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The West's Relative Absence in the Sudan Conflict
A Geopolitical Shift?

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INSIDE

Abstract

This article highlights the geopolitical shift in Sudan following the civil conflict in April 2023. Historically, Western nations like the U.S., EU, and UK were pivotal in mediating Sudanese conflicts, as seen in the 2005 Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA). However, recent global crises, such as the Ukraine war and Middle Eastern conflicts, have diverted Western attention, leading to their reduced engagement in Sudan. This absence created a power vacuum, filled by regional actors like Egypt, the UAE, and Saudi Arabia, driven by strategic interests in controlling key resources such as the Nile and Red Sea. Non-regional actors like Russia and China have also expanded their involvement,

with Russia's military presence through the Wagner Group and China focusing on economic investments. The West's retreat raises concerns about Sudan's future, with some viewing this shift as a path to regional peace efforts, while others fear the entrenchment of competing interests could exacerbate instability. This absence of Western diplomacy undermines peacebuilding, with potential implications for Sudan's neighbors, including South Sudan and Chad.

This paper is underscored by the assumption that all foreign policy actions are inherently interest-driven. Whether Western or non-Western, interventions in conflicts are rarely, if ever, purely altruistic. They are instead motivated by underlying geopolitical objectives, such as securing access to natural resources, expanding spheres of influence, or gaining strategic advantages. This framework applies universally, suggesting that state actors prioritize their national interests, using diplomatic, economic, or military means to further their goals. Consequently, both Western and non-Western interventions in conflicts are often shaped by these

pragmatic considerations rather than humanitarian concerns alone.

Introduction

The Sudan conflict, which reignited in April 2023, has revealed significant shifts in global diplomatic and security engagements, particularly highlighting the declining role of Western powers. Historically, Western nations, especially the United States of America (USA), European Union, and United Kingdom, played pivotal roles in mediating conflicts across Africa, including Sudan. Their facilitation of the 2005 Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) and humanitarian aid during the Darfur crisis exemplified the West's commitment to stability in the region (Contributors, 2010). However, recent developments have exposed a stark retreat of Western powers from active participation in Sudan's conflict (The Economist, 2024). As internal strife between the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) and the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces (RSF) escalates, Western nations have largely remained passive, focusing their resources on more immediate geopolitical concerns such as the

Seated right General Abdel Fattah al-Burhan, head of the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF), and left, General Mohamed Hamdan Dagalo, aka Hemeti, the leader of the Rapid Support Forces (RSF) (Photo Credits: Mahmoud Hjaj/Anadolu Agency/AFP)

Ukraine war and crises in the Middle East. This shift has created a power vacuum, increasingly filled by regional actors like Egypt, the UAE, and Saudi Arabia, as well as non-regional actors such as Russia and China. Each is pursuing strategic interests in Sudan. This section explores the West's disengagement, the roles of emerging actors, and the broader geopolitical consequences (Hicham u. a., 2022). One of the critical questions arising from this disengagement is whether it reflects a broader global shift in priorities. The ongoing Ukraine conflict has dominated Western foreign policy, particularly for the U.S. and European nations. This war has strained diplomatic, financial, and military resources, leaving little capacity for involvement in African conflicts like Sudan's. Additionally, the protracted nature of Sudan's conflict, combined with the West's growing reluctance to engage in seemingly intractable crises, has further diminished its role in the region. This raises key questions about the West's long-term commitment to peacebuilding in Africa, particularly in regions where its strategic interests are less directly at risk. Has the West abandoned Sudan, and if so, what are the consequences for future conflict resolution in Africa?

The vacuum left by the West has not remained empty. Regional powers such as Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and the UAE have stepped in, driven by their geopolitical interests (International Crisis Group, 2024b). Sudan is geopolitically lucrative due to its strategic location and abundant natural resources. Situated at the crossroads of Africa and the Middle East, it provides vital access to the Red Sea, making it a key transit point for international trade and maritime routes. Additionally, Sudan is rich in natural resources, including oil, gold, and arable land, which attract foreign investments and partnerships (Maglad, 2008). The country's oil reserves, in particular, have been a focal point of interest for various nations seeking to secure energy resources amid global demand (Collins, 2008). Furthermore, Sudan's diverse agricultural potential positions it as a crucial player in food security for the region, further enhancing its geopolitical significance. Egypt, heavily reliant on the Nile River, has aligned itself with the SAF to protect its water security. Meanwhile, the UAE and Saudi Arabia find themselves supporting opposing sides, with the UAE backing the RSF and Saudi Arabia supporting the SAF. Their involvement, rooted in broader ambitions to control critical maritime routes in the Red Sea and Horn of Africa, has added complexity to the conflict, raising concerns that Sudan could become a proxy battleground for regional powers. Additionally, non-regional actors like Russia and China have increased

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their influence. Russia, via the Wagner Group, provides military support to both the RSF and SAF, deepening its involvement in African geopolitics (Houreld, Bennett & Dixon, 2023). China, while remaining largely neutral militarily, exerts influence through economic investments, particularly in Sudan's oil infrastructure (Large, 2007). This evolving power dynamic raises critical questions about Sudan's future. Will the involvement of non-Western actors offer new avenues for conflict resolution, or will their competing interests exacerbate instability? While some argue that regional ownership of peace processes could empower African nations to resolve conflicts independently, others caution that the involvement of external actors, with their competing interests, risks prolonging the conflict and exacerbating the humanitarian crisis. The distinction between these perspectives often blurs, as the complexities of external influence and regional agency intertwine, making it difficult to disentangle the advantages of regional autonomy from the potential harm of external involvement. As the West withdraws, it remains to be seen whether regional actors can promote peace or if Sudan will become a failed state, destabilizing East Africa.

Historical Context of Western Engagement in Sudan

To understand the dimensions of Western engagement in Sudan, it is essential to consider the historical context and the specific roles that Western actors have played over time. The colonial era significantly shaped Sudan's trajectory. Governed jointly by Britain and Egypt during the Anglo-Egyptian Condominium (1899–1956), Britain's focus was primarily on the northern regions of Sudan (Collins, 2008). The economic interests centered on the Nile River and agricultural potential, particularly cotton production. However, Britain's uneven development policies marginalized the southern regions, fostering

deep divides between the Arab-Muslim north and the African-Christian and animist south. This period laid the groundwork for future internal conflicts (Ayers, 2010). The colonial strategy of "divide and rule" exacerbated regional disparities, sowing resentment that persists to this day.

Following independence in 1956, Sudan faced internal divisions stemming from colonial legacies. The Arab-dominated north controlled the government, sidelining the southern population. Western powers, particularly the U.S. and the UK, initially viewed Sudan as part of their Cold War strategy, aiming to align it with Western interests against Soviet expansion in Africa. Tensions between the North and South escalated, culminating in a civil war that lasted until the Addis Ababa Agreement of 1972, which temporarily granted the South regional autonomy (Shinn, 2004). During this period, the U.S. provided military and economic aid to the Sudanese government to counter Soviet influence, which fueled internal tensions (Nmoma, 2006). The tensions escalated again, leading to a second civil war (1983–2005). This conflict, triggered by the imposition of Sharia law by President Nimeiry, escalated the divide between the Christian south and the Arabic-Muslim north, deepening ethnic and political divisions fostered by colonial rule (Gordon, 1985).

The second civil war continued until the signing of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) in 2005 (Hicham u. a., 2022). U.S., Norway, and the UK, were instrumental in facilitating the CPA, which ended the second civil war and paved the way for South Sudan's independence to address ethnic tensions between the north and south. The U.S. played a crucial role in pressuring the Khartoum government and the Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA) to negotiate peace (Brosché u. a., 2009). Following the CPA, the International Criminal Court (ICC) indicted President al-Bashir for war crimes, including genocide, in 2009. Western nations supported the ICC's actions, straining relations further between Sudan and the West. U.S. sanctions, initially imposed

in 1997, were intensified (Barnes, 2011). After the CPA, South Sudan voted for independence in a referendum overwhelmingly supported by Western powers, seen as a diplomatic victory for the West, particularly the U.S. However, unresolved issues, such as the status of the oil-rich Abyei region, remained a source of tension (Curless & Ethnopolitics Papers, 2011).

In recent years, Western interest in Sudan has waned, particularly after the Arab Spring and amid shifting global priorities, such as the Ukraine crisis and Middle Eastern conflicts. While Western humanitarian agencies continue to operate in Sudan, political and military engagement has been limited. As of April 2023, conflict between the SAF and RSF has plunged Sudan into another civil war, with Western engagement largely passive, focusing on limited humanitarian aid, while regional actors like Egypt, the UAE, and Saudi Arabia have taken on more proactive roles. This lack of a coordinated Western response has allowed regional actors to exert greater influence over Sudan's internal affairs. This declining role of Western influence in Sudan could indicate a geopolitical shift, underscoring the potential importance of regional powers in conflict resolution.

Current Absence of Western Interest in Sudan

The decline in Western involvement in Sudan, particularly in its ongoing conflict, can be traced back to shifting geopolitical priorities and an increasing focus on domestic issues. Historically, Western nations, particularly the United States and the European Union, played pivotal roles in mediating peace efforts in Sudan. During the Cold War, Sudan became a strategically significant arena for Western powers, particularly the United States and the United Kingdom. These nations sought to contain Soviet influence in Africa by providing military and economic support to the Sudanese government. In the 1960s, the United States supplied weapons and military training to bolster the Sudanese armed forces in their fight against communist movements (Nmoma,

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United Nations Sudan War, April 2024: US Ambassador Linda Thomas-Greenfield forewarning of a likely massacre in the vast western Darfur region due to the ongoing war (Photo Credits: AP)

2006). In the 1970s, under President Jaafar Nimeiry, Sudan intensified its relationship with the Soviet Union, prompting Western nations to withdraw their support and shift towards humanitarian aid instead (Shinn, 2004). This dynamic resulted in a complex interplay between military assistance, geopolitical interests, and humanitarian interventions, shaping the future relationship between Sudan and the West.

Further engagements can be witnessed notably through the 2005 Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) and humanitarian interventions during the Darfur crisis (Udombana, 2005). However, Western engagement has seen a sharp decline attributed to a combination of factors. Western countries are currently facing a changing geopolitical landscape that presents new challenges and dynamics, leading to a shift in the concentration of political resources. Among these challenges, the occurrence of foreign political crises or conflicts demands considerable attention from Western actors. Additionally, the shift in global power dynamics toward major non-Western countries, like China, is perceived as both political and economic competition or threat, requiring significant focus from Western actors (Cox & London School of Economics, 2012).

The Western foreign policy focus has shifted from multiple geopolitical interests toward the war in Ukraine, perceiving Russia as an immediate threat to European territorial sovereignty. The Ukraine conflict has fundamentally altered Western diplomatic focus. The war in Ukraine represents a direct threat to European security, compelling NATO members and the EU to prioritize military and financial support for Ukraine (Pikulicka-Wilczewska, 2015). The sanctions regime against Russia and the military support, in terms of training and equipping Ukrainian armed forces, has drawn substantial resources and financial means from Western countries, potentially limiting their ability to engage in other costly geopolitical interests at present (Pikulicka-Wilczewska, 2015). These developments have dominated international Western diplomacy, pushing African conflicts down the list of priorities.

Concurrently, crises in the Middle East—such as the Iran-Saudi rivalry, the civil war in Yemen, and the escalating Israel-Palestine conflict—have drawn more attention from Western powers. These conflicts are geopolitically critical due to their proximity to global energy supplies and their potential to escalate into broader regional wars. A similar trend is evident in the Middle East, where predominantly Western powers support Israel's military efforts, providing financial support, weapon and ammunition deliveries, and political backing for Israel's agenda (Cordall, 2024). The alliance with Israel is one of the most significant geostrategic strongholds of Western values and interests

in the Middle East, and thus, especially for the U.S., an important ally in the region (Qian, 2023). The U.S.-Israeli relationship is influenced not only by geopolitical interests but also by strong cultural and religious ties between the two societies (Mousavi, 2015).

While Western political and diplomatic engagement in Sudan has diminished, humanitarian aid continues to be provided on a substantial scale („Sudan: EU Commits €190 Million in Additional Humanitarian And Development Aid", 2023). However, the nature of this aid—primarily aimed at alleviating the consequences of conflict rather than resolving the conflict itself—demonstrates the West's reduced commitment to playing a decisive role in Sudan's political landscape. Organizations such as USAID, the European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations (ECHO), and various NGOs have remained active in delivering aid to Sudan. Since the outbreak of the war, USAID has provided over $400 million in emergency humanitarian assistance to Sudan to address food insecurity and displacement (USAID's Bureau for Humanitarian Assistance (USAID/BHA) u. a., 2024). However, the same level of involvement does not extend to political or military engagement. In contrast to the early 2000s, when the U.S. played a critical role in negotiating peace agreements in Sudan, the current focus is largely limited to humanitarian efforts. This shift has been driven by the West's reduced appetite for direct involvement in complex, prolonged conflicts, especially following the lengthy and costly military engagements in Iraq and Afghanistan. Thus, Western nations are increasingly prioritizing "conflict containment" over conflict resolution, emphasizing humanitarian aid over direct political intervention.

The absence of Western political engagement in Sudan has created a vacuum filled by Middle Eastern and regional actors whose interests often conflict with Sudan's long-term stability. To gain back political stability the support that is directed towards Sudan needs to focus on strengthening the civil sector and humanitarian aid, rather than granting military support. The West's shift in focus, driven by pressing geopolitical concerns like Ukraine and the Middle East, has limited its ability to engage in Sudan's conflict. While humanitarian aid continues, the lack of robust political involvement leaves Sudan's conflict largely unchecked by Western diplomacy, further complicating future peace prospects. In the absence of Western powers, Middle Eastern and regional actors have stepped in to assert their influence in Sudan,

often with diverging interests that have the potential to exacerbate the conflict rather than resolve it.

