram, with support from Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube, to disseminate its messages and counter Russian narratives. In contrast, the Western media has played a significant role in the information war by promoting anti-Russia propaganda, selectively reporting events, and maintaining a unified discourse against Russia, often lacking objectivity and impartiality. Despite some independent perspectives, the Western media generally exaggerates Ukrainian resistance and downplays Russian successes in the conflict (Algarni, 2023).

An illustration of Putin and Zelensky. The ongoing Russo-Ukrainian war extends beyond conventional warfare. It encompasses a digital battleground, where Russia and Ukraine and their allies employ tactics like propaganda and manipulate content of deceptive narratives. (Photo Credit: Foreign Policy Illustration/Getty Images)

In 2016, the United States accused Russia of interfering with her presidential elections through a combination of hacking and spreading false and misleading information on social media networks. While the extent of Russia's interference remain the subject of active investigation and debate, this action foregrounded the potency of information warfare. The Russian interference in the 2016 US presidential election serves as a compelling case study highlighting the functioning and rationale of information operations, particularly in the form of information warfare. This event demonstrated how a foreign actor utilized various tactics to manipulate information and influence the electoral process.

In Africa, multiple armed groups and factions in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) have employed information operations to manipulate narratives and gain support. Case in point is the Second Congo War (1998-2003) where rebels and state forces disseminated propaganda through radio stations and print media to influence public opinion and recruit fighters. Additionally, both sides employed disinformation campaigns to undermine the legitimacy of their adversaries and sow confusion among local populations.

In South Sudan, information operations have been utilized by warring factions to shape perceptions and control narratives. During the civil war that erupted in 2013, both the government and rebel forces engaged in disinformation campaigns and targeted media manipulation. This involved spreading false information about each other, promoting ethnic divisions, and utilizing social media platforms to amplify their messages. These efforts aimed to gain domestic and international support, sway public opinion, and shape the narrative surrounding the conflict.

In Nigeria, Boko Haram, the militant group has employed information operations as a critical tool for recruitment and radicalization. Boko Haram has effectively used social media platforms, such as Twitter and YouTube, to disseminate propaganda videos, speeches, and ideological messages. They have leveraged these channels to recruit new members, promote their extremist ideology, and instill fear among the population. The group has also exploited media manipulation tactics to generate international attention and draw support from sympathetic individuals and extremist networks globally.

Information operations therefore extend beyond the global stage and have also been employed in smaller

conflicts within the Horn of Africa region. The region is currently facing a multitude of complex conflicts and challenges. In Ethiopia, the internal conflict in the Tigray region has resulted in the loss of thousands of lives and a dire humanitarian crisis. Somalia continues to grapple with political and security crises, with the al-Shabab terrorist group demonstrating resilience and posing a significant threat to the region. Sudan is experiencing armed conflict between rival factions of the military government, with clashes erupting in various cities, particularly in the capital city of Khartoum and the Darfur region. The peace process in South Sudan has been inconsistent and remains at risk of stalling.

This article analyzes the utilization of information operations in specific conflicts within the Horn of Africa region. The conflicts examined include the Tigray war in Ethiopia, the Eastern Congo conflict in the Democratic Republic of Congo, and the threat posed by al-Shabab in Somalia. The article explores how various actors have utilized information manipulation to achieve their strategic objectives.

Information Operations: A conceptual and Theoretical Understanding

Defining Information Operations (IO)

Information operations (IO) encompass a range of activities conducted by military, government, or civilian organizations with the aim of influencing the perception of an audience, adversary, or target population (Joint Chiefs of Staff, 2018; NATO, 2010). These operations are designed to shape the emotions, motives, objective reasoning, and behavior of the target audience in support of the operator's objectives (Barnes, 2019).

The concept 'information operations' can include various components, such as psychological operations (PSYOPS), military deception, propaganda, public affairs, and electronic warfare (EW) (U.S. Department of Defense, 2018). PSYOPS involve the use of psychological techniques to influence attitudes and behavior (Gouré, 2020). Military deception seeks to mislead the adversary and induce them to act in a way that is advantageous to the operator (Glaser, 2020). Propaganda aims to disseminate biased or misleading information to shape public opinion (Brinson, 2021).

The primary objective of information operations is to gain an advantage in the information environment (U.S. Department of Defense, 2018). IO activities seek to influence, disrupt, corrupt, or usurp decision-making through the integration of information-related capabilities during military operations (NATO, 2010). These capabilities can include cyber operations, influence operations, and other forms of information warfare (U.S. Department of Defense, 2018). IO can be employed defensively to protect one's own information and influence environment or offensively to exploit vulnerabilities in the adversary's information environment (Kallberg et al., 2019).

However, there is a lack of consensus and clarity in defining IO, and the distinction between IO and information warfare (IW) can be blurred (Brinson, 2021). The private sector and organizations like RAND Corporation often associate IO with influence operations, which involve shaping perceptions and decision-making processes (Glaser, 2020). International interpretations of IO may also differ due to cultural and political factors (Barnes, 2019). Therefore, it is crucial to develop clear and concise definitions of IO to ensure a comprehensive understanding of this concept (Joint Chiefs of Staff, 2018).

Suffice it to say, information operations encompass a range of activities aimed at influencing the perception and behavior of target audiences. These operations include psychological operations, military deception, propaganda, and other components. The objective of IO is to gain an advantage in the information environment by using various capabilities and integrating them into military operations. However, there is a need for clear definitions and consensus regarding the scope of IO to facilitate effective understanding and implementation.

Theoretical Perspective

There are three theories that can elucidate the concept of information operations in warfare: Decisive Advantage Theory, Influence Theory, and Coordination

> Boko Haram has effectively used social media platforms, such as Twitter and YouTube, to disseminate propaganda videos, speeches, and ideological messages

...some African countries have implemented coordinated information campaigns involving government agencies, health organizations, and media outlets to disseminate accurate and timely information, emphasizing the importance of coordination in countering the spread of misinformation

and Synchronization Theory. The *Decisive Advantage Theory* posits that information operations are conducted with the objective of gaining a decisive advantage in the information environment (Kallberg et al., 2019). This theory recognizes the significance of leveraging capabilities like cyber operations and influence operations to outmaneuver adversaries and shape decision-making processes to favor the IO practitioners. For example, during the 2016 U.S. presidential election, Russian actors utilized cyber and influence operations to disseminate disinformation and influence public opinion, with the goal of gaining an advantage in the information domain (Watts et al., 2017).

The *Influence Theory of Information Operations* focuses on the deliberate manipulation of public opinion to achieve strategic and geopolitical outcomes (Brinson, 2021). This theory views information operations as actions taken by organized actors, including governments or non-state entities, to distort or manipulate public sentiment through the dissemination of propaganda and other tactics (Glaser, 2020). A notable example is the use of information operations by Boko Haram, an extremist group in Nigeria. Boko Haram leverages propaganda videos and social media platforms to shape public opinion and recruit sympathizers (Ceron et al., 2017).

