

The Horn of Africa as a Security Complex: Towards a Theoretical Framework

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Introduction

This paper is the product of more than a decade of research work conducted by the author on the Horn of Africa and draws on his numerous discussions with foremost analysts as well as top-level decision-makers whose policies are increasingly influenced by regional politics. It also derives from the frustration of the author who has seen over-blown, trivial and particular issues such as the irrepressible obsession on piracy being amplified whereas more pressing and substantive security challenges such as the lethal danger of ferocious and irreducible conflicts are being benignly disregarded. Such a confounding situation as well as the thinness of the literature in terms of theoretical approaches simply made the author fear for the long-term security of the region. As a result, the author tried to move away from the world of divisive policy prescriptions towards that of theory which is no less contentious and is definitely not supposed to offer a magical recipe, for instance, for the prompt resolution of the Horn of Africa's several and interrelated conflicts.

Nonetheless, explaining theoretically the environment and dynamics of regional security is necessarily an arbitrary exercise for any student of international relations (Väyrynen, 1984), depending on which elements appear to him or her as most significant and also on the prevalent political and strategic realities. Fortunately, Barry Buzan offers a strong theoretical framework. From the perspective of this paper's author, this theoretical framework provides an adequate unit of analysis which facilitates comparison and generalizations to a very high degree. It is also comprehensive and adaptable enough to be applied to the Horn of Africa. Accordingly, the paper will first outline, as briefly as possible, the major tenets of this theoretical framework. It will then proceed to define, at its most basic, the region known as the Horn of Africa and explain in detail the major elements and patterns of regional politics within it.

1. The Security Complex Theory

First published in 1983 and republished in 1991, Barry Buzan's pioneering study *People States and Fear* was the first sustained and serious attempt to put forward guiding ideas pertaining to the concept of regional security. One major benefit of Buzan's theory is that it enables analysts to challenge prevalent conceptions and 'talk about regional security in terms of the pattern of relations among members of the security complex' (Ayoob, 1995:58). The following is a very brief consideration of Buzan's most significant percepts rather than a comprehensive survey of his theory.

In the first place and in security terms, Buzan argued that a region 'means that a distinct and significant subsystem of security relations exists among a set of states whose fate is

that they have been locked into geographical proximity with each other' (Buzan, 1991:188). Moreover, military and political threats are more significant, potentially imminent and strongly felt when states are at close range. Buzan stressed that regional security systems such as South Asia with, for instance, the military standoff between India and Pakistan can be seen in terms of balance of power as well as patterns of *amity* which are relationships involving genuine friendship as well as expectations of protection or support, and of *enmity* which are relationships set by suspicion and fear arising from 'border disputes, interests in ethnically related populations, to long-standing historical links, whether positive or negative' (Buzan, 1991:190).

These patterns are, according to Buzan, confined in a particular geographical area. He used and popularized the term security complex to designate the ensuing formation. Security complex is 'a group of states whose primary security concerns link together sufficiently closely that, their national securities cannot realistically be considered apart from one another' (Buzan, 1991:190). Such complexes 'are held together not by the positive influences of shared interest, but by shared rivalries. The dynamics of security contained within these levels operate across a broad spectrum of sectors – military, political, economic, societal and environmental' (Sheehan, 2005:49-50).

Applying Buzan's theory provides deeper insights into how different types of conflict suddenly erupt and quickly spread in space and time and also into the interplay between these different types. Security complexes are exposed to four major types of threats and their interaction: balance of power contests between great powers; lingering conflicts which emerge between states; intra-states conflicts which are usually spillovers of internal politics; and, conflicts which arise from trans-national threats caused, for instance, by the rise of radical Islam and informal networks, state fragility, demographic explosion, environmental degradation or resource scarcity.

2. The Horn of Africa

2.1. Delineating the Horn of Africa

In a narrow geographic sense, the Horn of Africa is that northeastern part of the African continent which faces in the east the Red Sea, in the southeast the Indian Ocean and in the west the Nile Basin. The Horn of Africa conventionally comprises of the key states of Ethiopia, Somalia and Djibouti, though it embraces geopolitically the adjoining states of Sudan and Kenya (Farer, 1979:1; Danfulani, 1999:37). It should also be pointed out that Uganda which is a member of IGAD, Yemen, Libya and Egypt are not less involved in the issues and processes of the region, certainly having an impact on power balances and developments. All these states share social and cultural values emanating from a centuries-old tradition of interrelationships, common religious practices and economic linkages. Furthermore, the political fate of each state in the region has always been inextricably intertwined with that of neighbouring states. Indeed, no state in the Horn of Africa has been insulated from the problems of the other states no matter how distant, no matter how strong or weak.