Regional and International Actors Filling the Gap

The absence of Western engagement and the lucrative geostrategic position of Sudan has attracted other regional actors who quickly filled the gap left by Western powers. Middle Eastern actors, culturally and religiously close to Sudan, have taken on significant roles in the conflict by supporting either the RSF or the SAF. One of the most important influencers in this regard is Egypt. Egypt's primary geopolitical interest in Sudan revolves around the Nile River, which supplies over 90% of Egypt's fresh water. The control and management of the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GERD) on the Blue Nile, which flows through Sudan, is critical to Egypt's water security (Hassan, 2007). Sudan's role as a middle riparian country in this conflict is key to Egypt's Nile strategy. Historically, Egypt has sought to maintain a stable government in Sudan that aligns with its critical water interests, particularly in opposition to Ethiopian control over Nile waters. Freshwater supplies are critical infrastructure for Egypt and are crucial for maintaining and scaling up the country's agriculture. Therefore, ensuring continued access to Nile water is a strategic priority for Egypt. Consequently, Egypt has provided military and diplomatic support to the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF), led by General Abdel Fattah al-Burhan, to ensure Sudan's stability and safeguard its own interests (Cafiero, 2023). Egypt views a stable SAF government as a buffer against both domestic instability and Ethiopia's ambitions (Swain u. a., 2009). This support includes training SAF personnel and potentially offering logistical support during the current conflict.

Other Middle Eastern actors, like the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and Saudi Arabia, have diverging interests in Sudan, often supporting opposing factions. The UAE has allegedly supported the Rapid Support Forces (RSF), led by General Mohamed Hamdan Dagalo (Hemedti), by providing arms and financial assistance (Mahjoub, 2024). The UAE's backing aligns with its broader ambitions in the Horn of Africa, where it seeks to expand its influence and secure strategic maritime routes. Meanwhile, Saudi Arabia has provided support to the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) as part of its efforts to maintain stability in Sudan and the broader region, ensuring influence in the Red Sea, which is crucial for Saudi economic and security interests. Given this dynamic, it is questionable whether

the Sudan conflict has become a proxy war, where regional powers seek to foster influence, shifting their competition to a different arena without endangering their own state sovereignty (Mohammad, 2023). Both nations have used financial and military aid to influence the political trajectory of the Sudanese conflict.

The UAE's support for the RSF has intensified the power struggle between Sudan's military factions. In contrast, Saudi Arabia's mediation efforts have largely focused on preventing regional destabilization that could affect its own security and investments, backing the SAF as the official representatives of the state of Sudan. Iran's involvement in the Sudan conflict has been more discreet but is rooted in its longstanding relationship with the Sudanese state. Historically, Iran has supported Sudanese regimes that align with its broader strategic interests in the Red Sea and Gulf of Aden. In the current conflict, Iran has provided covert support to the SAF, motivated by its desire to counterbalance Gulf Arab influence, particularly that of the UAE and Saudi Arabia, while seeking to establish a foothold in the Red Sea (Qaed, 2024). Iran's involvement can be seen as a reaction to the UAE's and Saudi Arabia's strong engagement in the conflict, aiming to retain influence in Sudan while other regional powers increase their own stakes in the country. Libyan strongman General Khalifa Haftar, leader of the Libyan National Army (LNA), has actively supported the RSF, providing arms and military expertise to Hemedti's forces (Mohamed, 2023). Haftar's involvement is driven by regional alliances, particularly with the UAE, which also supports the RSF. This undermines Saudi Arabia's position, given their conflicting alliances. Additionally, Libya aims to strengthen its geopolitical influence in the Sahel region by securing allies within broader North Africa and the Sahel regions, where mutual strategic interests may be found.

Russia's influence in Sudan has grown significantly, particularly through the operations of the Wagner Group, a private military company closely linked to the Russian government. Securing influence in Africa is a crucial aspect of Russia's broader strategy against the West. Offering financial and military support, without any humanitarian or democratic conditions, has become a key feature of Russia's engagement in Africa. Particularly in light of the ongoing war in Ukraine, Russia seeks to leverage Sudan's instability to push Western influence out of the region and establish stronger partnerships. Wagner forces have been involved in training Sudanese

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soldiers and providing security for gold mining operations, which are a crucial source of income for both the SAF and RSF. Russia views Sudan as a critical part of its strategy to expand its influence in Africa, focusing on natural resource extraction and arms sales. This strategy involves balancing support for both warring parties, the RSF and SAF („Russia Switches Sides in Sudan War - Jamestown", 2024). China, meanwhile, has long been Sudan's largest trading partner, with a particular emphasis on the country's oil reserves. Chinese companies have invested heavily in Sudanese infrastructure, including pipelines and refineries, to secure access to oil exports. While China has remained neutral in terms of military involvement in the current conflict, it continues to exert influence through economic diplomacy and infrastructure development. By maintaining stability, China aims to protect its investments and ensure future access to Sudanese natural resources (Maglad, 2008).

Geopolitical Implications for Sudan and the Region

The impact of Western disengagement can be observed in the efforts made to resolve the Sudanese conflict. Traditionally, Western powers took a leading role in peacebuilding missions, diplomatic efforts, and the deployment of troops worldwide (Boege, n. D.). Without Western involvement, the basis for negotiation has shifted, complicating the Sudan conflict, which has evolved into one of the world's most severe humanitarian crises. Diplomatic efforts by regional powers involved in the conflict have thus far failed to foster meaningful dialogue between the two warring generals (United States Mission to the United Nations & By United States Mission to the United Nations, 2024). The geostrategic

objectives of these actors have made the situation even more complex, often focusing on supporting one side of the conflict and diverting attention away from civil society and the critical humanitarian aid required at the moment (Situation Report: Sudan, 2024). Regional conflict resolution concepts have thus gained importance. The African Union (AU) and the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) have taken the lead in addressing the conflict through diplomatic means. The AU has sought to facilitate peace talks between the warring factions, while IGAD has concentrated on mediation and the implementation of regional security mechanisms. These efforts aim to fill the gap left by the West, but their success has been hindered by limited resources, divided regional interests, and the overall complexity of the Sudanese conflict (Joint AU/IGAD High-Level Panel, 2024).

The increasing involvement of non-Western actors has had mixed effects on Sudan's economic and humanitarian situation. While regional and Middle Eastern powers provide financial assistance, this aid is primarily linked to military support rather than addressing the needs of Sudan's civil society. This neglect has led to a worsening humanitarian crisis. Demand for food, water, and medicine has outstripped available aid, pushing Sudan towards one of the most severe famines on the planet (Ferragamo, 2024).

Prioritizing military aid over humanitarian needs has severe consequences for Sudan and the broader region. By not linking support to humanitarian or legal demands, both warring parties have been left free to commit war crimes against each other and the civilian population. Additionally, deep-seated social inequality between different ethnicities and tribes has fueled recruitment for the two factions, exacerbating the conflict. These divisions have resulted in violence deliberately targeting civil society, including looting, rape, and other forms of abuse (Amnesty International, 2023). Viewed from a global perspective, the escalation of the Sudan conflict, along with the involvement of non-Western actors, reflects a broader geostrategic competition between Middle Eastern and North African countries. Sudan can be seen as a playing field for regional powerhouses that fuel the ongoing conflict to advance their interests,

A school and centre for displaced people in West Darfur, supported by Save the Children, destroyed in April 2023 due to ongoing fighting in Sudan (Photo Credits: UNOCHA/Mohamed Khalil)

destabilizing the country's neighbors and the wider region (UN Press, 2024). The risk of spillover is particularly high in neighboring countries such as South Sudan and Chad. Militias, unlike regular armed forces, are not bound by national borders or legal frameworks, allowing them to extend their operations into other regions and countries. Consequently, broader instability and large refugee movements have followed the outbreak of the Sudan conflict. The entire region is increasingly affected by the deteriorating situation in Sudan (International Crisis Group, 2024a).

Conclusion

The absence of Western influence has allowed Middle Eastern and African nations to expand their roles in the Sudanese conflict, advancing their strategic objectives without significant external resistance. Egypt, the UAE, and Saudi Arabia have gained prominence by providing financial and military support to competing factions, shifting regional power dynamics away from traditional Western actors. This has led to a worsening of the humanitarian crisis, as these countries often prioritize their geopolitical interests over Sudan's long-term stability. Although Middle Eastern countries like Saudi Arabia and the UAE have facilitated dialogue, their motives often revolve around preserving strategic interests, weakening the peace process and favoring the status quo over conflict resolution. Both the AU and IGAD have attempted to fill the void left by Western powers, but their success has been limited. Despite their commitment to African-led peace initiatives, efforts are constrained by resource limitations and regional unity challenges. AU-led diplomatic attempts face hurdles from competing interests, complicating efforts to bring warring factions to the negotiating table effectively. The involvement of external actors, particularly from the Middle East, has exacerbated Sudan's economic crisis. External military support has prolonged the conflict, worsened the humanitarian situation, and increased the flow of refugees into neighboring countries.

The focus on military aid over humanitarian assistance has resulted in severe food shortages, displacement, and escalating violence. The shift from Western to non-Western influence in Sudan has altered the geopolitical landscape of the Horn of Africa, the Red Sea, and East Africa. As non-Western actors like Russia and China deepen their involvement through arms sales and economic investments, the region's political balance is shifting. The risks of prolonged instability are significant,

as the absence of interventions that support specifically the civil society and sanctions that target the two fighting parties are present. The absence of humanitarian support and diplomatic pressure towards the two generals increases the likelihood of spillover effects destabilizing other parts of Africa.

Policy Recommendations

To effectively address the conflict, it is crucial to build conflict resolution capacities on the African continent. The African Union (AU) and the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) have the potential to lead peace negotiations and resolution efforts in Sudan.

These initiatives require solid institutional frameworks and sufficient funding to impact the conflict and enhance peacekeeping capabilities. Strengthening regional security mechanisms, such as AU peacekeeping missions and providing IGAD with necessary resources, is vital for effective peace dialogue. Finding local solutions for tensions will offer a more sustainable approach than reliance on non-African actors, which could create dependencies. Supporting regional peacekeeping efforts with multilateral (including non-African) assistance is essential. Sustainable resolutions require collaborative efforts from regional and other African powers, focusing on inclusive peace agreements ensuring that economic and military support is tied to peacebuilding and good governance initiatives.

An international peace conference, facilitated by African institutions with the involvement of Western and Eastern actors, could significantly contribute to establishing a framework for sustainable peace in Sudan. Western nations, particularly through organizations like the United Nations and European Union, can act as facilitators in negotiations between the SAF and RSF. Making strategic

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use of Western recourses and financial means can contribute to the successful tackle or at least improvement of the current situation through a hybrid approach between African and Western facilitators. Emphasizing diplomatic resolutions over mere containment is essential. Moreover, strict and continuous sanctions targeting the military sector while allowing humanitarian aid to reach civil society should be enforced. A multi-faceted engagement approach is vital, combining diplomatic efforts, military pressure, and financial investment to rebuild the nation post-conflict. This comprehensive strategy should aim to prevent a relapse into conflict, necessitating coordinated involvement from USAID, UNHCR, and EU mechanisms beyond mere emergency aid.

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Counterterrorism in Eastern Africa:
Balancing Security, Human Rights and Development

By Rahma Ramadhan

Abstract

The article explores the multifaceted influence of global counterterrorism narratives and policies on the Eastern African region, particularly in addressing terrorism and enhancing national security. Since the adoption of Resolution 1373 in 2001, countries in Eastern Africa have implemented a variety of counterterrorism measures, leveraging both foreign and domestic assistance to build their capacities. However, while significant progress has been made in domestic legislation, institutional frameworks, and inter-regional cooperation geared towards combating terrorism, the measures have also raised notable concerns regarding human rights violations, diminishing civil liberties, and potential setbacks in developmental priorities. Moreover, the article delves into the implications of external interventions, particularly by Western nations, and the associated tensions stemming from inadequate parliamentary oversight over counterterrorism operations. It concludes with recommendations for a balanced approach that integrates developmental initiatives and civil society participation in counterterrorism efforts, underscoring the necessity for proportional, transparent, and accountable measures that can effectively tackle the underlying factors contributing to terrorism while promoting regional security and stability.

Introduction

The challenge of terrorism has emerged as a pressing security concern for governments worldwide, particularly in the horn of Africa, where a complex interplay of historical, social, and political factors has led to the rise of various extremist groups. Eastern African countries have been compelled to adapt their counterterrorism strategies in response to both local and global dynamics following the events of September 11, 2001. The international community has exerted significant influence through various narratives and strategies aimed at combating terrorism, emphasizing the need for compliance with universal resolutions such as United Nations Resolution 1373.

As a result, states in the region have not only forged legal frameworks and institutional capacities for counterterrorism but have also engaged in multifarious foreign partnerships for resources and expertise. With frameworks such as the Eastern African Community (EAC) and the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) in place, collaboration across national borders has intensified. Nonetheless, this focus on security has often led to encroachments on human rights and civil liberties, raising ethical concerns about the implications of counterterrorism measures. Furthermore, the absence of parliamentary oversight has precipitated tensions regarding foreign influence in national security matters, highlighting the necessity for transparency and accountability in counterterrorism operations.

In exploring these dynamics, the article aims to shed light on the successes and shortcomings of counterterrorism initiatives in Eastern Africa, emphasizing the need for a balanced approach that integrates both security imperatives and developmental priorities to foster sustainable stability in the region. The findings underscore the importance of engaging civil society in counterterrorism efforts, ensuring that measures are not only effective but also just and equitable, thereby paving the way for an inclusive security architecture that addresses the root causes of terrorism.