The third theory, *Coordination and Synchronization Theory*, highlights the importance of effectively coordinating and synchronizing various information-related capabilities in information operations (NATO, 2010). This theory emphasizes the need for integration and synergy among elements such as influence operations, cyber operations, and psychological operations to achieve desired effects and outcomes (Joint Chiefs of Staff, 2018). With the emergence of fake news and disinformation surrounding the COVID-19 pandemic, some African countries have implemented coordinated information campaigns involving government agencies, health organizations, and media outlets to disseminate accurate and timely information, emphasizing the importance of coordination in countering the spread of misinformation (Allcott & Gentzkow, 2017).\

Deployment and Impact of Information Operations in the Tigray War in Ethiopia, the Eastern Congo Conflict in DR Congo, and by al Shabaab Terror Group in Somalia

Information Operations in the Tigray War in Ethiopia

The conflict in Ethiopia erupted in November 2020 when the Ethiopian army launched an attack on Tigrayan troops in Mekelle, the capital of the Tigray region (BBC News, 2020). The underlying issues stem from a power struggle among Ethiopian communities within an ethnic-based federal system (DW, 2021). The TPLF, which had been part of the ruling coalition for three decades, was marginalized after anti-government protests and the appointment of Abiy Ahmed as prime minister in 2018. Abiy's administration sought to resolve territorial disputes with Eritrea and implemented political reforms, which the TPLF viewed as a threat to Ethiopia's ethnic federalism. Tensions escalated into a civil war following the Tigrayan authorities' decision to hold a regional election in September 2020 against the central government's postponement due to the pandemic. The conflict involved Ethiopian army forces, armed groups from neighboring provinces, and Eritrea. All sides engaged in obstructing humanitarian access and committing atrocities against civilians, including children (Human Rights Watch, 2021).
In the Tigray conflict, various actors utilized information to their advantage in shaping the narrative. Both the Ethiopian government and Tigrayan activists engaged in an online battle through social media platforms to control the discourse and present their version of events. The Tigrayan side primarily focused on raising awareness of the conflict, while the Ethiopian government and its supporters sought to discredit their opponents' claims. Both sides resorted to misleading or false information, but

official communications and pro-government users often aimed to dismiss content contradicting the government's narrative as disinformation. (Voice of America, 2021).

Pro-Tigray groups such as Stand With Tigray utilized Twitter campaigns to draw attention to alleged atrocities and humanitarian crises, appealing to the international community for intervention (Wilmot, Tveteraas, & Drew, 2021). In the formative days of the war, Tigrayan activists took to Twitter to initiate and promote hashtags such as *#StopTheWarOnTigray, #TigrayGenocide,* and *#IStandWithTigray*. These hashtags were widely circulated through 'copy-and-paste' campaigns facilitated by platforms like Stand With Tigray. During the initial stages of the conflict, these campaigns generated a significant number of tweets which analyzed the volume of tweets per hashtag. Wilmot, Tveteraas, and Drew (2021) note that the inclusion of the term 'genocide' in Tigrayan campaigns sparked intense reactions from pro-government campaigners who sought to counter the accusation.

On the other hand, a group initially known as Ethiopia State of Emergency Fact Check (later rebranded as Ethiopia Current Issues Fact Check) emerged to counter what they perceived as TPLF disinformation. This group, operating on Twitter and Facebook, disseminated statements condemning international coverage of the war and sought to delegitimize foreign and local reporting. The Ethiopian government supported the ECIFC and encouraged media outlets to follow their social media accounts for "fact-based information" on the conflict (Voice of America, 2021).

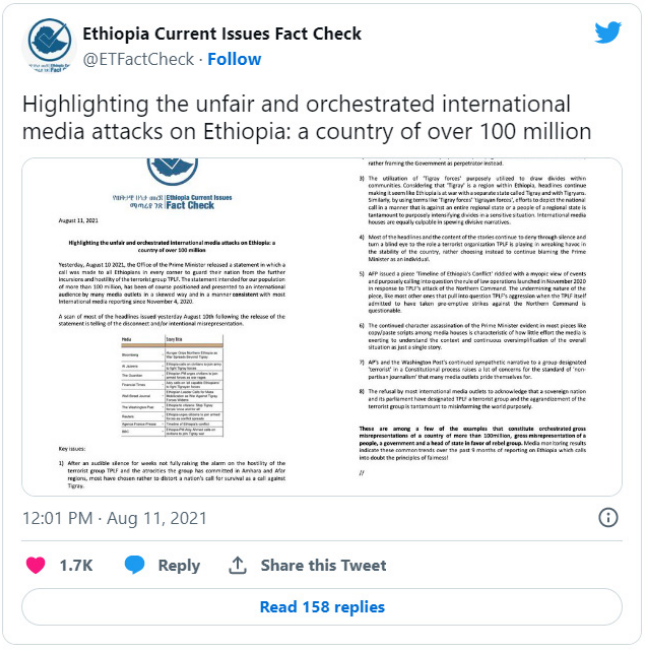

Figure 1 A tweet from Ethiopia Current Issues Fact Check in August 2021 (left) and a tweet from Stand With Tigray (right)

It was worth noting that the ECIFC's adoption of the 'fact check' label raised concerns about the dissemination of disinformation under the guise of objective verification. This deliberate strategy aimed to enhance credibility and potentially undermine trust in objective reporting. The ECIFC's work served the purpose of pushing the federal government's narrative rather than conducting genuine fact-checking. In contrast, no self-titled fact-checking accounts were identified among those supporting the Tigrayan side (Voice of America, 2021). Further, and in response to pro-Tigrayan campaigns, Ethiopian state actors and non-government supporters formed their own campaigns to influence international audiences. These campaigns emphasized the concept of Ethiopian 'unity,' which aligns with Abiy's agenda since establishing the Prosperity Party. A prominent hashtag campaign in pro-government circles was *#UnityForEthiopia*. These networks consisted of various participants, including Ethiopian government officials, diaspora advocacy groups, individuals and organizations supporting the war, and individuals linked to the Eritrean government.

The pro-government response to the Tigrayan campaigns gained momentum 2020. This surge in activity coincided with protests following the murder of musician and political activist Hachulu Hundessa, who played a significant role in inspiring youth protests in the Oromia region. Some participants in the pro-government campaigns joined Twitter independently to counter what they perceived as TPLF 'fake news,' viewing the Tigrayan activists' tweets as part of the TPLF's strategy to regain

power. A meeting was organized by individuals who believed in the justification of Abiy's actions in Tigray, leading to the formation of an advocacy coalition called the Global Ethiopia Advocacy Nexus (GLEAN). GLEAN, led by Neamin Zeleke, comprised four main organizations, including the Ethiopian and American Development Council, Advocates for Ethiopia, Voters Voice, and the Ethiopian Advocacy Network. While GLEAN members maintained that their organization was not aligned with any political party, they supported Abiy as a counterforce against the TPLF. Neamin Zeleke, a former member of the Ethiopian opposition and a key figure in G7, also played a significant role in expanding Ethiopian Satellite Television and Radio (ESAT). GLEAN operated through recruitment efforts and coordinated messaging using various online platforms, such as Twitter, WhatsApp groups, and Flock, for communication and campaign strategies.