The six states which make up the Horn of Africa cover an area of around 5 million square kilometers and had in 2000 a total population of about 130.1 million which grew to 170 million in 2008. The region's average population growth rate, of not less than 2.9 %, is one of the highest population growth rates of the world and nearly half of the population is under 14 years of age. In the Horn of Africa which is the meeting point between Muslim, Christian and Animist cultures, Muslims constituted in 2000 a slight majority, making up some 44 % of a 130.1-million population 43 % of whom were Christians.

Table 1: Area, Population and Religious Composition of States in the Horn of Africa

| State | Area (square km) | Population Estimates in 2008 (in millions) | Population Estimates in 2000 (in millions) | Christians in 2000 (millions) | Muslims in 2000 (millions) | Animists in 2000 (millions) |
|-----------------|---------------------|---|---|-------------------------------------|----------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| Djibouti | 23,000 | - | 0.7 | - | 0.7 | - |
| Eritrea | 121,000 | 5 | 3.8 | 1.9 | 1.9 | - |
| Ethiopia | 1,098,000 | 78 | 60 | 30.8 | 22 | 7.2 |
| Kenya | 583,000 | 36 | 28.3 | 22.1 | 2.8 | 3.4 |
| Somalia | 637,000 | 9 | 8 | - | 8 | - |
| Sudan | 2,506,000 | 42 | 29.3 | 2.4 | 21.9 | 5 |
| Total | 4,968,000 | 170 | 130.1 | 57.2 | 57.3 | 15.6 |

Various sources

The Horn of Africa can be characterized as the most deprived and the poorest region in Africa, if not in the world (See Table 7). In the region, the most basic needs of life (clean water, food, health care and education) are not available to the majority of the population. In the Horn of Africa, per capita income, life expectancy and literacy are among the lowest in the world while adult and infant mortality are among the highest. The region is prone to deadly droughts which hamper crop and livestock production. These droughts result in food deficits each year thus making the Horn of Africa one of the most food insecure regions of the world. In 2008, in the Horn of Africa, an estimated 17 million people were in need of emergency assistance (OCHA, 2008).

Furthermore, the Horn of Africa is the most conflict-ridden region in the world (Shinn, 2009:1) with conflicts, exacerbated by external interference and accompanied by widespread human rights violations, raging sometimes simultaneously within and between states. In fact, the African continent's longest-running intra-state conflicts, the Eritrean conflict and the South-Sudanese conflict with an estimated death toll of over two million, took place in the Horn of Africa. It is also generally held that, due to the above-mentioned natural and man-made disasters, the Horn of Africa has the highest percentage of refugees, estimated to have reached in 2003 700,000 which is roughly Djibouti's population, and internally displaced persons in Africa, a trend reinforcing future cycles of conflict. In 2008, the total number of internally displaced persons in Kenya, Somalia, Ethiopia and Uganda was estimated at 2.74 million out of which an estimated 1.3 million people were displaced in Somalia which is one of the world's worst humanitarian disasters (OCHA, 2008). In Sudan alone, in 2003, there were over 4 million internally displaced persons, virtually Eritrea's entire population.

Table 2: Intra-State Conflicts in and around the Horn of Africa

| State | Selected Rebel Movements | Year of Origin | Motivation | Active Regional Backing |
|-----------------|--|-----------------------|-------------------------------|---|
| Djibouti | Front for the Restoration of Unity and Democracy | 1991 | Change of regime | Eritrea |
| Eritrea | Eritrean Islamic Jihad | 1989 | Change of regime | Sudan |
| | Eritrean Democratic Alliance | - | Change of regime | Ethiopia |
| | Afar Red Sea Democratic Front | 1998 | Autonomy | Ethiopia |
| Ethiopia | Eritrean Liberation Front | 1961 | Secession | Sudan, Somalia, Egypt |
| | Eritrean People's Liberation Front | 1972 | Secession | Sudan, Saudi Arabia |
| | Tigray People's Liberation Front | 1975 | Autonomy and change of regime | Sudan |
| | Oromo Liberation Front | 1976 | Secession | Sudan, Somalia, Eritrea |
| | Western Somali Liberation Front | 1961/1976 | Secession | Somalia |
| | Ogaden National Liberation Front | 1986 | Secession | Eritrea |
| | Ethiopian People's Patriotic Front | 1998 | Change of regime | Eritrea |
| Kenya | Shifita war | 1963 | Secession | Somalia |
| Libya | National Front for the Salvation of Libya | 1981 | Change of regime | Sudan |
| Somalia | Somali Salvation Democratic Front | 1979 | Change of regime | Ethiopia |
| | Somali National Movement | 1981 | Secession | Ethiopia |
| | Al Itihad Al Islamiya | 1983 | Islamization | Sudan, Eritrea |
| | Somali Patriotic Movement | 1989 | Change of regime | - |
| | United Somali Congress | 1989 | Change of regime | Ethiopia |
| | Al Shabab Al Mujahedeen | 2006 | Change of regime | Eritrea |
| Sudan | Beja Congress | 1958 | Autonomy | Eritrea |
| | Anyanya | 1960 | Secession | Ethiopia |
| | Sudan People's Liberation Army | 1983 | Secession | Ethiopia, Libya, Uganda, Eritrea, Kenya |
| | National Democratic Alliance | 1995 | Change of regime | Eritrea, Ethiopia |
| | Justice and Equality Movement | 2003 | Darfur | Eritrea, Chad |
| | Sudan Liberation Movement | 2003 | Darfur | Eritrea |
| Uganda | National Resistance Army | 1981 | Change of regime | - |
| | Lord's Resistance Army | 1987 | Autonomy | Sudan |