Influence of Global Counterterrorism narratives and policies

Governments across the region have displayed not only a willingness but a pragmatic intent to address the threat of
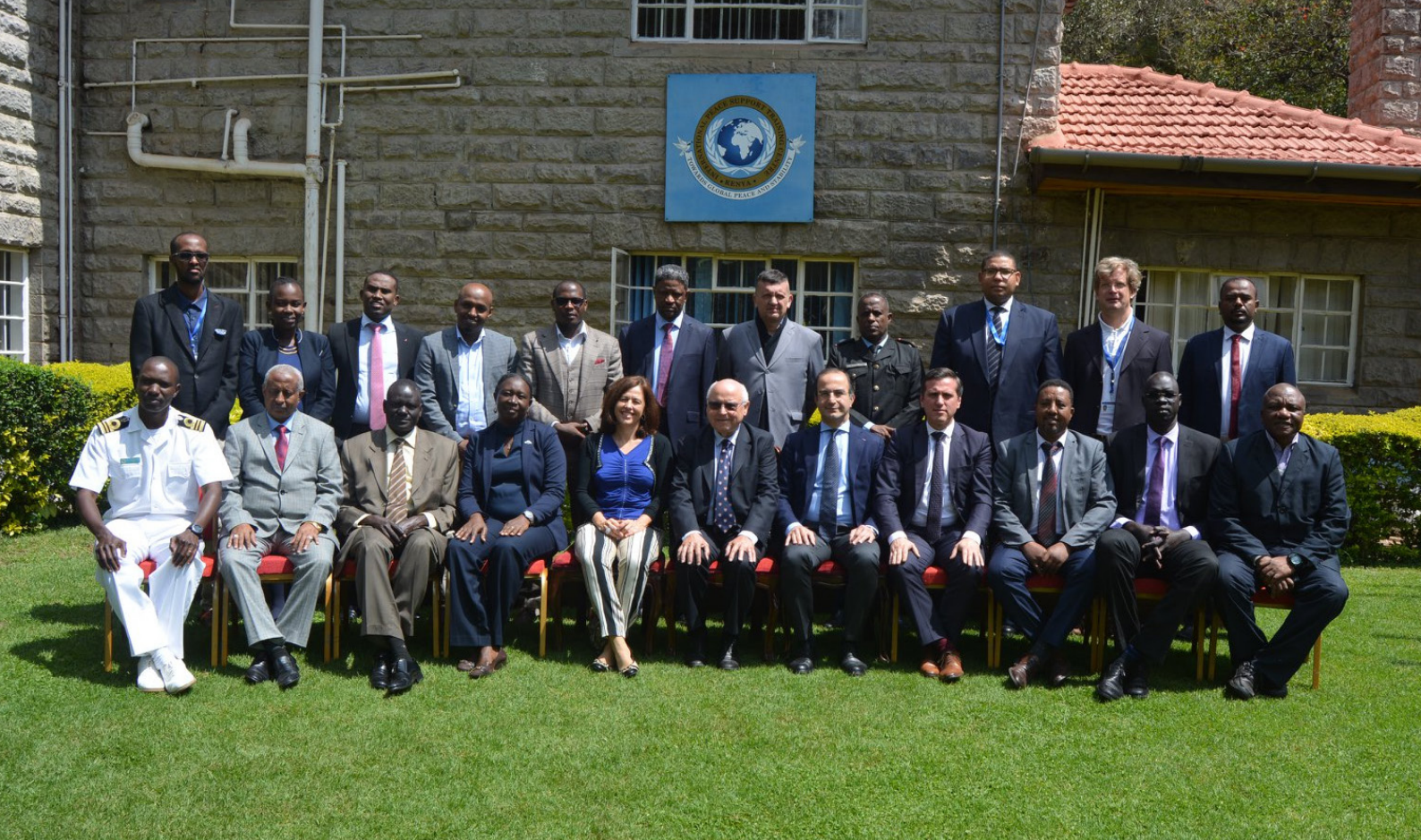
The Horn of Africa and Yemen countries senior officers from the Anti-Terrorism Police Unit Under the EU Regional Law Enforcement project workshop, September 2019 (Photo Credit: International Peace Support Training Centre)

terrorism. The way that different states and international bodies view terrorism has an influence on priorities in Eastern Africa. Since 2001, all Eastern African countries have complied with the most basic implementation step of Resolution 1373 and submitted at least one report to the Counter-Terrorism Committee on steps taken to implement the resolution. Numerous states have submitted several follow-up reports (CTC, 2001 – 2006).

Counterterrorism support

Countries in the region have received a significant amount of foreign and domestic counterterrorism assistance. Kenya has received substantial amounts of foreign assistance for its counterterrorism programs. Additionally, East African countries have received substantial amounts of foreign assistance to enhance their counter-terrorism efforts. The funds are have been allocated towards various security-enhancing initiatives, including the strengthening of intelligence capabilities, improvements in border security, and specialized training programs for various state agencies.

Domestic Counterterrorism legislation and policies

Since 2001, countries have implemented an array of counterterrorism measures. Uganda passed the

Suppression of Terrorism Act in 2002, while Tanzania passed its Anti-Terrorism Law in 2003. Kenya's Prevention of Terror Act was enacted in 2012 after failed attempts to pass anti-terror legislation in 2003 and 2006.

Domestic institutional Framework for CT implementation

Tanzania and Kenya have established National Counterterrorism Centers, which participate in several programs aimed at strengthening law-enforcement and military capacities, improving border and aviation security, and targeting terrorists' financing.

Both Countries have specialized units involved in various aspects of CT including the Tanzania Intelligence and Security Service (TISS) which is involved in intelligence gathering and analysis and the Anti-Terrorism Police Unit (ATPU), a specialized unit within the Kenya Police Service responsible for combating terrorism.

Uganda has a counterterrorism department under the Uganda Police Force responsible for implementing CT measures with the Chieftaincy of Military Intelligence (CMI) involved in intelligence gathering and CT efforts, and, the Uganda People's Defence Force (UPDF) playing a crucial role in national security and counter-terrorism.

Counter terrorist financing and anti-money laundering measures

Like many countries globally, Tanzania, Kenya, and Uganda have all implemented Anti-Money Laundering Acts to address the issue of money laundering associated with terrorism and terrorist financing. These acts were enacted in 2006, 2009, and 2013 respectively. Each country has established specific institutions to receive and analyze reports concerning suspicious transactions. In Tanzania, it is the Prevention and Combating of Corruption Bureau (PCCB) and the Financial Intelligence Unit (FIU), while Kenya has the Financial Reporting Centre (FRC), and Uganda has the Financial Intelligence Authority (FIA).

Border-security cooperation, designed to combat organized crime and terrorism insurgencies, is also ongoing between Kenyan, Ugandan, and Somali authorities. In February 2023, Kenya and Uganda agreed to operationalize a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between the two states, by establishing a Joint Technical Steering Committee, in support of the countries' cross-border programme for sustainable peace and development primarily to combat cross-border crime and enhance cross-border cooperation and security (NTV, 2023). In May of the same year, Kenya and Somalia agreed to re-open its border points with Somalia in Mandera, Lamu and Garissa Counties in Kenya and called for strengthened cross-border communication, shared cross-border intelligence and enhancement of law enforcement capacity to man the borders (Wambui, 2023).

Regional Cooperation

East Africa counterterrorism strategy and framework

The East African Community (EAC) CT strategy to enhance cooperation and coordination among member states in addressing shared security challenges through preventive measures, intelligence sharing, law enforcement collaboration, and capacity-building efforts.

The EAC is working to establish a Counter Terrorism Centre (EA CTC) that would coordinate the bloc's prevention and disruption efforts. The EAC also has a Defense Counterterrorism Centre, which is different from the EA CTC, and focuses on military interventions and cooperation to counter CT (ADF, 2020).

Intelligence-sharing and Mutual Assistance on counterterrorism

East African countries have collaborated and cooperated with other states in providing assistance in the investigation of terrorism matters and apprehension of suspected terrorists. Mutual assistance and support lent to the FBI by Kenya and Tanzania was crucial for identification, arrest, and extradition to the United States of four members of the al Qaeda terrorist network for their role in the simultaneous 1998 bombing of the American Embassies in Nairobi and Dar es Salaam. These investigations at the time represented the largest deployment of the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) in the institution's history, with over 900 FBI special agents alone—and many more FBI employees (FBI, 2003). In 2020, the US created its first-ever overseas joint terrorism task force in Kenya. The Kenyan Joint Terrorism Task Force (JTTF-K) is led by the FBI and funded by the Department of State's Bureau of Counterterrorism under the Counterterrorism Partnership Fund, which was established by Congress to build the law enforcement capacity of partner nations on the frontlines of terrorism. The multi-agency counterterrorism investigative force seeks to share experiences and sensitive intelligence to facilitate counterterror investigations (FBI, 2020).

An international investigation was launched in response to the July 2010 bombing in Kampala, Uganda. The ATPU allegedly detained at least 9 people and later extradited them to Uganda illegally. This included two Ugandan citizens who were arrested in Kenya. The Kenyan government maintained that the renditions were legal under a regional anti-terror agreement: "We cannot have renditions among East African states. We have agreements on terrorism. This is a legal process." However, the Kenyan High Court determined that the rendition of the suspects was unconstitutional. Suspects also claimed they were tortured by intelligence officers from Uganda, Kenya, Tanzania, the U.K., and the U.S,

> Uganda passed the Suppression of Terrorism Act in 2002, while Tanzania passed its Anti-Terrorism Law in 2003. Kenya's Prevention of Terror Act was enacted in 2012 after failed attempts to pass anti-terror legislation in 2003 and 2006

including being forced to confess at gunpoint, tongue piercing, genital abuse, and forced pork product consumption, against Muslim faith.

Countries in the region have also signed agreements that provide the legal framework for the exchange of information and evidence to assist countries in the enforcement of customs laws, including duty evasion, trafficking, proliferation, money laundering, and terrorism-related activities. Countries like Kenya and Uganda, which contribute troops to AMISOM, engage in intelligence-sharing within the framework of the mission. The mission involves a collective effort to counter the threat of al-Shabaab in Somalia, and intelligence-sharing is crucial for effective operations.

Most recently, from 27th to 31st January 2024, the Heads of Intelligence and Security Services from the Eastern Africa region met in Mombasa, Kenya to discuss how they can enhance their cooperation for security and stability (Oratua, 2024). The Mashariki Cooperation Conference was attended by Kenya, Tanzania, Uganda, Somalia, Ethiopia, Burundi, Rwanda, Eritrea, Mozambique, Comoros, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Djibouti,

Malawi, South Sudan, and Seychelles. The leaders at the conference called for increased cooperation between security and intelligence actors in the region. They also acknowledged the increased need for capacity building to equip intelligence and security personnel with advanced skills in critical areas like data analysis, cyber security, and forensics (Ombati, 2024).

Military efforts and Counterterrorism

The Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) is a REC of the African Union with eight member states - Djibouti, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Kenya, Sudan, Somalia, South Sudan, and Uganda. It aims to enhance regional cooperation in food security and environmental protection, economic cooperation, regional integration and social development, peace, and security. IGAD adopted its "Plan of Action for the Prevention and Combating of Terrorism" in 2003. IGAD's earliest and boldest response to terrorism was the decision to launch the Peace Support Mission in Somalia (IGASOM) in 2005, which was replaced by the current AMISOM in 2007.

IGAD also put in place the Convention on Mutual Legal Assistance and Extradition in 2009. The convention aims

U.S. forces host a range day with the Danab brigade in Somalia, on April 5, 2021. (Photo Credits: US Air Force / Staff Sgt. Zoe Russell)

In August 2022, member states of the EAC agreed to deploy a regional force to the DRC, which had joined the regional economic block in March of that year. Burundi, Kenya, South Sudan, Tanzania and Uganda are all providing troops in the East Africa Community Regional Force (EACRF) that fight jointly with Congolese force

to strengthen cooperation and coordination among member states in the areas of mutual legal assistance and extradition and provide safeguard measures in both areas. The IGAD Convention on Mutual Legal Assistance and Extradition in 2009 represents a significant milestone in regional efforts to combat transnational crime, enhance law enforcement cooperation, and ensure effective judicial cooperation among member states within the IGAD region.

The EAC has already set up the Eastern Africa Standby Force (EASF) to support peace in the region. EASF is made up of troops from 10 states — Burundi, Comoros, Djibouti, Ethiopia, Kenya, Rwanda, Seychelles, Somalia, Sudan and Uganda, while Eritrea and South Sudan are yet to join. Burundi, Comoros and Somalia—are yet to ratify the agreement that established the force. The EASF maintains a standby force that can be rapidly deployed to member states in case of a terrorist threat or attack. Their ability to quickly respond helps to contain and neutralize terrorist activities in the region. The 5,800-member force attained full operational capability in December 2014.

In August 2022, member states of the EAC agreed to deploy a regional force to the DRC, which had joined the regional economic block in March of that year. Burundi, Kenya, South Sudan, Tanzania and Uganda are all providing troops in the East Africa Community Regional Force (EACRF) that fight jointly with Congolese force, Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) president Felix Tsishekedi asked for EAC support in response to an alarming uptick of armed violence, including increased attacks on civilians and camps for the displaced, by the March 23 Movement (M23) rebel group, designated as a terrorist organisation, and other armed groups most active in eastern DRC (Sawyer, 2022).

Law enforcement

AFRIPOL is an institution of the African Union (AU) that promotes police cooperation among member states. Its goals are to enhance the capabilities of law enforcement agencies, foster collaboration in preventing and combating organized transnational crime, and share best practices. AFRIPOL offers online and in-person training, workshops, internships, and scholarships to law enforcement agencies. In partnership with INTERPOL, AFRIPOL successfully conducted its first counter-terrorism operation called "FLASH-PACT" in 2022. This operation aimed to improve the ability of border officers to identify suspected terrorists and disrupt their networks. It involved multiple African countries, police, customs, border forces, and counter-terrorism experts. Phase one took place from July 14-18, involving Djibouti, Kenya, Mozambique, Rwanda, Somalia, Sudan, Tanzania, and Uganda. Phase two occurred from September 4-8, with Cameroon, Cote d'Ivoire, Benin, Burkina Faso, Congo (DRC), and Nigeria participating (Interpol, 2022).