Figure 2 Shows a poster by Global Ethiopia Advocacy Nexus (GLEAN)

It can be inferred thus, that in the conflict in Ethiopia, different actors used information operations to advance their agendas. Tigrayan activists employed social media platforms, particularly Twitter, to raise awareness about the conflict and alleged atrocities. They initiated hashtags such as #StopTheWarOnTigray, #TigrayGenocide, and #IStandWithTigray to draw attention and garner international support. The inclusion of terms like "genocide" in their campaigns triggered strong reactions from pro-government campaigners who aimed to refute the accusations.

On the other side, the Ethiopian government and its supporters, including the Ethiopia Current Issues Fact Check (ECIFC) group, utilized social media platforms like Twitter and Facebook to counter what they perceived as disinformation from the TPLF. The ECIFC shared statements condemning international coverage of the war and sought to delegitimize foreign and local reporting. The government backed the ECIFC and encouraged media outlets to follow their social media accounts for "fact-based information" on the conflict. Additionally, pro-government campaigns stressed the concept of Ethiopian "unity," aligning with Prime Minister Abiy's agenda. Hashtag campaigns like #UnityForEthiopia were promoted to influence international audiences and rally support for the government's actions.

Global Ethiopia Advocacy Nexus (GLEAN) emerged as an advocacy coalition comprising individuals who supported Abiy's actions in Tigray. GLEAN utilized various online platforms, including Twitter, WhatsApp groups, and Flock, for communication and campaign strategies. They coordinated messaging and recruitment efforts to advocate for Abiy as a counterforce against the TPLF. It is important to note that both sides resorted to the dissemination of misleading or false information to shape the narrative. Tigrayan activists focused on raising awareness of the conflict and alleged atrocities, while the Ethiopian government and its supporters sought to discredit their opponents' claims and present their own version of events. The Ethiopian government's support of the ECIFC raised concerns regarding the dissemination of disinformation under the guise of objective verification.

DR Congo's M23 Conflict

The conflict surrounding the M23 in Eastern DR Congo denotes to the armed

rebellion and consequent clashes that occurred between the Congolese government forces and the rebel group known as the M23 (March 23 Movement) in the Democratic Republic of Congo. The M23, composed mainly of former members of the Congolese army, mutinied in April 2012, citing the government's failure to fulfill a previous peace agreement. The group quickly gained control of several key towns in the North Kivu province and engaged in intense fighting with the Congolese army. The conflict resulted in significant displacement of civilians and reports of human rights abuses. The M23 was accused of recruiting child soldiers, committing sexual violence, and looting resources, exacerbating the humanitarian crisis in the region. After several rounds of negotiations and external pressures, the M23 was eventually defeated by the Congolese armed forces and disbanded in late 2013. However, the underlying political and socio-economic issues that fueled the conflict in the Eastern DR Congo remain unresolved, leading to continued instability in the region. In March 2022, the M23, also known as the March 23 Movement, initiated an attack in North Kivu, resulting in confrontations with the Armed Forces of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (FARDC) and MONUSCO (United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo). The clashes led to the displacement of a significant number of civilians and reignited tensions between the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Rwanda. Accusations were made against Rwanda for allegedly supporting the rebel offensive.

The online space in Congo is filled with calls for boycotting Rwandan goods, expelling Rwandan nationals, and spreading disinformation. Both Congolese and Rwandan media have played a role in manipulating information and promoting hate speech against each other's communities. Politicians, religious leaders, civil society figures, and ordinary citizens have all contributed to spreading false narratives and fake news. The lack of media capacity to verify information and the public's tendency to believe mainstream and social media has allowed fake news to thrive. The effects of this disinformation include a decline in cross-border trade, hindrance of education, increased prices of goods, radicalization of populations, and harm to peaceful coexistence between communities. The negative consequences extend beyond the border

Kenyan soldiers depart Jomo Kenyatta International Airport for eastern Democratic Republic of Congo to join a new regional force vowing to "enforce peace". Both Congolese and Rwandan media have played a role in manipulating information and promoting hate speech against each other's communities (Photo Credit: Thomas Mukoya/Reuters)

towns to the capital, Kinshasa. Efforts are being made to combat disinformation and promote fact-checking among journalists to foster cross-border cooperation and credible information sharing.

Regarding the deployment of information operations strategies, both the Congolese government and the M23 rebel group have used social media to spread their narratives and influence public opinion. They have employed rumour, manipulated images, and inflated body counts to shape the information landscape and gain support for their respective causes. The Congolese government in Kinshasa has promoted a narrative that blames foreign powers for the country's problems, portraying the M23 as a puppet of the Rwandan government. The M23 group and its allies have strategically downplayed Rwanda's support to the rebellion and instead emphasized bad governance in the DRC as the root cause of violence. According to Vogel and Verweijen, (2023), "The pro-M23 side – highly popular in Rwanda – instead places bad governance in DRC at the core of the debate" (para. 15). By shifting the blame to the Congolese government, they aim to portray themselves as expressing legitimate grievances rather than being seen as a puppet of the Rwandan government. Second, M23 have highlighted the collaboration between the Congolese army and the Forces démocratiques de libération du Rwanda (FDLR) rebel group, which emerged from the former Hutu-led Rwandan army implicated in the 1994 genocide. The M23 supporters argue that the FDLR poses a significant threat to Rwanda and Tutsi civilians in the DRC, even if not through firepower, then as a vessel to spread genocide ideology. Vogel and Verweijen, (2023) state, "M23 supporters highlight UN expert findings on FDLR collaboration with the Congolese army" (para. 17). By emphasizing the danger posed by the FDLR, they seek to justify their actions and position themselves as protectors of Tutsi civilians and Rwanda's security.

On the hand, the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) government and its allies have also engaged in information operations to discredit M23 and their supporters. First, they have propagated a narrative that attributes all of the DRC's problems to foreign meddling by resource-hungry powers, "The pro-Kinshasa side buys into a long-standing narrative that ascribes all of DRC's woes to meddling by resource-hungry foreign powers" (Vogel & Verweijen, 2023, para 20). By placing the blame on external actors, they seek to divert attention from internal governance issues and portray themselves as victims of international interference.

> The lack of media capacity to verify information and the public's tendency to believe mainstream and social media has allowed fake news to thrive

DRC government has also harnessed the anti-Rwanda sentiment to reinforce its position ahead of elections. They have exploited the wave of anti-Rwanda sentiment in the DRC to strengthen their own political standing, "The government in Kinshasa is, meanwhile, treading a difficult line between calling on its citizens to refrain from popular violence and harnessing a wave of anti-Rwanda sentiment to reinforce its position ahead of elections later this year" (Vogel & Verweijen, 2023, para 25). By capitalizing on the public's negative sentiment towards Rwanda, they aim to consolidate their support base and maintain political control.