Source: Compiled by the author

Table 3: Selected Inter-State Conflicts in and around the Horn of Africa

| Year | Type of Inter-State Conflict | States Involved | Major Contentious Issue or Area | Other Issues |
|-----------|------------------------------|------------------|---|--|
| 1964 | Brief armed conflict | Ethiopia-Somalia | Control of Ethiopia's Somali-inhabited territory | - |
| 1960s | Tensions | Kenya-Somalia | Control of Kenya's Northern Frontier District | - |
| 1977-1978 | Full-scale war | Ethiopia-Somalia | Control of Ethiopia's Somali-inhabited territory | US-Soviet competition |
| 1979 | War of words | Egypt-Ethiopia | Nile River | - |
| 1994-1995 | Armed clashes | Sudan-Egypt | Territorial dispute over the oil-rich Halaib Triangle | Islamist threat |
| 1994-1998 | Tensions | Sudan-Eritrea | Islamist threat | Regional influence |
| 1995-1998 | Tensions | Sudan-Ethiopia | Sudanese link to the Mubarak assassination attempt | Support to rebel movements |
| 1995 | Brief armed confrontation | Eritrea-Yemen | Territorial dispute over the strategic Hanish islands | Control of mineral and fishing resources |
| 1998-2000 | Full-scale war | Eritrea-Ethiopia | Territorial dispute | Economic policies, regional hegemony |
| 2006-2008 | Intervention | Ethiopia-Somalia | Ethiopia intervened militarily | Global war on terrorism |
| 2008-2009 | Brief armed confrontation | Eritrea-Djibouti | Territorial dispute | Ethiopian-Eritrean conflict |
| 2009 | Tensions | Kenya-Uganda | Territorial dispute over the Migingo islands | - |

Source: Compiled by the author

Table 4: Military Balance in the Horn of Africa in 1972

| Asset | Ethiopia | Kenya | Somalia | Sudan |
|--------------------|----------|-------|---------|--------|
| Personnel Strength | 44,000 | 6,000 | 13,000 | 36,000 |
| Tanks | 50 | - | 150 | 130 |
| Combat aircraft | 46 | - | 21 | 40 |

Source: International Institute for Strategic Studies, Military Balance 1972-1973

Table 5: Military Balance in the Horn of Africa in 1989

| Asset | Djibouti | Ethiopia | Kenya | Somalia | Sudan |
|--------------------|----------|----------|--------|---------|--------|
| Personnel Strength | 4,000 | 315,000 | 23,000 | 65,000 | 72,000 |
| Tanks | - | 750 | 76 | 290 | 175 |
| Combat aircraft | - | 143 | 28 | 63 | 45 |

Source: International Institute for Strategic Studies, Military Balance 1989-1990

Table 6: Detailed Military Balance in the Horn of Africa in 2007

| Asset | Djibouti | Eritrea | Ethiopia | Kenya | Somalia | Sudan |
|-------------------------------------|-----------------|----------------|-----------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|
| Budget | \$ 26,000,000 | \$ 65,000,000 | \$ 345,000,000 | \$ 445,000,000 | - | \$ 335,000,000 |
| Personnel Strength (Regular) | | | | | | |
| Ground Force | 8,000 | 200,000 | 150,000 | 20,000 | - | 100,000 |
| Air Force | 250 | 1,000 | 2,500 | 2,500 | - | 3,000 |
| Naval Force | 200 | 350 | | 1,620 | - | 1,800 |
| Tanks | - | 150 | 250 | 78 | - | 270 |
| Combat Aircraft | 6 | 8 | 48 | 29 | - | 36 |
| Helicopters | 4 | 5 | 37 | 53 | - | 23 |

Source: International Institute for Strategic Studies, Military Balance 2007-2008

Table 7: Gross Domestic Product (GDP), Per Capita GDP and Human Development Index (HDI) Rank in the Horn of Africa

| State | GDP (\$ US billion) | Per Capital GDP (\$ US) | HDI Rank |
|-----------------|----------------------------|--------------------------------|-----------------|
| Djibouti | 0.83 | 1,000 | 149 |
| Eritrea | 1.0 | 224 | 157 |
| Ethiopia | 15.0 | 181 | 169 |
| Kenya | 29.8 | 795 | 148 |
| Somalia | - | - | - |
| Sudan | 45.7 | 1,186 | 147 |
| Total | 92.3 | 677 (average) | - |