Kenya also hosts the Eastern Africa Police Chiefs Cooperation Organization (EAPCCO). This is a regional police body whose membership consists of Chiefs of Police of the 14 countries- Burundi, Comoros, Democratic Republic of Congo, Djibouti, Ethiopia, Eritrea, Kenya, Seychelles, Somalia, Sudan, South Sudan, Rwanda, Tanzania, and Uganda. EAPCCO was established in 1998 with the aim of harmonizing, and strengthening police cooperation and joint strategies, sharing of crime-related information and harmonization of laws to enhance the capacity of law enforcement agencies to combat transnational organized crime. In 2012, the Regional Chiefs of Police unanimously and unequivocally established the EAPCCO Regional Counter Terrorism Centre of Excellence (CTCoE). The Centre acts as a think tank on counter-terrorism issues focusing on timely sharing of actionable information, coordinated planning, capacity building and conducting research on topical issues to help inform policy regarding terrorism and violent extremism. The CTCoE is supported and maintained by the EAPCCO member countries through annual subscriptions. As EAPCCO host, Kenya has provided office space, the initial staff to kick start the Centre, and catered for expenses.

Specialised capacity-building assistance to criminal justice officials and policy makers

The United Nations Office of Drugs and Crime (UNODC) has had a presence in Nairobi since 1988 as headquarters for its Regional Office for Eastern Africa (ROEA) that covers 13 countries: Burundi, Comoros, Djibouti, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Kenya, Madagascar, Mauritius, Rwanda, Seychelles, Somalia, Tanzania and Uganda. In 2009, these countries signed the Nairobi Declaration, endorsing the Regional Programme on Promoting the Rule of Law and Human Security in Eastern Africa, 2009-2015. It aimed to respond to main evolving human security threats including terrorism prevention, and was renewed from 2016 to 2022 (Regional Ministerial Conference, 2009). As per the 2004 United Nations draft resolution on strengthening international cooperation and technical assistance in preventing and combating terrorism, the UNODC's Terrorism Prevention Branch provides technical assistance in preventing and combating terrorism, including training judicial and prosecutorial personnel in the proper implementation of the universal anti-terrorism instruments.

Partnership for Legal Empowerment and Aid Delivery (PLEAD) is a KES 4.2 billion (EUR 34.15 million) partnership funded by the European Union that is improving the delivery of justice services and use of alternatives to imprisonment in Kenya. Through PLEAD, UNODC provided technical assistance to five criminal justice institutions to strengthen the administration of justice and capacity and functionality of criminal justice institutions involved in various aspects of the justice system namely - the National Council on the Administration of Justice,

> ... the Partnership for Regional East Africa Counterterrorism (PREACT), is a U.S.-funded and implemented multi-year, multi-faceted program designed to build the capacity and cooperation of military, law enforcement, and civilian actors across East Africa to counter terrorism in a comprehensive fashion

the Judiciary, Probation and Aftercare Service, Witness Protection Agency and the Office of the Director of Public Prosecution (ODPP). PLEAD ran until 2022 and is the European Union's largest justice sector investment in Sub-Saharan Africa.

Since 2020, UNODC, funded by the Government of Germany, has supported the Eastern Africa Police Chiefs Cooperation Organization (EAPCCO) and its Regional Counter-Terrorism Centre of Excellence (CTCoE) through a project that aims to strengthen capacities of law enforcement agents. The project concentrates on providing technical assistance, capacity building, and operational guidance to enable the EAPCCO members, the EAPCCO Secretariat, and the EAPCCO CTCoE to effectively cooperate in criminal matters to prevent and counter-terrorism, violent extremism, and transnational organized crime in Eastern Africa (UNODC, 2022).

IGAD's Capacity Building Programme Against Terrorism (ICPAT) has played a critical role in strengthening the capacity of East African countries to combat terrorism, piracy, drug trafficking, and small-arms smuggling through a variety of information-sharing initiatives and the joint training of enforcement officials. In support of United Nations Security Council Resolution 2383 (2017) to combat piracy along Somalia's coastline, Kenya spearheaded an effort to establish a regional maritime coordination center designed to support a worldwide navigation and warning system for ships sailing off the coast of Somalia, and has also set up a search-and-rescue center equipped with state-of-the-art operational systems, including a Global Distress Security System.

First established in 2009, the Partnership for Regional East Africa Counterterrorism (PREACT), is a U.S.-funded and implemented multi-year, multi-faceted program designed to build the capacity and cooperation of military, law enforcement, and civilian actors across East Africa to counter terrorism in a comprehensive fashion. It uses law enforcement, military, and development resources to achieve its strategic objectives, including reducing the operational capacity of terrorist networks; developing a rule of law framework for countering terrorism in partner nations; enhancing border security; countering the financing of terrorism; and reducing the appeal of radicalization and recruitment to violent extremism. PREACT partners include Djibouti, Kenya, Mozambique, Somalia, Tanzania, and Uganda. Burundi, Comoros, Ethiopia, Rwanda, Seychelles, South Sudan, and Sudan are also members of PREACT. PREACT's

collaborative and regional approach emphasizes the need for a concerted effort across various sectors to effectively counter the complex challenges posed by terrorism in East Africa. The program underscores the importance of integrating law enforcement, military, and development resources to achieve lasting impact in the region.

The Global Counterterrorism Forum (GCTF) East Africa Capacity-Building Working Group (EAWG) was established in September 2017 to broaden the scope of the previous GCTF Horn of Africa (HoA) Working Group, active between 2011 and 2017 and Co-Chaired by the European Union and Turkey. The EAWG focuses capacity-building efforts on: homegrown terrorism and returnees; national and regional P/CVE conducive to terrorism action plans; gendered perspectives in CVE/CT; strategic communications; dialogue and community engagement; nexus between organized crime and terrorism; preventing and countering violent extremism conducive to terrorism in prisons. Additionally, the East Africa Capacity-Building Working Group is: encouraging the implementation of the Rabat Memorandum on Good Practices for Effective Counterterrorism Practice in the Criminal Justice Sector, specifically those good practices relevant to the criminalization of terrorist activities and the use of legal frameworks to promote rule of law-compliant responses to terrorism in the East Africa region; promoting regional and international cooperation and providing an avenue for civilian counterterrorism capacity-building coordination; and providing a forum for networking and cooperation among a variety of stakeholders to promote dialogue, understanding, analysis-sharing, lessons learned, and collaborative partnerships (GCTF 2012).

East African Courts Deciding Terrorism Cases

Domestic courts in East African countries have interpreted provisions in anti-terrorism legislation, and clarified the elements of various terror offences that prosecuting agencies must prove in order to support a conviction. Cases including Nur Deka Maalim v Republic (KE), Uganda v Hassan (UG), and others have clarified the evidence threshold to convict suspects for terror offences such as being a terrorist fighter, collecting information, traveling to a country for terrorism training and possession. Various decisions have also clarified rules on issues relating to anti-terror laws and criminal procedure. These include issues of bail i.e. DPP vs Bokeem Mohamed (TZ), Kalule v Uganda (UG); due process i.e. Uganda v Sekabira (UG), Sar

Guracha Haro v R (KE) – criminal targeting, R v Farid Hadi Ahmed (TZ), R v Ahmad Abolfathi (KE), Richard Baraza v R (KE), and limitations on civic space i.e. Rashid Ahmed Kilindo v. Attorney General (TZ), C.OR.D v Attorney Genreal (KE). Some courts have observed malicious prosecutions and guarded against the application of criminal laws to target human rights defenders (HRDs). In the Kenyan case of Wilfred Olal vs the Attorney General, the High Court prohibited and permanently stayed the criminal prosecutions brought against the petitioners, HRDs arrested during a demonstration. The court stated: "The machinery of criminal justice cannot be allowed to become a tool for the police [to] violate the constitutional rights of citizens."

The proposed African Court of Justice and Human Rights is set to become the first regional court to have jurisdiction over the crime of 'terrorism', with the adoption of Article 28G of the Malabo Protocol of 2014.

Regional Disputes

The Kenya-Somalia maritime triangle dispute which began in 2012 and ended up with the adjudication of the International Court of Justice (ICJ) has greatly affected Kenya-Somalia bilateral relations on regional security and peace. It created unstable conditions that drew neighboring states as Kenya and Somalia mutually recalled their respective Ambassadors and Somalia accused Djibouti of siding with Kenya. This has the potential to further cripple regional integration in the Horn of Africa and within the IGAD community where Somalia threatened to withdraw its membership (KIPPRA2021).

The DRC accuses Uganda and Rwanda of supporting M23 rebels. It consequently denied Rwanda permission to deploy its troops despite the latter's security concerns from rebel groups in the eastern region, including the Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Rwanda (FDLR) (Malingha, 2022). The United States (U.S.), the U.N., France, and the U.K also openly called on Rwanda to cease support for the M23 armed group and to withdraw its troops from the DRC. Rwanda's president Paul Kagame has denied allegations and further accused the DRC of firing rockets into the country, resulting in increased tension that could reignite fighting between Rwanda and DRC, and draw in the broader region. The Rwandan government has also accused the DRC of supporting the FLDR. Moreover, the DRC has been concerned that the EAC has not acknowledged and responded to its claims

against Rwanda, whose government along with Uganda's were in 2002 also named in the Final Report of the Panel of Experts on the exploitation of resources in the DRC.

There have been concerns about EACRF member countries' abilities to fulfil its overly broad mandate and to sustain the effort financially as each country will foot the bill for its troop contributions. Kenya's motivations allegedly include seeking commercial opportunities in eastern DRC which are similar to Uganda and Rwanda coupled with wider regional security concerns. This may threaten Rwanda's hegemony in the country and carry further risks of natural resource exploitation as (Fabricius, 2022). The stability of the DRC is crucial for the overall stability of the Great Lakes region. Instability or conflict in the DRC can have spillover effects, leading neighboring countries to engage in efforts to prevent and mitigate potential threats.

Impacts of Counterterrorism responses

Terrorist and insurgent violence in East Africa has killed thousands and left even more wounded. Numerous terrorist attacks can be attributed to groups such as the al Shabaab, Lord's Resistance Army (LRA), Allied Democratic Forces (ADF), Party for the Liberation of the Hutu People (PALIPEHUTU), National Liberation Front (FNL) (Burundi), Mujahideen Youth Movement (MYM), Eritrean Liberation Front, Uganda Freedom Movement (UFM), Hizbul al Islam (Somalia), Jabha East Africa, National Council for Defense of Democracy (NCDD), Uganda People's Army. Islamic Courts Union (ICU), Janjaweed, the Sudan People's Liberation Army, the Justice and Equality Movement. and Ahlu Sunah Wa Jama'a (ASWJ) among others.

In 2022, al-Shabaab's terrorism-related deaths in East Africa rose by nearly 23%, marking the first increase in six years. Of the 784 deaths attributed to al-Shabaab, 93% occurred in Somalia and 7% in Kenya. The group initiated its first attacks in Ethiopia, resulting in no casualties. Exploiting Ethiopia's internal instability post-Tigray conflict, al-Shabaab seeks to expand its influence (Fabricius, 2022). Increased terrorist incidents are notable in the Democratic Republic of Congo, Tanzania, and Uganda. ASWJ in Cabo Del Gado, Mozambique, has attacked Tanzanian border regions since 2020. ADF, linked with ASWJ, executed attacks in Uganda, involving suicide bombers and recruiting members regionally. M23, labeled a terrorist group by the Congolese government in 2022, experienced heightened violence, causing numerous deaths and displacing over 170,000 people by June 2022.

Progress against terrorist organizations in Eastern Africa faces challenges, including inadequate counterterrorism training for law enforcement, insufficient expertise in drafting relevant legislation, particularly in extradition, mutual legal assistance, and information sharing. Border control and maritime boundary monitoring are insufficient. Key stakeholders lack awareness of national and regional counterterrorism objectives. There is a lack of interdepartmental cooperation at the national level and insufficient coordination at the subregional and international levels. Communication infrastructure is inadequate, and there is a scarcity of technology and hardware. Support for addressing conditions conducive to terrorism, including core development priorities like health, education, and transportation, is insufficient (Rosand, et al 2008).

Public support toward counterterrorism initiatives has declined because of human rights violations, and when confronted with more pressing daily challenges such as HIV/AIDS, poverty, widespread local crime, and trafficking of small arms and light weapons, spending on counterterrorism has at times been viewed as an unnecessary diversion of scarce resources.

The areas in the subregion that may be most in need are unfortunately the least accessible and secure. Ongoing conflicts and security issues at times bar the operations of organizations engaged in even the most basic humanitarian assistance. Humanitarian crises may arise, with implications for food security, health, and overall stability.

Concerns regarding the limitations and activities of foreign investigators in the region have arisen once again. The absence of parliamentary oversight in the decision to establish a Joint Terrorism Task Force (JTTF) in Kenya has reignited worries about the involvement of foreign investigators, similar to previous reports of direct participation by the FBI and other agencies in counterterrorism operations in the coastal area of the country. This involvement targeted individuals suspected of being involved in early attacks, such as the 1998 U.S. Embassy bombing in Nairobi and the 2002 Kikambala bombings.

In 2008, victims of rendition operations from Kenya to the United States and Somalia reported to Human Rights Watch that they were interrogated by intelligence officers from the U.S., U.K., and Israel following their arrests in Kenya and Somalia (Namwaya, 2021). A 2021

Ugandan authorities swing into action to bring to order and arrest perpetrators of the suicide bombings in the capital, Kampala on November 16, 2021 (Photo Credits: Ronald Kabuubi/AP Photo)

report by Declassified UK alleges that the U.S. and U.K. intelligence services play a significant role in abusive counterterrorism operations in Kenya. According to the report, the CIA and Britain's MI6, sometimes assisted by the Israeli Mossad, have been involved in making counterterrorism decisions in Kenya (The Start, 2020). The report suggests that the CIA not only funds a specialized counterterrorism unit known as the Rapid Response Team (RRT), but also plays a role in its establishment, training, and provision of weapons. The RRT comprises around 60 officers from Kenya's paramilitary police unit, the General Service Unit (GSU). Allegations claim that CIA operatives have been directly involved in planning some of the RRT's operations and occasionally participate in these operations themselves. The RRT has been responsible for apprehending high-value terror suspects and conducting rendition operations, killings, and alleged summary executions. The involvement of these countries raises concerns about their ability to advocate for accountability regarding abuses committed by the security forces in East Africa (HRW 2016).