Other actors such as the Congolese and Rwandan militaries, have also engaged in an information war by trading accusations and counter-accusations, such as incursions, arrests of soldiers, and bombing incidents. These actions shape the flow of resources and can intensify tensions on the ground. United Nations human rights officials, as well as international media outlets, have sometimes amplified certain narratives without critically examining the information. Inflated death tolls, sensationalist headlines, and simplistic discourses have contributed to misperceptions and the amplification of one side or another in the conflict.

Information Operations by al Shabaab in Somalia and the Region

Al Shabab is an Islamist extremist group that emerged in Somalia in the mid-2000s. It originated as a splinter group of the Islamic Courts Union (ICU), which had briefly taken control of parts of southern Somalia and implemented a strict interpretation of Sharia law. Al Shabab capitalized on popular grievances, including political instability, state collapse, clan rivalries, and the absence of basic services, presenting itself as a force of stability and justice. Over time, it became increasingly radicalized and aligned with al Qaida, conducting attacks against the Somali government, African Union peacekeeping forces, and civilian targets. Despite facing significant military

setbacks and territorial losses in recent years due to international interventions and the efforts of the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM) now African Union Transition Mission in Somalia (ATMIS), Al-Shabaab still retains a presence in rural areas and continues to carry out asymmetric attacks, particularly in Mogadishu and other major cities, posing a persistent security threat to Somalia and the region.

Wittingly or otherwise, al Shabab has effectively utilized the concept of 'information operations' as a strategic tool to advance its agenda and maintain control in Somalia and parts of Kenya (Hansen, 2010; Gardner, 2019). Through propaganda, recruitment efforts, and psychological operations, the group has sought to shape narratives, exploit grievances, and manipulate public opinion (Hansen, 2010; Gardner, 2019). Through propaganda, they disseminate messages via various channels, including the release of videos that glorify their activities and promote their ideology. Additionally, the group utilizes recruitment efforts, exploiting grievances such as political and economic marginalization, to attract new members and increase their ranks. Al Shabab also often engages in psychological operations aimed at influencing public opinion and instilling fear. These operations involve conducting targeted attacks on civilians and utilizing social media platforms to spread fear-inducing messages. This has enabled them to garner support, undermine security forces, and exert influence over local populations (Hansen, 2010; Gardner, 2019).

To achieve its objectives, al Shabab has developed a sophisticated media apparatus, including radio stations, websites, and social media platforms, to disseminate its propaganda (Hansen, 2010; Gardner, 2019). These outlets amplify their messages, disseminate extremist ideology, and recruit new members. The group has employed persuasive messaging techniques, such as highlighting perceived injustices and socio-economic grievances, to gain sympathy and support from marginalized communities (Hansen, 2010; Gardner, 2019). Since 2010, al Shabab's Al-Kataib Media Foundation has been actively producing media content aimed at recruiting Swahili-speaking individuals in East Africa (Freear, 2019). Interestingly, in the weeks leading up to Kenya's 2017 elections, Al-Kataib released a significant number of films that deviated from their previous approach. Unlike the 2013 elections, during which Al-Shabaab only issued a radio statement and press release, they produced and released seven films with a combined duration of 2

Figure 3 Al Shabab-affiliated media logos, from top left to right, clockwise; al Kataib, Radio Al Furqaan, Al-Andalus, Bogga Calmada, and al Shabab main logo

Al Shabab has leveraged information operations to undermine counterterrorism efforts by sowing mistrust and eroding public confidence in the government and security forces. They have disseminated false information, manipulated images and videos, and conducted disinformation campaigns to discredit their opponents

hours and 50 minutes explicitly addressing the Kenyan elections and the concept of democracy. These films, part of a broader trend, focused on creating a connection with the Kenyan audience by referring to themselves as '*we, the mujahideen*,' emphasizing grand ideals and a violent mission rather than explicitly presenting Al-Shabaab as an organization (Freear, 2019).

Al Shabab has also employed psychological operations to instill fear, create chaos, and weaken security forces. This includes the use of intimidating videos, audio messages, and public executions to spread terror and deter opposition (Hansen, 2010; Gardner, 2019). The group has also conducted targeted assassinations and carried out high-profile attacks, such as the Westgate Mall attack in Nairobi, Kenya in 2013, which garnered significant media attention and demonstrated their capabilities (Hansen, 2010; Gardner, 2019; Hassan, 2014).

Al Shabab has leveraged information operations to undermine counterterrorism efforts by sowing mistrust and eroding public confidence in the government and security forces (Morsink, 2014; Prah & Karugia, 2019). They have disseminated false information, manipulated images and videos, and conducted disinformation campaigns to discredit their opponents. This has made it challenging for the authorities to effectively counter their propaganda and maintain stability (Morsink, 2014; Prah & Karugia, 2019).

Conclusion

This article discussed how various actors in conflict in the greater Horn of Africa and the great lakes regions have variously utilized information operations to their strategic advantage. The conflicts examined include the Tigray war in Ethiopia, the Eastern Congo conflict in the Democratic Republic of Congo, and the threat posed by al-Shabab in Somalia. It is noteworthy that the most actors are now more than ever exploiting social media in propagating their agenda in the context of conflict.

In the context of the Tigray conflict in Ethiopia, various actors have utilized information operations to shape the narrative and advance their agendas. Tigrayan activists used social media platforms, particularly Twitter, to raise awareness about the conflict and alleged atrocities, employing hashtags such as #StopTheWarOnTigray and #TigrayGenocide. The Ethiopian government and its supporters, including the Ethiopia Current Issues Fact Check (ECIFC) group, utilized social media platforms like Twitter and Facebook to counter what they perceived as disinformation from the TPLF.

In DR Congo, Both the Congolese government and the M23 rebel group have used social media platforms to spread their narratives and influence public opinion. They have employed rumors, manipulated images, and inflated body counts to shape the information landscape and gain support. The Congolese government has blamed foreign powers and portrayed the M23 as a puppet of the Rwandan government, while the M23 group has emphasized bad governance in the DRC as the root cause of violence. The government has also exploited anti-Rwanda sentiment to strengthen its own political standing.

Through propaganda, recruitment efforts, and psychological operations, al Shabab in Somalia shapes narratives, exploits grievances, and manipulates public opinion. They disseminate messages through various media channels, including videos that glorify their activities, recruit new members, and instill fear. They also conduct psychological operations, such as targeted attacks and social media manipulation, to influence public opinion.

Recommendations

In the increasingly complex networked environment, it is crucial for governments, the media, and other actors to actively promote independent and objective fact-checking mechanisms to effectively counter

disinformation. Instead of dismissing the claims of conflicting parties, constructive dialogue should be encouraged, and their grievances should be addressed.