Source: Getachew, Human Security and Regional Planning in the Horn of Africa

2.2. The Colonial Legacy

The seeds of the current conflicts in the Horn of Africa to a large extent go back to the European colonial experience in the Horn of Africa even though most of the conflicts' root causes predate this experience (Chege, 1987:88; Ayoob, 1980:137). Indeed, at the end of the nineteenth century and after the construction of the Suez Canal (Woodward, 1996:14), the European colonial powers partitioned the previously free constituent parts of the Horn of Africa, joining unrelated areas and peoples into territorial units. The establishment of new states (Sudan got its independence in 1956, British and Italian Somalilands in 1960, Kenya in 1963, and Djibouti in 1977 while Eritrea was federated with Ethiopia in 1952 and forcefully gained its independence in 1993, leaving Ethiopia landlocked) was thus based on misdrawn borders which were agreed upon by the colonial powers and basically ignored ethnic, cultural, historical and religious groups' natural lines. And, consequently, it resulted in intra-state conflicts (in particular demands for autonomy for ethnic groups) as well as in the regimes of the newly independent states lodging territorial claims in turn leading to conflict with other states.

The challenge was compounded by the fact that the framework of colonial laws and institutions had been designed to exploit local divisions rather than to overcome them. Colonialism also disrupted the political, social and economic lives of pastoral societies. The emergence of colonial ports as well as the development of modern transport systems disrupted the ancient trade networks on which pastoralists depended, coastal markets disappearing in many cases. Moreover, transportation networks and related physical infrastructure were designed to satisfy the needs of the colonial power rather than to support the balanced growth of an indigenous economy. During the same period, by taking advantage of inter-European rivalries, the Ethiopian rulers doubled through conquest the geographic size of their independent state built on the interior highlands. A vast and multi-ethnic state was created there. The need to maintain intact the unity of this fragile and disparate entity led to the excessive centralization of political and economic power which in turn stimulated widespread infringement upon local cultures and led to religious coercion and political repression.

Conflicts were also triggered by ethno-centrism arising from colonial rule which favoured certain ethnic groups accorded access to education and economic privileges. This was done at the expense of other ethnic groups in the context of *divide and rule* tactics employed by the colonial powers and inflicted deep societal wounds in some states. In the post-colonial era, ill-advised policies have entrenched colonially-designed disparities and chronic injustice, thereby worsening ethnic animosities and antagonisms in most states of the region. Such a legacy lives on especially in Sudan in which a pernicious conflict was resuscitated in 1983 as a result of Gaafar Nimeiri's imposition of the Sharia or Islamic law on all segments of the Sudanese population – Muslims, Christians and Animists alike. The widely perceived racial and religious discrimination against the mainly Christian and Animist Black-Africans from South Sudan by the Arabs from Sudan's north essentially Muslim and controlling Sudan's governing regimes and economy contributed largely to the commencement of the conflict. This conflict which provoked an influx of refugees into neighbouring states including Ethiopia presented the latter's post-1974 regime the opportunity to reciprocate for Sudan's support to Ethiopian rebel movements by giving support to the rebel movement emerging in Sudan.

2.3. Political and Economic Problems

In the Horn of Africa, the nature of state power is a key source of conflict, political victory assuming a winner-takes-all form with respect to wealth and resources as well as the prestige and prerogatives of office. Irrespective of the official form of government, regimes in the Horn of Africa are, in most cases, autocracies essentially relying on ethnic loyalties. The military and security services, in recent times emerging from a liberation front background, ensure the hold on power of these militarized regimes (Medhanie, 2004:7). By default, a controlled, not to speak of peaceful change of power, is an exception. And, insufficient accountability of leaders, lack of transparency in regimes, non-adherence to the rule of law, lack of respect for human and peoples' rights made political control excessively important and the stakes dangerously high.

Also, given the highly personalized milieu in which politics operates in the Horn of Africa, it was possible for a 'strong-man benevolent leader' (Rupiya, 2008:14) in the likes of Mengistu Haile Mariam, Gaafar Nimeiri or Siad Bare who were all deeply insecure behind their ruthlessness and vindictive egomania, to shape the political destiny of a state almost single-handedly and to enter into warm or conflictual relations with other states, inducing civilian populations to join in and converting them into military and para-military groups (Wasara, 2002:39). In fact, despite the devastation they brought, such leaders and their behind-the-scenes operators used senseless conflicts to divert popular impatience to their inability to improve conditions. Moreover, there is, in these states, a lack of trained personnel mustering a long-term vision and with long experience in security policy-making and management who prefer to go abroad in order to better their lives or escape systematic maltreatment. Leaders exploiting the international community's laissez-faire attitude turn deaf ears to the advice of professional policy advisors and opinion-formers. This automatically leads to what an observer of regional politics described as 'short-term thinking' (Medhanie, 2004:7) and clumsy ad hoc decision-making and eventually to shocks such as the unanticipated Ethiopia-Eritrea War of 1998-2000.