The United States is facing allegations of conducting covert military operations in Africa, often without public knowledge or approval from Congress. Reports suggest that the US has been involved in armed conflicts, either directly or through proxies, and has carried out airstrikes in more than 20 African countries (Ebright, 2022). The

US armed forces Africa Command (AFRICOM) was established in 2007 and has significantly expanded over time. Recently disclosed planning documents from 2019 indicated the existence of around 29 bases in 15 African nations (Turse, 2020). In Kenya, for instance, there are three US bases including naval facilities in Mombasa and Lamu counties, as well as an inland base in Wajir county. One of these bases, Camp Simba in Manda Bay, Lamu, is part of a collaboration between the US Armed Forces and the Kenyan Defense Forces. Its primary role is to offer training and counterterrorism assistance to East African partners, respond to emergencies, and safeguard US interests in the region. Task Force Red Dragon, a specialized US military unit, is stationed at the camp to work alongside Kenyan forces in combatting the al-Shabaab terrorist group (Clements, 2022).

Security cooperation authorities 10 U.S.C. § 333 and 10 U.S.C. § 127e have served as the basis for the United States' expanding presence in Africa. Under the former, the U.S. Department of Defense (D.OD.) is granted the ability to train and equip foreign forces worldwide. Meanwhile, the latter empowers the D.OD. to provide "support" to foreign forces, paramilitaries, and private individuals who, in turn, assist in U.S. counterterrorism efforts. These section 127 programs have been initiated in approximately 15 African and Asian nations, including Kenya and Somalia. Unfortunately, access to information

regarding the specifics of § 127e programs, their legal justifications, and the extent of combat involvement remains highly classified and is seldom shared with the U.S. Congress. Furthermore, host countries do not disclose the presence of U.S. forces to the public and are unaware of the operational activities being carried out. This lack of transparency poses a risk of unmonitored U.S. involvement in unnecessary and unauthorized conflicts, with potential dangerous escalations.

Focus, primarily and at times soley, on counter-terrorism with heavy investments in military and security forces may divert resources away from development, education, and healthcare, perpetuating a cycle of poverty and instability. Security measures, particularly those involving border controls and restrictions on trade, can have adverse economic effects. They may disrupt commerce and impede the movement of goods and people, affecting local economies as seen in the Kenya, Uganda and Somalia boarders. Overemphasis on military solutions without addressing underlying social, economic, and political factors may only provide temporary relief.

Many countries in East Africa have put in place anti-terrorism legislation that raises human rights concerns and have led to major human rights violations. These have ushered in several of its regulatory preferences including proscription of groups and individuals, sanctions, emergency powers that impact due process, legal proceedings and freedom of movement, countering terrorism finance measures and limitations on freedoms of expression.

There are a series of challenges to increased civil society engagement on CT-related issues in East Africa. Their engagement on issues of terrorism and counterterrorism may open up local civil society groups to retaliation by governments (Rosand et al, 2008). In September 2010, Ugandan police arrested the director of the Muslim Human Rights Forum (MHRF), Kimathi and lawyer, Mbugua Mureithi who were visiting Uganda to arrange legal representation for the seven Kenyan suspects facing trial for the Kampala World Cup bombing in July that year. Mureithi was released and deported to Kenya three days later, while Kimathi was held for almost a year, jointly accused with his clients for the bombings. Ugandan prosecutors claimed he funded al Shabaab operatives to rent a safe house and transport explosives. He was unconditionally released and all charges against him were dropped. While the Kenyan government denied asking Uganda to arrest Kimathi, it confirmed that it offered him no assistance despite the circumstances of his arrest. The government spokesperson stated, "We are not sure whether Kimathi really is a human rights defender, or if he was involved in the attack." Moreover, the Kenyan government in 2011 summarily deported Clara Gutteridge, a British human rights monitor who had sought to observe one of Kimathi's bail hearings but denied entry to Uganda and was detained overnight at Entebbe Airport in December 2010.

In Uganda, and Kenya, members of civil society organisations (CSOs) have been arrested and charged under anti-terror and CFT legislation. Ethiopia and Kenya have also imposed discriminatory administrative measures against CSOs, including arbitrarily accusing them of supporting terror groups, deregistration, and financial sanctions. Several methods have also been used to limit foreign funding including: requiring prior government approval for the receipt of international funding; capping the amount of international funding that a CSO is allowed to receive; requiring international funding to be routed through government-controlled entities; restricting activities that can be undertaken with international funding; Prohibiting CSOs from receiving international funding from specific donors; constraining international funding through the overly broad application of anti–money laundering and counterterrorism measures; taxing the receipt of international funding; imposing onerous reporting requirements on the receipt of international funding; and use of defamation, treason, and other laws to bring criminal charges against recipients of international funding.

Overly aggressive counterterrorism policies could potentially worsen the terrorist threat by alienating local Muslim communities. Aggressive counterterrorism measures, such as mass arrests, profiling, and heavy-handed tactics, can alienate local Muslim communities which has contributed to a breakdown in trust between these communities and security forces, hindering cooperation and information-sharing. Overly aggressive policies may result in human rights abuses, affecting innocent individuals and exacerbating grievances inadvertently contributing to the very conditions that terrorists exploit for recruitment and support.

In addition, focusing on counterterrorism potentially undermines the support for and credibility of groups among local populations, who may be mistrusting of

the "state." The operating space given to civil society organizations varies from country to country. However, there are growing reports of increasing government hostility reported by CSOs in a majority of East African countries. The concern that NGOs may offer a convenient conduit for funding violent Islamist radicals has brought increased scrutiny of the activities of Islamic charities in the subregion.

Positive Impacts

Despite the growing criticism of the militaristic nature of the US-led counterterror engagements in East Africa, there are positive outcomes.

- Coordinated raids, intelligence operations, and targeted arrests have dismantled key terrorist cells and disrupted their operational capabilities. In some instances, tackling terror threats militarily has not only enabled policymakers to dismantle al Qaeda's cells but has also weakened their organizational structure.

- These counterterror efforts have expanded capacity for a multidimensional counterterror coalition with African counterparts as is the case of the US-Kenya asymmetric bilateral relation.

- Counter-terrorism measures have fostered regional cooperation among East African countries. Regional organizations such as the East African Community (EAC) and the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) have facilitated information-sharing, joint training programs, and collaboration on border security. This has led to a more regional coordinated response to terrorism, enabling countries to collectively address common security challenges.

- By 2020, about 4,400 US Military troops were stationed across the East African region specifically in AMISOM's major troop-contributing countries, notably Burundi, Djibouti, Kenya and Uganda. In Djibouti, the US Military base has been significant in advising regional counterterrorism efforts against the Somalia-based al Shabaab terrorist group. It has been through a coordinated and collective counterterror operation that these countries have been instrumental in liberating several areas which were under the control of al Shabaab, in Somalia (Mukuti, 2022).

- The U.S. works alongside the UN, the African Union, the European Union, and other international partners to support the development of the Somali security forces and seeks to strengthen Somalia's ability to counter violent extremist organization (VEO).

- The counterterror operations in East Africa have significantly weakened al Shabaab's ability to maintain and expand their influence in the region. Consequently, al Shabaab has been forced to seek new territories to re-establish their presence, as acquiring control over an area has always been their primary objective. This would enable them to govern the local population, attract and enlist new members, and generate funds through illegal activities (Mukuti, 2022).

- Enhanced capacity of local security forces and law enforcement agencies in East Africa has not only reinforced national security but also fostered self-reliance, reducing the need for prolonged international interventions. The extensive US financing towards counterterror initiatives such as PREACT as well as the implementation of AFRICOM have been instrumental in addressing insecurity vulnerabilities stemming from the neighboring Somalia whose chronic state of instability, and socio-economic and political instability permeated the rise in terrorism.

- The joint operation between Kenyan troops under the aegis of the EACRF and the Armed Forces of the Republic of Congo (FARDC) counterparts stabilized normalcy in the troubled Eastern part of DRC.

- Since March 2009, under Operation Allied Protector, NATO has been patrolling the waters outside the coast of Somalia to deter or disrupt pirate activities that threaten humanitarian and economic interests off the Horn of Africa. NATO's

> "Enhanced capacity of local security forces and law enforcement agencies in East Africa has not only reinforced national security but also fostered self-reliance, reducing the need for prolonged international interventions

military presence, supported by the EU, is inarguably assisting the safe arrival of humanitarian assistance to the suffering Somali population and at the same time contributing to improved prospects for economic development in Eastern African countries, which are negatively impacted by pirate activities

Recommendations

Enforced coordination and deeper regional integration should be solidified to avert any possible inter-state disputes. Any disintegrated cooperation has the potential to quell solidarity and interdependence amongst the visibly asymmetric neighboring states in the face of a much lethal and emerging security threat such as terrorism

The antagonistic relationship between civil society and regimes in the subregion has stifled civil society engagement. It is thus critical to continue engagement by international NGOs in support of civic space promotion and protection measures, including efforts to champion reforms targeting international bodies, domestic CSO regulatory bodies including financial reporting agencies, and security actors among others.

It is essential that counterterrorism operations are proportionate, transparent and adheres to due process minimizing the risk of human rights abuses. Ensuring due process and accountability in counterterrorism operations with countries implementing a holistic approach that involves robust legal and judicial oversight mechanisms providing a comprehensive mechanism for redress. Strengthen parliamentary oversight to ensure transparency and accountability in decision-making related to counterterrorism operations.

States must strike a balance between military and development approaches. Prioritize development initiatives alongside security measures to address root causes and promote sustainable stability.

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The Impact of Climate Diplomacy in Promoting Sustainable Development in the COMESA Region

By Rabecca Kavithe Ndeto & Japheth Musau Kasimbu

Abstract

The Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa region experiences significant environmental challenges which in turn affect the health, security, and socioeconomic development of member states. States lack the capacity and knowledge to vehemently handle climate-related issues. The climate challenges include; floods, drought, desertification, and resource scarcity. The purpose of this paper is to clearly outline pathways connecting to mitigation and resilience in addressing climate change impacts on socioeconomic development. The significance of this study is to identify climate challenges within the COMESA region and highlight diverse ideas on how to leverage resources, influence Regional Corporations, and implement climate policies directed towards adaptive measures in the region. The research will employ both qualitative and quantitative research methodologies. By qualitative research method, data will be collected from interviews with government officials, policymakers, and representatives from different societies in the region. For quantitative data, the researcher will analyze data from already existing published materials related to the topic and within the COMESA region.After conducting thorough research, the researcher will provide profound findings and recommendations at the end. The findings and recommendations will be drawn from data analysis.

Introduction

Over the past decades, the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA)region has experienced both challenges and opportunities related to climate diplomacy, development and sustainability. Climate diplomacy offers different solutions to different challenges through promotion of collaboration in the region, mobilizing resources and nurturing policy comprehensibility. Climate diplomacy creates impact in the COMESA region through actions such as enhanced regional cooperation, capacity building, technology transfer and addressing climate-related migration and conflict. In addition, the COMESA region consists of numerous diversified activities in terms of economy, ecosystems and socio-political standpoint. States in the COMESA region face climate change and its impact therefore directly affecting economic development, food security and water resources (Boiral, 2006). By addressing climate change impacts in the region, the effort gears the region towards economic sustainability and stability. Therefore, climate diplomacy remains a crucial tool in addressing climate change by fostering regional and international cooperation in order to enforce effective climate actions and policies.

Scholars in diplomacy and international studies define climate diplomacy as the utilization of diplomatic actions to negotiate, collaborate and foster multinational agreements and initiatives that target on rationalizing climate change and effecting sustainable development. In reference to the COMESA, climate diplomacy remains outstanding through engagements with international agreements such as the Paris Agreement but again implements intra-regional relationship and cooperation. Climate diplomacy facilitates states in the COMESA region to share knowledge, technology and available resources hence advancing their capacity building and advancement in addressing climate-related issues. Also, climate diplomacy enables the COMESA region to access both finance and technical support from global institutions, multi-national corporations and developed countries. The mobilized resources achieved through climate financing facilitate implementation of climate mitigation and adaptation projects in the region. The financed projects enable the COMESA region to experience classified financial status which is often beyond reach, specifically for developing countries. In addition, through diplomatic engagements, COMESA

region benefits with the ability to secure financial assistance and expertise to advance and achieve the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Therefore, climate diplomacy advocates for strengthening climate resilience in the region and sustainable economic development and growth.

Climate Diplomacy History in the COMESA Region

Reflecting back from 2000, COMESA member states started the journey of addressing climate change hence the results of sustainable development. The member states' effort portrays through the ability to raise awareness on climate change. The awareness revolved around impacts on biodiversity, agriculture and water resources. During the same period, the COMESA region developed habits of holding dialogues and cooperation platforms, whereby member states got an opportunity to discuss, share experiences and strategies on how to deal with climate change.

In 2009, COMESA member states established the COMESA climate initiative. The COMESA Climate Initiative had different responsibilities in fostering climate mitigation and resilience in the region. The initiative's main focus was on mainstream climate change into the member states' agenda and willingness to participate in development and capacity building and also implementation of effective climate policies. Additionally, the initiative's focused on improving land productivity, empowering agricultural practice and educating the involved community about climate change and its impact. The initiative as well sought to improve and facilitate institutional framework for a better region.

In 2010, the COMESA region updated on interests to join international climate diplomacy whereby member states actively participated in international climate negotiations such as the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC). From 2010 to 2023, member states collaborated to offer merged voices which advocated for increased support for climate change specifically in developing countries. During the same period, COMESA region developed strategies and partnerships with international organizations, donor, business communities and development partners.

President William Ruto of Kenya second right and other leaders during the 23rd COMESA Summit in Bujumbura, Burundi (Photo Credits: PCS)

The collaborations and partnerships enabled the region to access financial assistance and capitation for sustainable development.

In the COMESA region, there exists different advancements in reference with the post-Paris Agreement. Globally, the Paris Agreement in 2015 marked an important movement to different regions in regards to climate diplomacy. During the Paris Agreement, COMESA region agreed on commitment to foster Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) with a focus on reduction of greenhouse gas emissions within the region. Also, the region emphasized on the importance of climate financing and how states would achieve the aforementioned commitment. Post-Paris Agreement, COMESA members states have shown their commitment by aligning their national policies with global climate goals, resulting into sustainable development promotion through climate actions such as renewable energy, climate-smart agriculture and environmental conservation.