1. Regional governments, such as those represented by the African Union, IGAD, or EAC, should develop comprehensive regulations that specifically target misinformation, disinformation, and other malicious information practices. Additionally, they should advocate for transparency and accountability from tech companies and social media platforms.
2. To combat misinformation effectively, regional governments should also invest in educational programs that enhance media literacy skills among citizens. These programs should prioritize teaching critical thinking, fact-checking, and digital literacy to empower individuals to discern reliable information from false narratives.
3. Security agencies in the affected countries should take action by urging tech companies to increase transparency regarding algorithms and recommendation systems. By doing so, the unintentional amplification of misinformation can be mitigated. Independent audits and research should be allowed to ensure accountability and trustworthiness.
4. The international community should provide support for independent journalism and fact-checking initiatives as part of their efforts to counter disinformation.
5. Media outlets and journalists should adopt responsible practices by verifying information before reporting and avoiding the amplification of false or misleading narratives. Media companies should foster cross-border cooperation among outlets to promote accurate and balanced reporting. Additionally, fact-checking claims made by conflicting parties and providing context can greatly enhance public understanding.
6. International organizations and peacekeeping forces play a crucial role in promoting peace, stability, and reconciliation efforts in the region. They should actively monitor and report on human rights abuses, hold perpetrators accountable, and facilitate dialogue and negotiations between conflicting parties. Moreover, they should provide resources and training to enhance the media's capacity for accurate reporting and fact-checking.
7. Civil society organizations and community leaders can contribute to combating disinformation by promoting peaceful coexistence and dialogue among different communities. They should counter hate speech and disinformation through education and awareness campaigns. Additionally, engaging in mediation and reconciliation efforts can help resolve conflicts and address grievances effectively.

> The Congolese government has blamed foreign powers and portrayed the M23 as a puppet of the Rwandan government, while the M23 group has emphasized bad governance in the DRC as the root cause of violence

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The Limitations of Identity Politics in the Horn of Africa

By Odhiambo Frank Arrogo

Abstract

Identity politics has become a dominant force in the Horn of Africa region, shaped by the historical legacies of colonialism, ethnic and religious diversity and regional conflicts. While identity politics has served as a tool for political mobilization, it has also created a complex web of inter-group tensions, violence and exclusion. This article examines the origins and impacts of identity politics on the Horn of Africa region and why it is not enough to address the challenges of development, social justice, socio-economic equality, and good leadership. The article concludes by offering recommendations for how to move beyond identity politics to achieve sustainable peace, stability, and progress in the Horn of Africa.

Introduction

According to Ian Taylor, identity politics in Africa are a result of underlying developmental challenges rather than the cause itself. The prevalence of identity-based mobilization reflects deeper structural issues faced by post-colonial states. Colonial rule amalgamated different communities, some of which traditionally held hostilities towards each other, resulting in the scarcity of nation states today. The process of decolonization further exacerbated the politicization of identity.

The Horn of Africa region boasts remarkable diversity in terms of ethnic and religious communities, shaped by historical factors such as migration, trade, and conflicts. However, recent years have witnessed a surge in identity politics, with groups mobilizing along ethnic, religious, and regional lines to assert their claims to political power, resources, and recognition.

It is important to recognize that identity politics can divert attention from the underlying causes of poverty, inequality, and underdevelopment in the Horn of Africa. These issues are often deeply rooted in structural and systemic factors rather than mere cultural or ethnic differences. Consequently, addressing these challenges requires a comprehensive and holistic approach that goes beyond identity-based mobilization. This approach should focus on promoting inclusive and participatory governance, ensuring equitable distribution of resources, and fostering sustainable economic development in the region.

Tracing the Source and Impact of Identity Politics in the Horn of Africa

The causes of identity politics in the Horn of Africa are multifaceted, with roots in the legacies of colonialism that imposed artificial boundaries and hierarchies based on ethnicity, religion, and region (Smith, 2018). The colonial era also witnessed the establishment of client states in the region, where rulers utilized identity politics as a means to consolidate power and suppress dissent (Mamdani, 1996). In the post-colonial era, the rise of democratic governance and the demands for recognition and representation by marginalized groups have revitalized the significance of identity politics (Kasfir, 2018).

The consequences of identity politics in the Horn of Africa have yielded mixed outcomes. On one hand, it has served as a tool for political mobilization, enabling marginalized groups to assert their demands for recognition and representation (Hagmann & Péclard,

“The causes of identity politics in the Horn of Africa are multifaceted, with roots in the legacies of colonialism that imposed artificial boundaries and hierarchies based on ethnicity, religion, and region

An illustration of showing variables of identity politics (Photo Credit: Hostra.edu)

2010). Conversely, identity politics has also engendered a complex web of inter-group tensions, violence, and exclusion, resulting in cycles of conflict and displacement (Daley, 2019). For instance, Ethiopia has experienced a power struggle between the Oromo and Amhara ethnic groups, leading to widespread protests, violence, and displacement (Adugna & Akinade, 2021). Similarly, clan identity has been a significant source of conflict in Somalia, contributing to the long-standing instability in the country (Menkhaus, 2016).

The Limits of Identity Politics in the Horn of Africa

While identity politics has been an important tool for political mobilization, it is not enough to address the challenges of issues such as development, social justice, socio-economic equality, and good leadership in the Horn of Africa region. Identity politics tends to be focused on narrow group interests, often at the expense of broader societal needs. Critics argue that groups based on a particular shared identity, such as race or gender identity, can divert energy and attention from more fundamental issues, similar to the history of divide and rule strategies. Identity politics is not sufficient because it focuses on the interests of specific identity groups rather than the common good of society as a whole. While it is important to recognize and respect the diverse identities and cultures that make up a society, identity politics can lead to the exclusion and marginalization of certain groups, perpetuating social and economic inequalities. Additionally, identity politics can lead to a zero-sum game, where one group's gain is seen as another group's loss. This can create a toxic environment of competition and conflict, which undermines efforts at sustainable peace and development.

Treatment of citizens on the basis of ethnicity is a common characteristic of the political leadership in many African countries. Ethnic identity influences electoral contests in Africa. African Presidents tend to target co-ethnics with patronage, especially in non-democracies. In the political sphere, leaders appeal to people of their own tribes when they want support, they also use their tribes as leverage when bargaining for positions and favours in government. This practice is anti-development as it aggravates the problems of the region.

Socio-Economic Inequality

Identity politics is not enough to bring about socio-economic equality in the Horn of Africa. Socio-economic inequality in the region has been deeply entrenched for centuries, and it will take more than identity politics to address it. The major causes of socio-economic inequality in the Horn of Africa include colonialism, corruption, poor

governance and environmental degradation, among others. Identity politics may address some of these issues, but it is not sufficient to solve them.

Identity politics has had a negative impact on the economy of the region. The focus on identity and ethnicity has led to a neglect of other important economic factors such as innovation, education and entrepreneurship. As a result, the region has not seen the economic growth and development that it desperately needs. Tanzania is an example where despite widespread corruption inspired by ethnic bias and favouritism, the victims usually become resigned to their fate for fear of reprisals.