Moreover, political competition in the Horn of Africa is not rooted in viable economic systems. All of the region's states are barely capable of reaching a level of economic development at which even the basic needs of their populations are met. Economic activities are strongly skewed towards primary commodities for export which are subject to the whims of the fluctuating prices of the international commodity market. Economic activities are also hampered by external dependence, inadequate infrastructure, shortage of capital, shortage of skilled manpower and misguided development policies. Moreover, the state is unable to provide adequate health and education services and to remedy mass unemployment which partly results from unsustainably high population growth.

Furthermore, in order to hold on to power, to hold the state together and to defend it against the claims and attacks of other states and rebel movements, governing regimes build and maintain military forces of large dimensions (See Tables 4, 5 and 6). They spend a large share of national expenditure disproportionate to available economic resources and existing security threats. This kind of excessive militarization eventually entails an increased burden especially in the present times of dwindling resources and economic crises. Excessive military spending is essentially a wasteful expenditure because of which social projects in education or health remain stagnant or even non-existent. It also heightens the perception of mutual threat with a wide range of unintended political consequences. On the one hand, external threats will be used, as mentioned earlier, to distract attention from real internal problems. On the other hand, a politicized, compromised and restless military with its proneness to usurp state power and resources will represent a grave danger to inherently fragile regimes as well as their political and security structures.

Table 8: Military Coups in and around the Horn of Africa

| State | Military Coups | |
|-----------------|------------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| | Successful | Failed |
| Djibouti | - | 1991 |
| Egypt | 1952 | - |
| Eritrea | - | - |
| Ethiopia | 1916 | 1960 1989 |
| Kenya | - | 1982 |
| Somalia | 1969 | 1951 1978 |
| Sudan | 1958 1969 1985 1989 | 1959 1966 1971 1976 1983 |
| Uganda | 1971 1980 | 1971 1974 1975 1976 1988 |

Sources: Adapted by the author from McGowan, African Military Coups 1956-2001

2.4. Access to Shared Resources and Environmental Degradation

Even though the states of the Horn of Africa appear to be independent of each other, ‘there may have to be a sharing of resources. An obvious example is the flow of a river ... but shared resources may also be reflected in the cross-border movements of pastoralists’ (Woodward, 1996:118). The most prominent river is the Nile River which has always been an intricate part of Horn of Africa geopolitics. Ethiopia, Sudan and Egypt are geographically partly owners and users of the river, and all three consider it as a major security issue (Swain, 1997; Debay, 2008). Egypt, in particular, totally depends on the Nile River’s waters for its very existence (Abdel, 1995:19) and thus ‘the first consideration of any Egyptian government is to guarantee that these waters are not threatened. This means ensuring that no hostile power can control the headwaters of the Nile or interfere with its flow into Egypt’ (Heikal, 1978:715).

Accordingly, Egypt repeatedly made it crystal-clear that it would resort to the treat of military action (Swain, 1997:685) to preserve its portion of the Nile River (the 1959 Egyptian-Sudanese Treaty allocated 55.5 billion cubic meters of the river to Egypt) even though, ‘owing to a combination of political and economic conditions and technological limitations in Central and Eastern Africa, this threat fortunately did not materialize for a long time’ (Abdel, 1995:19-20). For instance, after signing a peace treaty with Israel in 1979, Egypt’s late president Anwar Sadat issued a stern warning which was well-noted in Ethiopia and according to which ‘the only matter which could take Egypt to war again is water.’

This policy aimed at preventing upstream states, especially Ethiopia which contributes more than 80 % of the water flowing to Egypt, from claiming their share of the Nile River's total water. Furthermore, being the Arab world's most populous, politically influential and militarily strongest state, Egypt entertained the long-established ambition of projecting its power into the Red Sea. Ethiopia was exposed to this geopolitical projection which included overt support to the Eritrean Liberation Front established in Cairo, military support to Somalia during the 1977-1978 Ogaden War, military support to Eritrea during the 1998-2000 Ethiopia-Eritrean War and short-circuiting Ethiopia's IGAD-mandated mediation in Somalia during the mid-1990s. Indeed, a military pact was signed in 1976 between the two states following which Egypt stationed troops in Sudan, trained its military personnel and undertook joint military planning given that, in the case of aggression against one, the other will come to its rescue. Clearly, Egypt regards Sudanese territory as providing added depth to its geopolitical objectives and is not comfortable with the idea of South Sudan attaining independence as it 'might jeopardize Nile security' (Lefebvre, 1996:402; Buzan and Waever, 2003:243).