From 2000-2023, COMESA member states through climate diplomacy efforts, has tried to implement regional cooperation and innovative solutions thus the ability to address climate related challenges. The region prides in several initiatives such as the African Renewable Energy Initiative (AREI) which facilitates the expansion of renewable energy in COMESA region and across Africa. As well, the initiatives enable sustainable economic growth due to the shift into integrating climate action into wider development plans. The history highlights all necessary transformations and evolution regarding climate change that the COMESA region has achieved since 2000. The transformation dates from creating and raising awareness to creating initiatives

> The negative socioeconomic effects of natural resources-based conflicts include political tensions, underdevelopment, food insecurity, increased poverty levels and gender-based violence

and active participation at global stages to address climate change.

COMESA Member States Advocacy for Climate Diplomacy

The COMESA region consists of twenty one (21) member states; namely Kenya, Rwanda, Uganda, Tanzania, Burundi, Ethiopia, Comoros, Malawi, Madagascar, Swaziland, Egypt, Eritrea, Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Libya, Sudan, Somalia, Seychelles, Tunisia, Zambia, Mauritius and Zimbabwe. The twenty-one member states collectively collaborate in addressing issues to do with climate change. States also share knowledge and support each other specifically on engagement with other international institutions to increase support in climate mitigation and adaptation efforts (Creegan & Flynn, 2020).

The region faces both economic and political instability hence hindering desired climate diplomacy advocacy magnitude. Financial constraints involve limited financial resources to facilitate investments in climate diplomacy. Some states face challenges while attempting to secure financial support from international financiers. On the other hand, climate finances might be available, but accountability and transparency on the usage of the donations remains evident. Concerning political instability, some COMESA member states such as Democratic Republic of Congo, Somalia, Ethiopia and Kenya scare away potential climate financiers hence inconsistency in climate action and plan.

Data Source: Research 2024

From the data above, COMESA region face both political instability at 30%, economic instability at 28% while other states fall under the category of others, which means, those states experience either political or economic instability. COMESA region is full of resources; utilized, underutilized and over-utilized. Over utilization leads to exhaustion of the resources hence conflict over limited resources. Africans possess the potential to utilize their resources in meaningful processes while taking care of the environment. A clash over resources leads to political instability which contributes directly to economic instability. Climate diplomacy in the COMESA region creates an environment where states can thrive collectively.

Knowledge Sharing and Capacity Building

Knowledge sharing and capacity building contributes to positive impact in environmental diplomacy. In the COMESA region, capacity building and knowledge sharing facilitates implementation of climate policies, adoption of sustainable practices and leverage resilience against climate change. Climate diplomacy in the region is practiced through activities such as strengthening institutions, information exchange, technology transfer, international partnership and best practices sharing.

Concerning strengthening institutional capacities, COMESA has a responsibility to equip member states with institutional capacity to facilitate management and respond to climate change. Activities around strengthening institutional capacities include; intensify policy frameworks, developing state structures and improving coordination among state agencies. In 2009, the COMESA region launched Climate Initiative that facilitates strengthening of institutional capacities. Since its establishment, COMESA Climate Initiative manages to integrate climate change into both nationally and regionally hence the implementation of development plans. The integration ensures alignment and coherence of climate policies with the sustainable development goals (Boiral et al., 2012).

Strengthening institutional capacity also involves accepting different capacity-building programs hence the ability to benefit from technical assistance and training in the region. For example, the COMESA Climate Initiative since establishment, has facilitated several training and workshops aligned to climate change mitigation and adaptation strategies. The workshops and training in return have enabled state officials and policy makers to produce and foster trenchant climate action plans. The initiative also facilitates data collection and governance capabilities, which play a critical role in implementing an abreast decision-making and monitoring advancement.

The aspect of regional initiatives also contributes towards capacity building and knowledge sharing. Regional initiatives such as Tripartite Climate Change Programme, a project within the COMESA framework plays a critical role in strengthening and enabling capacity building and knowledge sharing. The Tripartite Climate Change Programme covers not only the COMESA region but also the East African Community (EAC) and the Southern Africa Development Community (SADC). Additionally, the Tripartite Climate Change Programme focuses on areas such as disaster risk reduction, climate data management, early warning systems, tools and knowledge provision to the member states to construct resilience against climate issues.

Another remarkable initiative in the COMESA region known as the African Renewable Energy Initiative (AREI) focuses on a target to provide and supply Africa with enough renewable energy. The project has enabled the COMESA region with enthusiasm to implement usage of renewable energy in terms of solar, hydro-power and wind. Due to continuous usage of renewable energy, the region has experienced reduction in greenhouse gas emission, supported the United Nations 2030 Agenda and enhance energy security within the region.

On the other hand, international support and partnerships enhance capacity building within the COMESA region in various ways. COMESA member states have the potential to interact with global organizations and initiatives for them to access quality and quantity expertise, resources and technical support. Valuable multilateral and bilateral interaction provides the COMESA region with assistance, specifically from institutions and organizations such as the Green Climate Fund (GCF), the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) and other multilateral donors. In addition, more collaboration within the COMESA region include African Climate Policy Centre (ACPC) which is recognized as part of the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA) provides the region with an outstanding capacity building and technical reinforcement programs. The international assistance comes with an attached advantage such as development of national climate policies, hence in return addressing climate change within the region.

The Significance of Climate Diplomacy within the COMESA Region

Climate diplomacy draws numerous advantages in the COMESA region. The significance involves; enhancing resilience and adaptation, social and human impact, economic development and policy harmonization. Climate diplomacy facilitates economic growth through various ways such as; smart agriculture, infrastructure development, sustainable management of natural resources, trade and promotion of green economy. The persistence to uphold green economy has enabled

COMESA member states drones for mechanical pollination in smart applications technology make agriculture promising and affordable in the effort to address food insecurity challenge. (Photo Credit: Shutterstock/Albert Nangara)

industries and companies to adopt green business hence reducing carbon footprint and embracing sustainable manufacturing methods.

On matters agricultural resilience, climate diplomacy has immensely contributed towards climate-smart agricultural practices in all COMESA member states. The practices include innovative farm techniques and introduction of different resilient crops which result into increased food production and food security in the region. Bilateral relations from different states in the region instrumentally facilitates the region with knowledge exchange and other best economic practices. Millions of COMESA residence rely on agriculture for subsistence and economic development. Climate diplomacy therefore creates positive impact in economic stability and growth in the region.

In the past five decades, Africa relied on monopolized power supply such as fossil fuels. The fuel did not serve enough purpose in industries, institutions and even residential areas. Power challenges discouraged economic growth within the COMESA region. The introduction of renewable energy in the region reduced challenges associated with power shortage and environmental pollution. Climate diplomacy plays an important role in advancing Implementation, access and

usage of renewable in the region. The region experiences climate diplomacy efforts through installation of hydro-power, wind and solar plants that facilities reduction of greenhouse gas emission and dependency on fossil fuels. Again, cross-border energy projects enable energy security and provision of reliable power specifically to the under-served areas in Africa. The aforementioned efforts are seen through regional cooperation in the energy sector.

Climate Challenges within the COMESA Region

Disruption of the earth's climate commands attention and resources due to its impact on the global economy. Environmental problems can lead to economic losses, political unrest, sociocultural tensions and loss of diversity which in turn threatens food and health security. According to an assessment report done by the European Environmental Agency in 2017, hydro-meteorological events (storms, floods, and landslides) account for 64% of the reported damages due to natural disasters in Europe since 1980 while climatology events (temperature, droughts, and forest fires) account for another 20%. The report further says that the winter storm Lothar (1999), the flooding in Italy and France (2000) flooding in central Europe (2002), and the drought

and heatwave (2003) were the most expensive climate disasters in Europe. In developing countries, flooding, soil erosion, and deforestation degrade the arable land and decrease fish stocks. This increases the cost of living pushing many to live below the poverty line due to an increase in food prices. Powerful tropical storms like Hurricane Katrina devastated New Orleans and the Gulf Coast causing immediate and significant damage to the region's economy.

Climate change and its potentially devastating short-term and long-term consequences have received heightened attention at global, national, and regional levels during this decade. Climate change is described as the 'biggest global health threat of the 21st century'. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) stated that 'Climate change currently contributes to the global burden of disease and is projected to increase threats to human health'. Evidence suggests that different mechanisms related to climate change like heat exposure, air pollution, chemical exposure, reduced food access, extreme weather, and climate-sensitive infectious diseases will have profound health impacts. All populations are expected to be affected by a changing climate that will inevitably affect the basic requirements for maintaining health: clean air, water, food, and shelter. The progress made by the global health community against climate-sensitive diseases like malaria, dengue fever, and other vector-borne infections can be altered and the resulting disease burden is likely to have a greater impact on particular groups that are most vulnerable (Aben et al., 2010).

Climate change is causing additional stress on the developing countries that are already facing extreme pressure due to urbanization and globalization. The IPCC states that social impacts will vary depending on age, socioeconomic class, occupation, and gender. The likely impacts of climate change will affect those most that have virtually the least responsibility for the problem the poorest and, particularly, poor women. The poorest will experience the worst consequences of climate change while at the same time having a reduced coping capacity (Busch and Hoffmann, 2007).

In Africa, people particularly depend on land for survival, conflicts related to land scarcity are occurring more and more, and when the land contains valuable mineral resources conflict can arise between neighboring communities and those who seek to control land for

resource extraction. According to climate diplomacy, many countries in Africa experienced violent conflict associated with resource competition, for example, conflict over land resources in Kilosa Tanzania and security implications of the Gilgal Gibe Dam in Ethiopia. The dam is supposed to regulate the seasonal flow the of Omo River to allow the growing of sugarcane. However, this will reduce water-causing conflict among downstream communities (Beirne, 2014). Kenya and Somalia are in dispute over the Indian Ocean maritime border mainly due to the discovery of oil and gas in the area.

Climate change is contributing to the start and escalation of violent conflicts in Africa (Hussona, 2021). Across the Sub-Sahara region changing climatic conditions, prolonged drought, floods, deforestation, desertification, and soil erosion have resulted in decreased productivity of the land, as well as changes in grazing patterns. In Sudan it led to a civil war lasting for over three decades. Both abundance and scarcity of natural resources are known to cause conflicts. In abundance, the elites tend to horde the rents and revenues from the available resources, the citizens feel taken advantage of and they may take arms to demand for their share of the national cake. Environmental scarcity refers to the diminishing availability of renewable natural resources like cropland, range-lands, forests, soil, water, fisheries and marine resources, and protected areas Environmental scarcity can cause conflicts such as revolutions, ethnic clashes and urban unrest.. Resource scarcity can lead to an insecure global system, therefore causing security anxieties. Scarcity of basic renewable resources like water, forests, and cropland can harm economic productivity and states' ability to provide for their citizens. This causes conflict and violence between states and within states.

Resource-based conflicts, especially over international shared resources can destabilize a whole region. Presence of natural resources when not handled well, provide a chance and reason for violent conflicts. The negative socioeconomic effects of natural resources-based conflicts include political tensions, underdevelopment, food insecurity, increased poverty levels and gender-based violence. lack of development, gender-based violence, which leads to poor provision of social services. It also aggravate political strains and volatility within a region. For instance, in the current dispute over the Nile River Basin between Ethiopia, Egypt, and Sudan, the Nile Basin is shared by 11 countries that are mutually dependent on the river for their water resources.

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Downstream countries especially Egypt and Sudan were concerned that the construction of the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GERD) dam by Ethiopia would affect them negatively. The tensions among these countries is threatening to escalate to a war (Pearce, 2015). According to the UN, water wars occurs due to opposing interests of the water users. Water conflicts describe conflicts between countries, states, or groups over the right to access water resources. In most cases, scarcity of water, land, environmental degradation, political tensions will lead to conflict over the administration, sharing, and division of resources. The natural resource demand will always be more than the supply.

Africa is gifted with a lot of natural resources; oil drives most fights in Sudan and South Sudan while in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) it is the mining of diamond and cobalt among others. Land ownership a social, spiritual, political, and economical significance in Africa, therefore it is a source of many conflicts as witnessed in Somalia. The clans fight over access and control of land and water sources. Availability of land and the resources therein have not been of great economic benefit to many African countries save for a few such as Botswana which has somehow escaped the natural-resource curse.

While climate change is affecting everyone, women are more vulnerable. Research shows that gender inequalities have economic, political, and socio-cultural implications for individuals responding to climate change. Women and girls are forced to walk for long kilometers in search of water and those treks are often accompanied by danger of physical harm. While trekking for water, these women and girls are expose to excess heat and research on the impact of increased heat exposure on women in low and middle income countries reveals that it slows down women's daily activities and forces them to spend more time collecting water, food, or firewood. This can lead to the shortening of time available for other important household activities and, hence, possibly create or increase health risks for the entire family (Carrão

et al., 2016). The physical constraints due to reproductive demands and the socioeconomic inequalities affecting women limit their choices and enhance vulnerabilities. Such hardships are further pluralized not only by poor reproductive health care systems, especially in the rural areas, but also by the burden of diseases like malaria, tuberculosis, or HIV/AIDS. This has led to feminization of poverty and HIV/AIDS especially.

Forest fires and logging have stood out as the principal causes of forest degradation in the world. The COMESA region has increasingly faced the threat of forest fires, driven by a combination of climate change, deforestation, and human activity (Ramford, 2022). The COMESA region, which includes countries such as Kenya, Zambia, and Malawi, has increasingly faced the threat of forest fires, driven by a combination of climate change, deforestation, and human activity. These fires not only devastate vast areas of forest, leading to loss of biodiversity and habitat, but also contribute to air pollution and health hazards for nearby communities. Additionally, the economic implications are significant, as many local economies rely on forestry and agriculture, which are severely affected by the destruction of natural resources. Efforts to mitigate these fires involve improved land management practices, community awareness programs, and regional cooperation to implement effective fire prevention and response strategies. Furthermore, the economic implications are significant, as many local economies rely on forestry and agriculture, which are severely affected by the destruction of natural resources. Efforts to mitigate these fires involve improved land management practices, community awareness programs, and regional cooperation to implement effective fire prevention and response strategies.