The marginalization of women in the region forms fault lines in the quest to eradicate poverty for sustainable development. Women are under-represented in the region due to the fact that most African societies are patriarchal. Therefore, women occupy little to no seats of power as the stronger political seats are reserved for men. Women's political participation, however, varies from country to country. In some countries, women are being shunned from vying for competitive political seats and as a result are being pushed to quotas or women-reserved seats only.

In the Horn of Africa, identity politics has been used to address issues of resource allocation, employment opportunities, and access to education and healthcare. For instance, in Ethiopia, affirmative action policies have been implemented to ensure that historically marginalized communities have access to education and employment opportunities. However, these policies have been criticized for not going far enough to address the deep-seated socio-economic inequalities in the country. Moreover, these policies have often been implemented in a manner that reinforces identity-based divisions and inequalities.

In Somalia, identity politics has been used to justify clan-based resource allocation and political representation. This has led to a situation where members of certain clans have privileged access to resources and opportunities, while others are excluded. This has contributed to the persistence of poverty and socio-economic inequality in the country.

Political instability

Identity politics in the Horn of Africa region has resulted in the marginalization of certain ethnic groups, which has led to inter-communal conflicts. In Ethiopia, for example, the Tigray people have been marginalized by the central government, leading to a conflict that began in November 2020. Similarly, in Somalia, the marginalization of certain clans by the government has resulted in ongoing clan-based conflicts.

Legitimacy is very significant in the stability and functioning of any political regime. Legitimacy is the belief that a rule, an institution or a leader has the right to govern, (Hurd, 2007). It affects the people's recognition and acceptance of the validity of the electoral outcomes for instance, rules guiding an entire political system as well as the decisions of the rulers. Beetham, in his book, *'The Legitimation of Power'* (1991), states that political legitimacy involves:-

- Conforming to established rulers- This implies that the leader has indeed followed the due procedures in acquiring the legitimate ascendance to rule.
- Justifiability of the rulers by reference to shared beliefs, norms and values- People must bear a certain type of allegiance to the norms which they powerfully observe.
- The expression of consent by the people to your rule- Consent by people translates into public approval.

However, the virginity and purity of the electoral procedures in many African countries are often convoluted and characterized by:-

a) Violent electoral environments.

b) Stealing of votes (banditry).

Identity politics is not enough to bring about socio-economic equality in the Horn of Africa. Socio-economic inequality in the region has been deeply entrenched for centuries, and it will take more than identity politics to address it

c) Compromised voter-counting process.

d) Vote buying activities.

e) Decreasing voter turnout during elections.

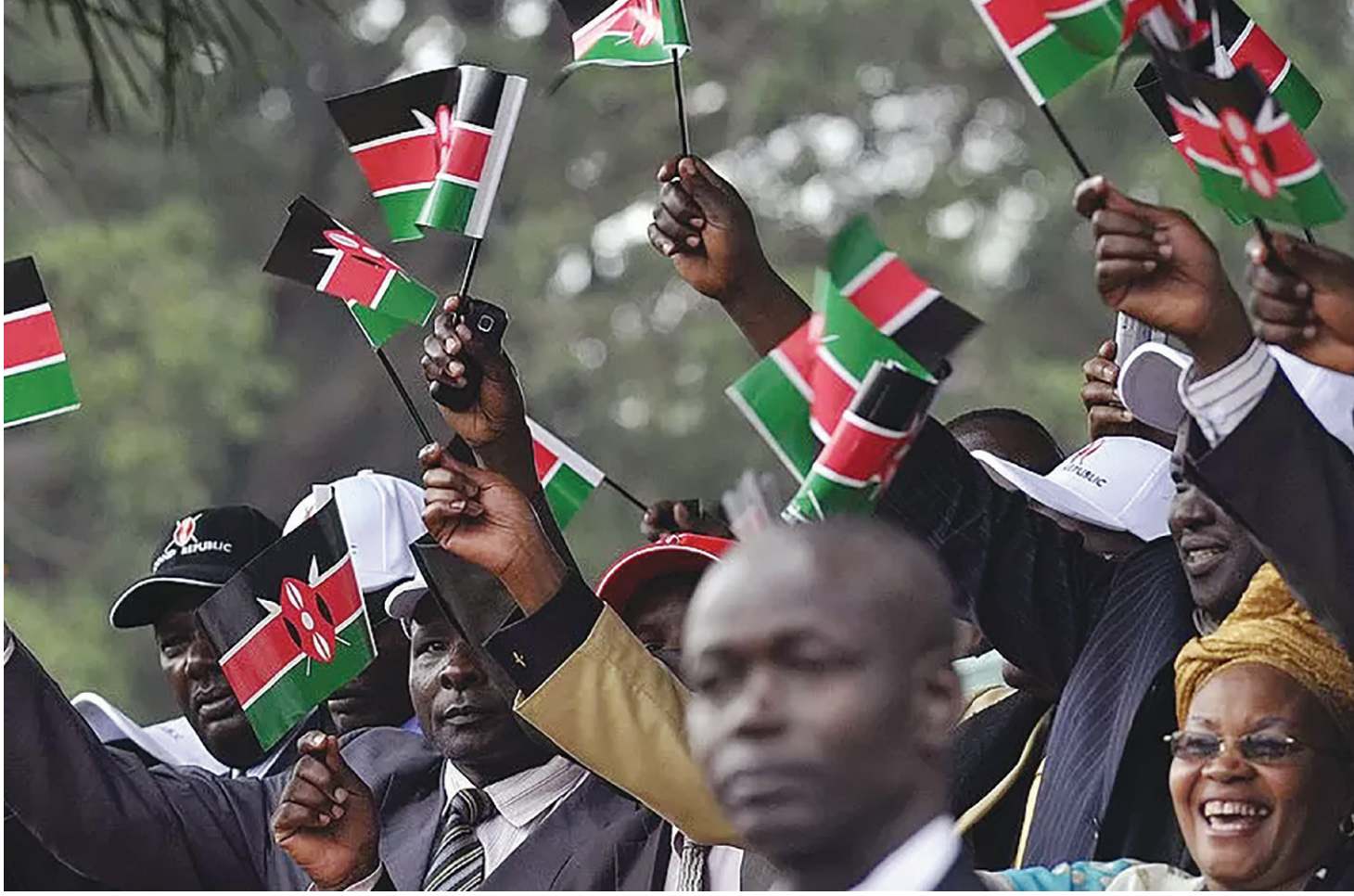
f) Chaotic political parties' nominations.

g) Political choiceness as there are individuals already pre-qualified to be elected.