In addition, pastoralists have to be constantly on the move looking for areas offering better water and grass which ignite conflicts among pastoralists as well as with sedentary agricultural communities in the Horn of Africa. However, the creation of artificial borders and of states which are interested in controlling all movements and imposing taxes limited the size of available resources and disrupted the traditional movement patterns of pastoral societies (Markakis, 1993). Armed clashes, negative state policies leading to violently expressed grievances and recurrent drought lead to an environmental crisis and the militarization of pastoral societies which in turn exacerbate inter-ethnic tensions. What happened in Darfur was partly an environmentally-generated antagonism over shared resources such as water systems, woodlands and grazing land for livestock. As populations in Darfur and its surroundings increased and access to these resources became more acutely scarce, conflicts between and among communities erupted and became difficult to resolve.

Table 9: Armed Cattle Rustling in and around the Horn of Africa

| State | Clusters | Targeted Areas of Raids |
|-----------------|------------------------------------|--|
| Ethiopia | Koroma Nyangatom | North-eastern Kenya South-eastern Sudan |
| Kenya | Marakwet Turkana Sabiny | North-eastern Uganda Southern Ethiopia South-eastern Sudan |
| Sudan | Boya Didinga Toposa Murle | Northern Kenya North-eastern Kenya North-eastern Uganda Southern Ethiopia |
| Uganda | Karamajong Dodoth Jie | Northern Kenya South-eastern Sudan North-eastern Kenya Kenyan Rift Valley |

Source: Wasara, Conflict and State Security in the Horn of Africa

2.5. The Logic of Subversion

The states of the Horn of Africa took advantage of every local tension or conflict to support rebel movements in neighbouring states (Cliffe, 1999:90; Healy, 2008a:39). Sponsoring subversive activities had simply become a customary tool poised to destabilize and endanger the security of another state, in what some observers called the time-honoured principle of *my enemy's enemy is my friend* extending throughout the Horn of Africa (Weber, 2008:11; Healy, 2008b:10). This enhanced inter-state rivalries, mutual suspicion and the development of an eye-for-an-eye mentality. One example is the long and bloody game of tit-for-tat which bedeviled relations between Ethiopia and Sudan for over four decades (Woodward, 1996:119; Ottaway, Herbst and Mills, 2004:1). It 'is impossible to prove who was the original culprit in this long-running proxy war' (de Waal, 2007:10) as ensuring the secrecy of the support's details was paramount because a disclosure of its true extent would threaten its effectiveness and risk major embarrassment to the regimes. In any case, Sudan's support for Ethiopian rebel movements was the reason why the Sudan People's Liberation Army enjoyed strong and sustained support from the post-1974 Ethiopian regime.

Other examples abound in the Horn of Africa in which 'pursuing regional foreign policy through proxy forces in neighbouring countries has been the normal pattern of relations for decades. This activity has proved persistent over time and has survived radical political reconfigurations, including changes of regime' (Healy, 2008a:39). 'Mengistu engaged Barre in a proxy guerrilla war in which they each supported the other's insurgent' (Lefebvre, 1996:397). The Christian-fundamentalist Lord's Resistance Army received support from Islamist Sudan in retaliation for Uganda's support for the Sudan People's Liberation Army. Sudan's support for the Eritrean Islamic Jihad invited Eritrean support to the Sudan People's Liberation Army and the National Democratic Alliance which was even allowed to occupy the Sudanese embassy premises in Asmara (Cliffe, 1999:97-99; Lefebvre, 1996:401; Woodward, 2006:49). It has to be pointed out that Eritrea has become a recklessly belligerent bully especially adept at pursuing a low-cost strategy of supporting rebel movements against Sudan and Ethiopia as well as in Somalia. Many analysts describe Eritrea's support to the Somali Islamist movements, despite facing its own Islamist movement, as a *proxy war* (a case which will be developed in more detail in upcoming sections) which is largely opportunistic as it cuts across ideological lines.

2.6. The Logic of Alliances

Alliances are usually assigned to prevent or contain external disruptions of security from occurring and to establish a viable equilibrium of forces in a region (Buzan, 1991:189). The formation of alliances which is part of the balance of power system is a strategy devised and implemented in conjunction with regional or external partners. In the Horn of Africa, alliances span a wide range of different configurations. They range from formal military alliances between leaders or regimes to state support for rebel movements in neighbouring states and farther afield or even alliances between rebel movements (Healy, 2008a:39). But, as in the case of subversion, alliances may not bring together like-minded

partners the loyalties of which are by no means fixed as they may be sometimes working at cross purposes. Every alliance 'tends to have a logic of its own when once set in motion' (Cliffe, 1999:102) and accordingly cannot withstand the test of time (See Table 10). It is plausible to argue that one exceptional alliance which stood the test of time and the Cold War's realignments was the one established between Kenya and Ethiopia after they signed in 1963 a military pact aimed at neutralizing Somalia.