As the environment deteriorates, new problems emerge. Environmental refugees are a concern internally and externally. According to FAO 2017, their movement within and outside their countries is triggered by environmental factors like severe droughts, flooding, poor harvests due to poor weather, and bad harvest induced by

pestilence such as locusts and army worms. There is no legal framework to address environmental refugees thus creating problems for both the receiving and sending states. Calls have been made by the UN to create legal frameworks to address issues concerning environmental refugees. According to the UN, environmental refugees are reshaping the human geography of the planet, and this trend will increase as deserts advance, forests are felled and sea levels rise. Greater resource scarcity as well as an increase in the frequency and intensity of extreme weather events force resource-dependent people to migrate. It is argued that environmental factors are in fact, the root cause of most migrations across the world. Migration worsens competition over the remaining resources, destabilizes neighboring communities, and increases the risk of conflict in transit and destination regions.

Central to the discourse on climate change is food and health securities. Approximately one-third of African countries suffer from drought and chronic hunger, despite 70% of the population being involved in agriculture. African is still unable to fully feed itself and relies on food imports to meet its dietary needs. The continent still imports 25% of its food, and farm productivity is declining, with limited access to better seeds for less than 30% of farmers. The situation is worsened by prevailing climatic conditions. To lessen the harmful impacts of climate change on food systems, researchers insist on adoption of resilient crop varieties, smart agriculture adoption and and climate-smart agricultural policies (Caiado et al., 2018). Hunger affects women and children (they are not able to migrate as fast as men) more than men bring out the socio-economic dimensions of hunger, therefore, there is need for women's empowerment, education initiatives in eliminating food insecurity, and inclusive economic policies. Investing in agriculture plays a crucial role in enhancing efficiency, productivity, income growth, and addressing issues related to hunger and poverty. COMESA members need to adopt to advanced technology such as block chain and large data analytics to optimize food supply chains. Availability and distribution of food should be a priority in Africa while adopting ways to minimize wastage especially due to poor storage or lack of infrastructure to transport food from one region to another.

Mobile maternity clinics provide care to pregnant and breastfeeding mothers at an outreach visit supported by UNFPA in Loima Sub-county, Turkana County - Kenya. (Photo Credits: UNFPA/Luis Tato)

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Closely related to food security is health security. There is an increasing worry that African children are not able to access food in the right nutrition value leading to malnourishment while women of child-bearing age are in a danger of being anemic leading to complications during gestation and the post-delivery period. The health insecurities need concerted efforts to deal with them. Women must be provided with the right food to enable them to breastfeed their children and also feed their children nutritious foods that will help reduce the high child-morality rates in Africa (Creegan & Flynn, 2020).

The UN treaty United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) deals with the assessment and mitigation of climate change. All Parties of the UNFCCC are required to submit National Communications (NCs) according to the principle of 'common but differentiated responsibilities' enshrined in the Convention. The NCs usually contain information on emissions and removal of greenhouse gases with details of activities a Party has undertaken to implement the convention.

The NCs of Annex I Parties (industrialized countries and economies in transition) should additionally contain information on policies and measures not necessary for Non-Annex I Parties. Taking into account different and limited ability of least developed countries (LDCs) to address climate change, the National Adaptation Programs of Action (NAPAs) were developed. These NAPAs report pressing vulnerabilities and identify priority activities that respond to the urgent and immediate needs of these nations with regards to adaptation to climate change.

Findings and Recommendations

1. COMESA region faces different challenges that affect biodiversity immensely. The challenges include; floods, drought and extreme weather events. The challenges negatively impact activities such as agriculture, public health and all activities associated with water resources.

2. The existence of limited access to climate financing affects mitigation and adaptation projects in the COMESA region. Availability of climate finances does not guarantee COMESA member states a smooth transaction since accessibility procedure are complicated and tiresome for the local governments

3. Strength in the regional collaboration enables the COMESA region to tackle climate change collectively through presenting diplomatic actions such as negotiation to deal with global warming activities.

4. Climate diplomacy has strategically placed the COMESA region in a better place in terms of green growth capabilities. Green growth approach has enabled member states to create economic development while reducing environmental impact.

5. Limited policy implementation due to aspects such as technical capacity, insufficient resources and competing development activities hence sluggish economy.

Recommendations

1. Implement actions such as capacity building for funding access and private sector investment within the region.

2. Focus on Regional Climate Action Framework with a target towards unified climate agreements and trans-boundary resource management

3. Adhere to the Sustainable Development Goals, sustainable initiatives and green growth promotion within the region. This can be achieved through climate smart-agriculture and renewable energy

4. COMESA region need to develop a regional disaster preparedness and response system whereby early warnings can be communicated and also factor in post-disaster recovery plan.

5. Involve all member states in policy implementation not forgetting private investors and the youths.

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Berbera Port: A Nexus of Tensions, Sovereignty, and Regional Ambitions

By Isacko Adano Kushi

Abstract

The purpose of this bulletin is to discuss the tension between Ethiopia and Somalia over the Port of Berbera in Somaliland, providing a comprehensive analysis of the various factors contributing to the conflict and its broader implications. The bulletin begins with an introduction that sets the stage for the discussion, outlining the historical context and significance of the port in regional geopolitics. This is followed by an examination of a recent critical development: Somalia Signs Law 'Nullifying' Ethiopia-Somaliland Port Deal, which underscores the legal and diplomatic complexities of the situation. The impact of the tension between Ethiopia and Somalia over Port Berbera in Somaliland segment discusses the immediate and long-term effects on the region, emphasizing the economic and political repercussions. Security Concerns and Military Presence explores the potential for conflict escalation, detailing military activities and the presence of security forces around Berbera Port. The Memorandum of Understanding between Ethiopia and Somaliland analyses the agreements and their implications for the port's administration and regional cooperation. The bulletin identifies key obstacles to peace, including political, legal, and economic barriers. This is complemented by potential opportunities for diplomatic dialogue and conflict resolution, which explores avenues for negotiation and peace-building initiatives.

Introduction

The tension between Ethiopia and Somalia over the control of Port Berbera in Somaliland has been a source of concern in recent times. Both countries have expressed competing claims and interests in the strategic port, which lies in the self-declared independent state of Somaliland. Ethiopia considers Port Berbera as crucial for its landlocked economy, providing it with direct access to the Red Sea and enabling the transportation of goods more efficiently and cost-effectively (Norman, 2024).

On the other hand, Somalia views Port Berbera as part of its national territory and believes it should have full control over its management and operations. This tension has led to diplomatic disputes and strained relations between Ethiopia and Somalia (David, 2024).

Berbera, is a self-declared independent region of Somaliland, has become a focal point of contention between the two neighboring countries due to its strategic location and economic importance. Ethiopia relies heavily on access to seaports for its international trade.

Ethiopia's reliance on seaports and Somaliland's pursuit of international recognition are intertwined within the

geopolitical dynamics of the Horn of Africa, illustrating a mutually beneficial but precarious relationship. After gaining independence from Somalia in 1991, Somaliland has made significant investments to establish a functional state with improved security, stable governance, and economic reforms, establishing itself as an important regional partner. Ethiopia, a landlocked country since Eritrea gained its independence in 1993, is largely dependent on nearby ports for trade access, especially Berbera in Somaliland, which has undergone substantial modernization thanks to investments from DP World, a company based in Dubai. Deeper ties between the two entities have been cultivated by their economic interdependence, with Ethiopia acting as a crucial ally in Somaliland's recognition campaign by using its clout in regional and global forums (David, 2024).

Ethiopia's larger strategic concerns, such as preserving Somalia's stability and striking a balance with its relationships with other regional actors like Djibouti, in which it has significant economic interests, complicate the relationship. The partnership strengthens Somaliland's case for recognition while highlighting its strategic significance to regional trade and security. Its growing significance to Ethiopia and the region is

Port Berbera in Somaliland. The expansion of the Port will multiply its capacity and improve surrounding logistics facilities to create a regional trading hub (Photo Credit: British International Investment)

paradoxically counterbalanced by its disputed status in the international arena, as its lack of recognition still restricts its ability to fully participate in international trade agreements and institutions. The delicate balance between Ethiopia's reliance on seaports and Somaliland's quest for recognition is highlighted by this interaction of strategic calculation and mutual benefit, which reflects the larger complexity of geopolitics in the Horn of Africa (Farah, 2024).

Historically, Ethiopia has predominantly relied on the port of Djibouti for its maritime trade, which serves as the main gateway for its imports and exports. However, with growing trade volumes and concerns about overreliance on a single port, Ethiopia has been seeking alternative maritime routes to diversify its trade options and enhance its economic resilience (Ahmed & Green 1999).

Somaliland's Berbera port has emerged as a potential alternative for Ethiopia. Located on the Gulf of Aden, Berbera offers proximity to Ethiopia's eastern regions and promises shorter transit times for goods compared to routes through Djibouti. Furthermore, the expansion and modernization of the port facilities through investment partnerships with the United Arab Emirates (UAE) have increased its attractiveness to Ethiopia as a viable trade route.

However, Somalia contests Ethiopia's engagement with Berbera, asserting that it undermines Somalia's sovereignty and territorial integrity. Somalia views Somaliland as an integral part of its territory and considers any dealings with Berbera by foreign entities, including Ethiopia, as a violation of its sovereignty. This stance has led to diplomatic tensions between Somalia and Ethiopia, with both countries engaging in rhetoric and diplomatic maneuvers to assert their respective interests over the port (Gebru, 2010).

The situation is further complicated by regional dynamics and geopolitical interests. The involvement of external factors such as the UAE, which has significant investments in Berbera port, adds another layer of complexity to the dispute. Additionally, the broader strategic interests of neighboring countries and international powers in the Horn of Africa region contribute to the intensity of the tensions surrounding the Berbera port issue.

Somalia Signs Law 'Nullifying' Ethiopia-Somaliland Port Deal

The signing of a law by Somalia that nullified the Ethiopia-Somaliland port deal was a move to underscores the long-standing tensions between Somalia and Somaliland regarding sovereignty and territorial integrity, as well

as the broader geopolitical dynamics in the Horn of Africa region.

Somaliland, a self-declared independent region that broke away from Somalia in 1991, has been seeking international recognition as a separate state. Despite functioning as a de facto state with its own government, security forces, and institutions, Somaliland's independence has not been internationally recognized. Somalia, on the other hand, maintains that Somaliland is an integral part of its territory and rejects any attempts to establish it as an independent state.

The port deal between Ethiopia and Somaliland, particularly involving the port of Berbera, has exacerbated tensions between Somalia and Somaliland. Somalia views any engagement with Somaliland, especially by foreign entities, as a challenge to its sovereignty and territorial integrity. The signing of the law nullifying the port deal by Somalia is thus consistent with its stance on the issue. From Somalia's perspective, the nullification of the port deal is a reaffirmation of its sovereignty and a rejection of any agreements made by Somaliland without its consent. By voiding the deal, Somalia seeks to assert its authority over Somaliland and prevent external actors', such as Ethiopia, from engaging with Somaliland independently of the Somali government.

For Ethiopia, the nullification of the port deal represents a setback to its efforts to diversify its trade routes and reduce dependence on the port of Djibouti. Ethiopia's engagement with Berbera was motivated by its strategic interests in securing alternative access to maritime trade routes, particularly for its eastern regions. The nullification of the deal disrupts Ethiopia's plans and forces it to reconsider its options for maritime connectivity.

The broader implications of the nullification of the port deal extend beyond Somalia and Ethiopia. It reflects the complex web of geopolitical interests and rivalries in the

> "Contemporary Ethiopia was not a model when it came to democracy.... There were no political parties, no popular organs of government, no separation of powers, only the emperor, who was suprem

Horn of Africa region, where states compete for influence and strategic advantages. The involvement of external actors', such as the United Arab Emirates (UAE), which has invested heavily in the development of the port of Berbera, further complicates the situation and adds layers of geopolitical intrigue.

Moving forward, the nullification of the port deal is likely to exacerbate tensions between Somalia and Somaliland and complicate efforts to resolve their longstanding dispute. It also underscores the challenges of achieving regional stability and cooperation in the Horn of Africa, where competing interests and historical grievances continue to shape the political landscape. Resolving the tensions surrounding the port deal will require constructive dialogue, respect for sovereignty, and a commitment to finding mutually acceptable solutions that promote peace and stability in the region.

Impact of the Tension between Ethiopia and Somalia Over Port Berbera in Somaliland

The tension between Ethiopia and Somalia over the port of Berbera in Somaliland has been having far-reaching implications for geopolitics, regional stability, economic development, and diplomatic relations in the Horn of Africa. Addressing the underlying issues and finding peaceful solutions to the tension is essential to promote stability, security, and prosperity in the region.

The tension over the port of Berbera reflects broader geopolitical rivalries and strategic interests in the Horn of Africa region. Both Ethiopia and Somalia are key players in the region, and their competition over access to maritime routes and strategic assets like ports underscores the importance of the Horn of Africa in global geopolitics. External actors, including the United Arab Emirates (UAE), China, Turkey, and Western powers, are also involved in the dispute, further complicating the geopolitical landscape. These external actors have their own strategic interests in the region, which may align or diverge from the interests of Ethiopia and Somalia, shaping the dynamics of the tension (Aynte, Bryden & Mohamoud 2024).

The tension between Ethiopia and Somalia poses risks to regional stability and security. Any escalation of conflict or military confrontation could have far-reaching consequences, destabilizing not only Ethiopia and Somalia but also neighboring countries in the Horn of

Berbera, is a self-declared independent region of Somaliland, has become a focal point of contention between the two neighboring countries due to its strategic location and economic importance. Ethiopia relies heavily on access to seaports for its international trade

Africa. The involvement of armed groups and extremist organizations, such as Al-Shabaab, further exacerbates the security risks in the region. These groups may seek to exploit the tension between Ethiopia and Somalia to advance their own agendas, leading to increased violence and instability.