These factors usually end up affecting the people's acceptance of the electoral outcomes in many African countries. Leaders bank on ethnicity to gain political power, for instance in Kenya where politics and citizens are based and divided along tribal lines. These divisions often poses threats to the country's stability. This is because people want one of their own in the driving seat so that they can represent them, address their issues and even favour them in terms of allocation of resources which is not always the case. The 'big five' tribes have influenced who is elected, owing to their numerical advantage. According to Kenya's Human Rights Commission, the largest native ethnic groups are the Kikuyu, the Luhya, the Kalenjin, the Luo and the Kamba respectively.

This ethnic divide led to the 2007-2008 Kenyan post-election violence. The country experienced a wide range of violence which ended up in massive destruction of properties, injury and death of people. There was a total disruption to social order and the election results sparked widespread, ethnically related violence and internal displacement of hundreds of thousands of families. This violence was sparked by the unwillingness of the people to accept of the election results. Opposition leader, Raila Amollo Odinga, has run to become President of Kenya five times, with none of his attempts being successful. Each time, Raila has alleged electoral fraud. A recent example is the demonstrations, which were set to happen every Monday and Thursday, called on by the opposition leader to address the issue of the high cost of living. Opposition leaders claimed that they were protesting against the high cost of living. Kenya saw several days of protests and unrest, which lasted for two weeks, sparked by a rising cost of living and political divisions. Protests turned into violence in some areas of the country driven by these political disputes. Opposition leader, Raila Odinga, was leading the demonstrations and calling on President William Ruto to resign who instead extended an olive branch to the opposition.

Kenya's opposition National Super Alliance leader, Raila Odinga, holds up a Bible as he swears himself in as the 'people's president' (Photo Credit: Patrick Meinhardt/AFP/Getty Images)



Children eating directly out of cooking pots outside makeshift shelters in Mogadishu. (Photo credit: Phil Moore, Concern Worldwide)

Ethnicity has also become a central nerve in terms of electoral conflicts more particularly among people who feel marginalized from the mainstream political systems. It has also led to a spike in separatist movements across different states. For instance in Kenya where we have the Mombasa Republican Council, (MRC). MRC is the main separatist organization to argue that Mombasa should secede from Kenya to become an independent state. They preached of the slogan, 'Pwani si Kenya' which is Swahili for the Coast region is not part of Kenya.

Poverty

Poverty is said to exist when people lack the means to satisfy their basic needs. In 1995, the United Nations, (UN), defined absolute poverty as "a condition characterized by severe deprivation of basic human needs, including food, safe drinking water, sanitation facilities, health, shelter, education and information. It depends not only on income but also on access to services." Political leaders use poverty as political and electoral capital. Political capital on the other hand is a metaphor used in political theory to conceptualize the accumulation of resources and power built through relationships, trust, goodwill and influence between politicians or parties and other stakeholders such as constituents.

It is becoming increasingly apparent that a nation's poverty rate is determined in large part by how a nation's governing authorities distribute economic and other resources amongst the population. The link between poverty and politics can be understood in three ways:-

i. Individual characteristics such as lack of education or employment skills create poverty.

ii. Public policies themselves are the primary determinants of a nation's poverty rate.

iii. The distribution of power and influence within the nation creates the public policies that determine poverty rates.

Candidates and parties know that they face a largely ignorant electorate and they structure their platforms accordingly. They largely act as if the country's very serious fiscal problems can be finessed through a combination of smoke and mirrors and pretending they do not exist.

I believe that if the voters were better informed about fiscal issues, the parties could not get away with that and quite likely would not even try to do so. Voter ignorance has played a major role in ensuring that African voters faced such terrible options in their elections. Poorly informed voters have no choice but to cast a ballot

based on crude heuristics and biases because voting is considered a civic obligation. If they are indeed poorly informed, they should consider not voting at all. Abstaining from ignorant voting is not a breach of civic duty, to the contrary, it is often the right thing to do.

Threats to development

When political leaders prioritize identity politics over other important issues such as poverty reduction, education and health care, they risk neglecting the needs of vulnerable groups and failing to address the root causes of social and economic inequalities. This can result in the perpetuation of poverty, unemployment, and social exclusion, particularly for marginalized groups such as women, youth, and ethnic minorities.

Moreover, identity politics can lead to the politicization of development projects, which may result in a lack of coordination and a waste of resources. Projects that could benefit the entire population, such as infrastructure development, may be allocated based on political considerations rather than objective criteria, resulting in inefficient use of resources and the neglect of critical social and economic issues.

Furthermore, identity politics can lead to conflicts and violence, which can have devastating impacts on development. When political leaders use identity politics to advance their own agendas at the expense of other groups, it can result in resentment, division and violence. Conflicts and violence resulting from identity politics can have profound impacts on the social and economic well-being of the populations affected, particularly for vulnerable groups such as women and children. For instance, the never-ending conflicts in South Sudan, Somalia, and Ethiopia. Despite assurances to end the war, and billions spent on peacekeeping, law and order rarely extends beyond the capitals of these countries and horrific violence continues with impunity.

Ethnicity for instance, has led to a lot of underdevelopment specifically if such is determined by the level of individual accumulation of wealth rather than the overdependence on the state to provide basic needs.

In many cases, political leaders use identity politics to consolidate power and advance their own agendas at the expense of the marginalized groups. This results in a lack of political will to address the pressing development

Due to poor infrastructure, 40 per cent of funding is spent on transport when delivering aid in South Sudan which costs seven times more than in Somalia. (Photo credit: Nektarios Markogiannis, United Nations Mission in South Sudan)

challenges faced by the region. For instance, in Ethiopia, the government's focus on identity politics has resulted in the neglect of other important economic and social issues, such as poverty reduction, job creation and access to basic services. The marginalization of certain ethnic groups has also contributed to social inequalities and unrest.

Similarly, in Somalia, the focus on clan politics has resulted in political instability and the neglect of critical social and economic issues. This has perpetuated poverty and inequality in the country, particularly for marginalized groups. Former President of the United States, Barack Obama, stated the following during his state visit to Kenya in 2015: "Politics that is based solely on a tribe and ethnicity is politics that is doomed to tear a country apart."

Social injustice

Social injustice is real as evidenced by the atrocities that minority groups are faced with, for example discrimination, educational inequality, police brutality, access to opportunities and resources. While identity politics has brought about important discussions and advances in social justice, relying solely on identity politics can be limiting in achieving broader social justice goals. Nancy Fraser's study shows that achieving social justice today means that we require a combination of both identity politics and class politics otherwise respectively known as politics of recognition and politics of redistribution. She emphasizes that by taking both dimensions into account, social justice can cut across all movements.

Many African countries suffering from a 'minority at risk' syndrome described by Gurr (1993) have also seen the formation of various levels of militant ethnic groups, a syndrome described by Brass (1991). Rwanda and Burundi have witnessed ethnic transformation in the form of collective action by ethnic groups against one another and even against the state. In Rwanda, for example, the ethnic tensions between the majority Hutu group and minority Tutsis peaked in 1994 when, within the space of 100 days from April to July, about 800,000 lives were lost, most of the victims being Tutsis and some Hutus who opposed the Hutu-led government's repressive politics. In Burundi, a similar conflict between Hutu and Tutsi groups resulted in a war that lasted for 12 years from 1993, claiming about 300,000 lives.