In the Horn of Africa, opportunistic alliances had a relative restraining influence but gave equally additional momentum for inter-state conflict. One classical alliance behaviour is provided by the vicious spiral of alliances and counter-alliances which emerged in the late 1970s at a time of tensions and violence in the region. US-supported Egypt which was engaged in conflict with Soviet-supported Libya helped Sudan and Somalia. Ethiopia which was drawn into the socialist camp fought Somalia, confronted Sudan and got associated with Libya by the 1981 Aden Treaty. Somalia was in effect supported by Egypt and Sudan in its claims on Ethiopian territory. Sudan which was backed especially by Egypt stood against its neighbours, Libya and Ethiopia. And, Libya which was not directly involved in territorial or other disputes in the Horn of Africa helped the enemy (Ethiopia) of its enemy's (Egypt) allies, Sudan and Somalia (Imru, 1989:38-40; Seifudin, 1997:114; Lefebvre, 1996:397).

Table 10: Half a Century of Regional Alliances (1959-2009)

| Year of Origin | Type of Alliance | Allied States | Target States | External Connection |
|-----------------------|-------------------------|---|--|-------------------------------------|
| 1959 | Nile treaty | Egypt and Sudan | Ethiopia | - |
| 1963 | Defense pact | Kenya and Ethiopia | Somalia | - |
| 1976 | Defense pact | Egypt and Sudan | Ethiopia and Libya | - |
| 1978 | Alliance of convenience | Somalia, Sudan and Egypt | Ethiopia | US supported all 3 states |
| 1981 | Tripartite treaty | Ethiopia, South Yemen and Libya | Egypt, Sudan and Somalia (all US allies) | The Soviet Union armed all 3 states |
| 1991 | Alliance of convenience | Sudan, Ethiopia and Eritrea | - | - |
| 1993 | Defense pact | Eritrea and Ethiopia | - | - |
| 1994 | Containment front | Ethiopia, Eritrea and Uganda | Sudan | US blessing |
| 1998 | Alliance of convenience | Ethiopia and Djibouti | Eritrea | France |
| 2002 | Alliance of convenience | Ethiopia, Sudan, Yemen, Somali Transitional Federal Government and Djibouti | Eritrea | - |

Source: Compiled by the author

The latest regional alliance is the Sana'a Forum for Cooperation which was established in 2002 and is widely perceived as an 'alliance of convenience aimed against Eritrea'

(Venkataraman, 2005:73). It was initially a tripartite alliance between Ethiopia, Sudan and Yemen all of which had military confrontations with Eritrea and shared a deep-seated antipathy towards its regime. Sudan and Ethiopia especially think that 'there can never be regional stability as long as Issayas dominates the Eritrean state' (Young, nd:15). Somalia was also later on included as a sideline partner and Djibouti joined as an observer in 2008 after its bizarre border dispute with Eritrea.

2.7. The Horn of Africa's Strategic Importance and Superpower Interference

The Horn of Africa has never acquired a strategic importance for its raw materials or for any other continental advantage (Imru, 1989:55). Indeed, the region has always been allotted a relatively important strategic value owing to its proximity to the Red Sea which is an important and expeditious route of international trade and communications between Europe, the Middle East and the Far East as well as the navigation route through which oil is transported from the Persian Gulf (in which the largest oil deposits of the world are located) to consumers in North America and Europe (Legum, 1985:193; Lefebvre, 1996:388). Hence, the states of the Horn of Africa were forced into economic, political and military dependence on either one of the two superpowers of the Cold War – the US and the Soviet Union. Competing to establish positions of influence and military advantage in the strategically significant regions of the Persian Gulf and Indian Ocean, the two superpowers supported client states in the adjacent Horn of Africa primarily by injecting military aid and undermined inimical states by supporting rebel movements and weaving unfriendly alliances and counter-alliances (Abbink, 2003:407).

The interests of the US can be explained in terms of securing access to oil for the West in the Arabian Peninsula and the Persian Gulf. It was thus in the interests of the US to fend off any expansion of Soviet power and influence, whether through proxies or not, in the Middle East, Indian Ocean and the Horn of Africa. Conversely, the Soviet Union aimed at promoting its credibility as a superpower by influencing and overarming the largest number of strategically placed client states (Imru, 1989:57), at imperiling oil tankers bound to the West via the Suez Canal and at reducing to nil the influence of the US in the above mentioned regions. Geopolitical logic also required the Soviet Union which needed to have maritime staging areas for its rapidly increasing navy to control the arc running from South Asia to the Horn of Africa (Farer, 1979:114-115).