The tension over the port of Berbera has implications for economic development and trade in the region. Ethiopia's access to alternative maritime routes through Berbera could potentially reduce its reliance on the port of Djibouti and diversify its trade options, benefiting its economy. However, the tension may also disrupt trade and investment flows, impacting economic growth and development in Ethiopia, Somalia, and Somaliland. Uncertainty surrounding the port deal could deter investors and hinder infrastructure development, limiting the potential economic benefits of improved maritime connectivity.

The tension between Ethiopia and Somalia strains diplomatic relations between the two countries and complicates efforts to resolve longstanding disputes, such as the status of Somaliland. Diplomatic channels for dialogue and negotiation may be hindered by mutual mistrust and hostility, making it challenging to find diplomatic solutions to the tension. Moreover, the involvement of external actors adds another layer of complexity to diplomatic relations in the region. Countries with vested interests in the Horn of Africa may seek to leverage the tension between Ethiopia and Somalia to advance their own diplomatic agendas, further complicating efforts to de-escalate the situation (Teresa, 2024).

Security Concerns and Military Presence

There are serious security ramifications for the area from the conflict between Ethiopia and Somalia around the Port of Berbera in Somaliland. Due to its advantageous location along the Gulf of Aden, the port serves as a focal point for military and commercial interests. Control disputes over the port have the potential to escalate

already high levels of tension in the region. The rivalry over control of Berbera has the capacity to worsen and involve neighboring nations, so destabilizing the Horn of Africa. Since Ethiopia is landlocked and depends on access to international waterways for economic survival, the country has made significant investments in the port and sees it as a vital outlet for its imports and exports. On the other hand, the likelihood of a military conflict is increased by Somalia's claims to Somaliland and, consequently, Berbera Port. Armed troops and the possibility of conflict can impede marine trade, endangering both international shipping channels and regional security.

There is already a noticeable military presence and activity around Berbera Port, and multiple parties are keeping a close eye on the region. The port's managing nation, Somaliland, has increased security in order to protect its sovereignty and economic interests. Additionally, through agreements with Somaliland that include a military presence to protect its investments, Ethiopia has shown its strategic interests. The United Arab Emirates has made investments in the port's development through its business, DP World, and has implemented security measures to safeguard its workers and property. While these military presences can serve as a deterrence, they also raise the possibility of conflicts, particularly in the event that diplomatic efforts falter. For instance, the construction of a UAE military facility in Berbera has sparked worries among neighboring countries, such as Ethiopia and Somalia, about the port area's increasing militarization and possible use as a basis for larger military operations.

International maritime law, particularly the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), provides guidelines for resolving disputes over maritime boundaries and the use of international waters. However, applying these frameworks to the Somaliland-Somalia issue is challenging, as they typically require the parties involved to be recognized states. Additionally, customary international law and regional agreements, such as the

African Union's Lomé Charter on maritime security, also play roles in mediating such disputes but are contingent on state recognition.

Thus, the Berbera Port dispute involves not only legal rights but also political power and economic control. Ethiopia, while not asserting sovereignty over Berbera, has significant strategic and economic interests in the port, adding another layer of complexity to the legal and geopolitical landscape. Any legal resolution must address the sovereignty claims, Somaliland's ambiguous legal status, and the broader regional implications under international and maritime law.

The Memorandum of Understanding between Ethiopia and Somaliland

Somalia's signing of a memorandum of understanding with Ethiopia on January 1, 2024, regarding the port of Berbera in Somaliland sparked diplomatic tensions in the Horn of Africa and beyond. While the specific details of the agreement remain undisclosed, key elements include Ethiopia obtaining a 50-year lease on a portion of Somaliland's Red Sea coast for naval and commercial maritime purposes, along with access to the Berbera port.

In return, Somaliland receives a stake in Ethiopian Airlines and a commitment from Ethiopia to explore recognizing Somaliland as a sovereign state, potentially making Ethiopia the first country to do so. The agreement has faced opposition from various countries, including those in the region such as Egypt, as well as global powers like the US, EU, China, and Turkey (Khalif, 2022).

The opposition stems from concerns over geopolitical significance, infrastructure development, and potential impacts on regional stability. Somalia strongly opposes the port deal, viewing it as a violation of its sovereignty, although it lacks full control over Somaliland. The involvement of external powers further complicates the situation, with the United Arab Emirates (UAE) playing a significant role due to its investments in the Berbera port and broader interests in the Red Sea region.

The opposition to the agreement reflects shifting political alliances and underscores the complexities of

The President of the self-declared Somaliland Republic, Muse Bihi sign a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with Ethiopian Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed, which Somaliland provide a 20KM wide sea access to landlocked Ethiopia in exchange for potential recognition (Photo Credit: Africa Confidential)

regional dynamics in the Horn of Africa. Despite calls for de-escalation and dialogue, the situation remains tense, with potential implications for stability and security in the region (Stanislav, 2024).

International Involvement and Mediation

Significant international attention has been drawn to the tension between Ethiopia and Somalia over the Port of Berbera in Somaliland, with a number of international organizations and states playing important roles in mediating and influencing the conflict's dynamics. Leading efforts to mediate the conflict and advance regional stability have been made by international organizations like the United Nations (UN) and the African Union (AU).

With the goal of securing peace and security throughout Africa, the African Union (AU) has promoted communication and cooperative efforts between the concerned parties. In a similar vein, the UN has offered forums for diplomatic negotiations and conflict settlement through its peacekeeping operations and special envoys. These groups work to keep the conflict from getting worse and to make sure that any settlement upholds international law and fosters stability in the area (Sheikh & Hassan 2024).

The Port of Berbera and the larger geopolitical context of the Horn of Africa are of importance to superpowers such as the United States, China, and the European Union. In order to protect its security interests, the United States promotes stability in the region and sees it as strategically significant for counterterrorism efforts, notably against organizations like Al-Shabaab. China's Belt and Road Initiative, which aims to improve global trade routes and infrastructure, is related to its interest in Berbera. China wants to increase its economic clout and protect marine trade routes, which is why it has invested in ports in Africa, particularly Berbera. Because the stability of the Horn of Africa affects trade and migration, the European Union also has a lot riding on it. In an effort to stabilize the area, the EU has supported governance measures and provided financing for development projects. These superpowers have an impact on the dynamics of the Berbera port conflict through their diplomatic and economic interactions, frequently coordinating their activities with more general strategic goals.

International commerce and diplomatic strategies have a significant influence on the Berbera port issue.

International trade regulations that support safe, free sea lanes are consistent with efforts toward a peaceful settlement of the conflict. The port has significant economic implications since it is a vital nexus for both domestic and foreign trade. In order to reduce tensions, diplomatic initiatives that support investment and development in the area can offer financial incentives for collaboration.

For instance, the development of Berbera port by the United Arab Emirates' DP World has attracted attention and funding from around the world, positioning it as a hub for worldwide trade networks. The parties in dispute may feel pressured by this international participation to come to a resolution that will guarantee the port's continuous growth and operation.

Additionally, diplomatic strategies that prioritize economic cooperation and regional integration, like those supported by the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD), can create a cooperative atmosphere that lessens conflict. The development of the Berbera port issue has been significantly shaped by international trade and diplomatic policy, underscoring the interdependence of local conflicts with global economic and political frameworks (International Crisis Group, 2024).

Main Challenges Hindering a Resolution to the Tension between Ethiopia and Somalia

The fundamental disagreement between Ethiopia and Somalia over the status of Somaliland presents a significant obstacle to resolving the tension. Somalia considers Somaliland as part of its sovereign territory, while Somaliland seeks international recognition as an independent state. This dispute complicates any efforts to negotiate agreements involving Somaliland, such as the port deal with Ethiopia.

Historical conflicts and animosities between Ethiopia and Somalia, as well as within Somalia itself, contribute to the current tension. Past territorial disputes, conflicts over resources, and ethnic tensions have left deep scars and created mistrust between the parties involved. Addressing these historical grievances is essential for building trust and fostering meaningful dialogue.

The involvement of external actors', such as the United Arab Emirates (UAE), China, Turkey, and Western powers,

further complicates the resolution of the tension. These external actors have their own strategic interests in the region, which may diverge from the interests of Ethiopia and Somalia. Balancing these competing interests and navigating the complex web of geopolitical dynamics is a significant challenge for conflict resolution efforts. Economic interests, including access to maritime trade routes and control over key infrastructure such as ports, play a crucial role in the tension between Ethiopia and Somalia. Both countries seek to secure their economic interests and ensure access to vital resources, which may lead to competition and conflict over strategic assets like the port of Berbera.

Potential Opportunities for Diplomatic Dialogue and Conflict Resolution

Regional and international organizations, such as the African Union (AU), Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD), and the United Nations (UN), can play a constructive role in facilitating dialogue and mediation between Ethiopia and Somalia. By providing neutral platforms for negotiation and encouraging dialogue, these organizations can help build trust and foster cooperation between the parties involved. Implementing confidence-building measures, such as ceasefire agreements, humanitarian initiatives, and cultural exchanges, can help create an atmosphere conducive to constructive dialogue and conflict resolution.

By demonstrating goodwill and a commitment to peaceful resolution, both Ethiopia and Somalia can build trust and lay the groundwork for more substantial negotiations. Diplomatic channels, including bilateral talks, Track II diplomacy, and high-level summit

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meetings, offer opportunities for direct engagement between Ethiopia and Somalia. By engaging in open and transparent dialogue, the two countries can clarify their respective concerns, interests, and red lines, paving the way for pragmatic solutions to the tension over the port of Berbera (Norman, 2024).

Possible Scenarios for the Resolution of the Port Dispute

There are a number of possible outcomes for settling the conflict between Somalia and Ethiopia about the Port of Berbera in Somaliland. A negotiated settlement in which Somaliland, Ethiopia, and Somalia concur on a win-win plan is one possibility that could occur. This would entail preserving Ethiopia's access and commercial interests while acknowledging Somaliland's administrative authority over Berbera (Sheikh & Hassan 2024).

An alternative situation is international mediation, in which institutions such as the United Nations (UN) or the African Union (AU) assist in negotiating and mediating a settlement. A third possibility would entail initiatives for economic integration, in which the port is transformed into a hub for the region with shared management and investments, encouraging collaboration as opposed to rivalry.

The worst-case scenario, which would be harmful to all parties concerned, is an ongoing impasse or an escalation into conflict. The Horn of Africa's regional stability and cooperation will be significantly impacted in the long run by the outcome of the port conflict at Berbera. Stronger regional integration can result in more stable political and economic relationships through a peaceful and cooperative conclusion. It might serve as a model for talking and negotiating the settlement of other territorial and resource-based conflicts in the area. Since stability is a major consideration for investors, a successful resolution can help draw in foreign capital (Khalif, 2022). On the other hand, if the issue doesn't get resolved or gets worse, it could destabilize the area, making already-existing problems worse and posing new security risks. The Horn of Africa, which is already vulnerable as a result of numerous internal and external pressures, may experience a rise in the number of refugees, economic downturns, and a reduction in the opportunities for sustainable development (Pinto, 2024).

Somalia's President Hassan Sheikh Mohamud signed a law nullifying an agreement by the breakaway Somaliland region to grant Ethiopia access to the Red Sea in return for recognition as an independent nation, January 7, 2024 (Photo Credit: Media Wire Express)

Strategies for Sustainable Development and Mutual Benefit in the Horn of Africa

Several tactics can be used in the Horn of Africa to create mutual benefit and sustainable development. First of all, more seamless trade contacts and shared prosperity can be facilitated by strengthening regional economic integration through programs like the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA). Connecting the region through infrastructure projects, such building roads and rail networks to connect inland communities and key ports like Berbera, can stimulate the economy and create jobs.

Second, improving port administration and infrastructure can make Berbera a significant hub for trade, which will be advantageous to all parties involved. Ensuring equitable distribution of economic benefits can be achieved through collaborative investments and shared management systems. Thirdly, it is imperative to advance the rule of law and good governance. It is possible to reduce corruption and guarantee that economic advantages result in social benefits by implementing transparent and accountable governance institutions.

Promoting social cohesiveness and community growth is also essential. Initiatives to improve social services,

healthcare, and education can raise living standards and lessen the allure of violence. Fostering cross-border cultural and social interactions can also help communities become more trustworthy and understanding of one another. These initiatives can be strengthened by international cooperation and support, including financial and technical support from major international organizations and governments (Sheikh & Hassan 2024).

In conclusion, cooperative and strategic methods are critical to the future success of settling the Berbera port dispute. In the Horn of Africa, a peaceful settlement can open the door to greater regional collaboration and stability, which will create the conditions for mutual benefit and sustainable development. The area can turn potential conflict into a driver of progress and stability by emphasizing social cohesiveness, infrastructure development, economic integration, and good governance.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the tension between Ethiopia and Somalia over the port of Berbera in Somaliland underscores the connection between geopolitical interests, regional dynamics, economic imperatives, and historical grievances in the Horn of Africa. This dispute has

significant implications for the stability, security, and development of the region, as well as for diplomatic relations between the countries involved.

The standoff over the port of Berbera also reflects broader geopolitical rivalries and strategic interests in the Horn of Africa, with both Ethiopia and Somalia vying for control over maritime routes and strategic assets. The involvement of external actors further complicates the situation, as countries such as the United Arab Emirates, China, Turkey, and Western powers pursue their own agendas in the region.

At the same time, the tension poses risks to regional stability and security, with the potential for escalation to exacerbate existing conflicts and humanitarian crises. Economic development in the region is also at stake, as uncertainty surrounding the port deal may deter investment and hinder infrastructure development.

Resolving the tension between Ethiopia and Somalia requires addressing underlying grievances, fostering dialogue and cooperation, and promoting regional stability and prosperity. This may involve diplomatic mediation, confidence-building measures, and a commitment to inclusive dialogue that takes into account the interests and concerns of all parties involved.

Ultimately, the resolution of the tension over the port of Berbera will require political will, compromise, and cooperation from all stakeholders. By working together to address the root causes of the dispute and find mutually acceptable solutions, Ethiopia, Somalia, and other regional actors can contribute to a more stable, secure, and prosperous future for the Horn of Africa.

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Editor's Note

Dear Reader,

We are excited to release our 40th bi-monthly issue of *The HORN Bulletin* (Vol. VII, Iss. VI, 2024). 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.

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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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