> Ethnicity for instance, has led to a lot of underdevelopment specifically if such is determined by the level of individual accumulation of wealth rather than the overdependence on the state to provide basic needs

Innumerable times we have seen demonstrations by large groups of people to either create or resist social change, fight for social justice, and/or provide a political voice for an oppressed group. Yet, despite these efforts, identity-based oppression along the lines of race, gender, ethnicity, and so on is far from ending (Kwame, A., 2006). In Uganda, for instance, President Yoweri Museveni heads a regime that is more like a military government than a civilian one and it is rife with ethnic conflicts, the main victims being people from Northern Uganda, the Acholi ethnic group and those who identify as homosexuals, all of which are condemned and therefore marginalized through displacement.

While identity politics can be an important tool in promoting social justice, it should not be relied on as the sole solution to complex and systemic issues. A more comprehensive approach that recognizes the intersections of identities and class, would be able to address the systemic issues leading to lasting and equitable change. Equality between men and women is a matter of human rights and a condition for social justice. It is also a very necessary and fundamental prerequisite for social justice, peace and development. A transformed partnership based on equality between men and women is a condition for people-centered sustainable development.

Poor governance

Identity politics is not enough to bring about good leadership in the Horn of Africa. Good leadership is essential for development and social justice, but identity politics often leads to the emergence of leaders who are more concerned with promoting the interests of their identity group than with promoting the common good. Identity politics can undermine good leadership

Eritrean migrants rally outside the European Union embassy in Ramat Gan, Israel demanding that President Isaias Afewerki face justice for crimes against humanity. (Photo Credits: Tomer Neuberg, Flash90)

by focusing on narrow interests and excluding other groups from the political process. This can lead to the election of leaders who lack the competence, experience and vision necessary to govern effectively, resulting in poor governance and the neglect of critical social and economic issues.

In the Horn of Africa, identity politics has often led to the emergence of leaders who are more concerned with promoting the interests of their ethnic or clan group than with promoting the common good. These leaders often engage in patronage politics, favouring members of their identity group over others. This has contributed to vices such as corruption, poor governance, and the persistence of poverty and socio-economic inequality in the region.

Political governance institutions are hardly built to accommodate the practical needs of women. In some cases, there is a clear preference for male candidates in winnable constituencies which catalyzes the listing of female candidates in unwinnable constituencies. This is usually because of the social norms and practices that subordinate women and excluding them from actively participating in development processes. Due to the cultural perception and approval of masculine traits in public policy, we find that certain female leaders even portray masculine energy and are therefore accepted by the people.

There is ample evidence of dictatorship in the Horn of Africa region, with many countries experiencing authoritarian rule at some point in their history. The consequences of these regimes have included political instability, economic stagnation and human rights violations. Eritrea, for instance, gained independence from Ethiopia in 1993, but since then, the country has been under the control of President Isaias Afwerki. Afwerki's regime has been accused of suppressing political dissent, arbitrary detention and torture. The government also tightly controls the media and restricts freedom of expression.

Furthermore, the focus on identity politics has had a negative impact on governance in the Horn of Africa region. Political leaders often use identity politics to rally their base, which has resulted in a lack of focus on important issues such as corruption, human rights and good governance. This has led to poor leadership and a lack of accountability, which has hindered development and progress in the region.

Conclusion

The impacts of identity politics on development and social justice in the Horn of Africa region cannot be overstated. As previously mentioned, identity politics often leads to the marginalization of certain ethnic groups, which results in social and economic inequalities.

In conclusion, identity politics has had both positive and negative impacts on the Horn of Africa Region. While identity politics has helped to address historical injustices and inequalities, it has also contributed to the fragmentation of society, the persistence of conflict, and the exacerbation of socio-economic inequalities. Identity politics is not sufficient to bring about development, social justice, socio-economic equality and good leadership.

Poverty in developing nations is as a result of the political and economic organization of society rather than the personal failings of individuals. National governments organized along social democratic lines have the least poverty rates whereas those organized along authoritarian lines have the highest rates.

Identity-based politics is rampant all over the region. Policies are not based on a comprehensive understanding of the structural causes of the problems facing the Horn of Africa. This is evidently clear because the policies in place do not promote inclusive development, social justice, socio-economic equality and good leadership for all people in the region.

Recommendations

1. Identity politics in the Horn of Africa region has negatively impacted development, social justice, socio-economic equality, and good governance. To move beyond this, a more inclusive and holistic approach to governance and development is needed, while acknowledging and respecting the region's diversity. The primary focus of political discourse should not be on identity politics.

2. Political leaders should prioritize good governance, economic growth, and social justice, as these are crucial for the region's development and progress.

> The realization of an African Renaissance, New Africa Initiative, and African Union is impossible if violence, conflict, and war continue to afflict ordinary Africans

Policies promoting merit-based leadership and accountability are necessary to achieve good leadership. Competence should be the basis for selecting leaders, rather than their identity. Additionally, policies that promote transparency, accountability, and discourage corruption and patronage politics are essential.

3. Development projects should be allocated based on objective criteria, not political considerations. Addressing the underlying causes of identity politics, including historical grievances, marginalization, and exclusion, should be done through inclusive policies and dialogue.

4. Civil society organizations and the media have a critical role in promoting inclusive discourse and challenging identity-based politics. Prioritizing education and entrepreneurship will foster economic growth and development in the region. Conflicts resulting from identity politics should be resolved inclusively and peacefully. International organizations and donor countries should provide support for programs that promote good governance, economic growth, and social justice in the region.

5. Africans must also take responsibility for conflict prevention and reduction in their societies. Many of these conflicts stem from poor and ineffective governance, corruption, mismanagement of state finances, and human rights abuses. The realization of an African Renaissance, New Africa Initiative, and African Union is impossible if violence, conflict, and war continue to afflict ordinary Africans.

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Editor's Note

Dear Reader,

We are excited to release our 31st bi-monthly issue of *The HORN Bulletin* (Vol. VI, Iss. III, 2023). We bring to you well-researched articles and analysis of topical issues and developments affecting the Horn of Africa. We welcome contributions from readers who wish to have their articles included in the HORN Bulletin. At HORN, we believe ideas are the currency of progress. Feel free to contact the Editor-in-Chief for more details at communications@horninstitute.org.

Hassan Khannenje, Ph.D.
Editor-in-Chief, The HORN Bulletin

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The HORN International Institute for Strategic Studies is a non-profit, applied research, and policy think-do tank based in Nairobi, Kenya. Its vision is a progressive Horn of Africa and the African continent, served by informed, evidence-based and problem-solving policy research and analysis. Its mission is to contribute to informed, objective, definitive research and analytical inquiry that positively informs policies of governments, intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations and spaces.

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HORN Bulletin ISSN: 2663-4996
2663-4996