2.8. Terrorism

Since the mid-1990s, the states in the Horn of Africa have witnessed hundreds of acts of terrorism against foreign as well as local citizens and interests. The region is accordingly considered both as a breeding ground and a safe haven for terrorist organizations, especially after the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks in the US. Hence, this region has come under increased scrutiny in the war against terrorism. For instance, Kenya in which around 10 % of the population is Muslim (See Table 1) was the site of the 1998 terrorist attack on the US embassy in Nairobi, the bombing of a Mombasa hotel and the missile attack on an Israeli commercial jetliner in 2002. These acts have accentuated the fear that Kenya's Muslim-dominated coastal areas may fall under fundamentalist influence and

affect the state's internal structure and foreign relations as well as exacerbate latently existing social and ethnic conflicts (Usama, 2009:25-26).

In the wake of the terrorist attacks in the US, Somalia came under the watchful eyes of Western intelligence services and military forces. In view of Somalia's lengthy and easily penetrable seacoast as well as the prolonged absence of a functioning administration, the US worried that Al Qaeda might establish training bases or use it as a conduit of money, personnel and material for future terrorist operations beyond the Horn of Africa. Moreover, the increasing flexibility and speed of twentieth century transportation and communications meant that states could expect no time to be warned against terrorist attacks. The US thus created a Combined Joint Task Force-Horn of Africa (CTJF-HOA) with an area of responsibility covering the Horn of Africa plus Yemen.

The US is only bent on reducing the ability of terrorist organizations to operate and move in the region. The actions of the US clearly show a discrepancy between its own interest of fighting terrorism in the Horn of Africa and that of the regional regimes which have an utter disdain for its concerns. In fact, the diffusion of modern military technologies and state-of-the-art techniques of organization which the US approach entailed went beyond the modernization of the military or the transfer of weapons. It led to the institutionalized surveillance of entire populations and the blind wholesale suppression of all political opponents, leading in effect to the diffusion of ideas such as Islamist fundamentalism with resultant security problems particularly in Somalia. An observer of the Horn of Africa said that

Outside actors need to respond judiciously to the allegations of terrorism leveled against various parties to conflict in the Horn. The underlying conflicts in the region are older than the contemporary war on terrorism and will probably outlast it. Outsiders need to recognize the tactical value of their support and the interests at stake in representing local adversaries as associates of terrorism. They also need to weigh the possible gains (in terms of international terrorism) from intervention against the risks of greater radicalization, alienation and conflict generation in the region (Healy, 2008a:44-45).

Conclusion and Prospect

The author tried to treat the Horn of Africa which is 'interlinked to an even greater extent than in the case in other regions of Africa' (Shinn, 2009:1) as a unit of analysis in its own right, a unit which possesses its own internal dynamic process. He also tried to underline the importance of such a regional focus which links both the internal and external determinants in providing a better understanding of the dynamics of conflict in the Horn of Africa in which the unknown prevails and power is calculated in terms of available weapons. Only such an understanding can release a *this isn't working* attitude leading to a whole new *rethinking* on several levels in turn leading to a *something must be done* reaction which might perhaps give the next generations of the Horn of Africa a better perspective on their future.

Indeed, 'how security threats are perceived and articulated in the Horn of Africa could provide better insights into how the region actually works' (Healy, 2008a:40). For instance, the 'seemingly irrational stances vis-à-vis neighbours' (Cliffe, 1999:108) and the rapidity of the shifts in alliances and subversive support in the Horn of Africa suggest that regional security is intimately linked to the survival and interests of regimes in place as well as of rebel movements which actually all gain from conflict and are respectively part and manifestation of the problem rather than part of the solution (Cliffe, 1999:108; Chege, 1987:99). They also suggest that 'interactions between the states of the region support and sustain the conflicts within the states of the region in a systemic way' (Healy, 2008a:44).

It will be undoubtedly argued that the view which the author presented in this paper is, apart from being theoretical and speculative, unnecessarily pessimistic and even apocalyptic. For one, the author could not bring himself to paint a rosy and ahistorical picture of the grim realities in the region. Moreover, his view emanated from the sad fact that the Horn of Africa continues to face a myriad of smothering security challenges. One such challenge is the primal urge of the region's states to secure and extend their geopolitical power in ways which are threatening to other states. The author could point to the politics during the decades preceding the conflicts in Darfur, South Sudan, Somalia and Eritrea, and even the few years preceding the 1977-1978 Ogaden War or the 1998-2000 Ethiopian-Eritrean War.

The turbulent political transitions in all of the region's states and their reciprocal fears and disputes were so durable and interlocked that, in retrospect, the outbreak of all these conflicts seems inevitable. In fact, it should not require much analysis and imagination to understand that, in the Horn of Africa, conditions for conflict brew for years, if not decades and centuries. However and paradoxically enough, it will always be difficult to weave together various contradictory trends as well as realistically assess precedents and multiple indices of a dynamic nature and of many dimensions. And, despite all the dedicated seminars, conferences, presentations, briefings, articles and voluminous books, it will always be difficult to continuously anticipate with a reasonably high degree of accuracy the different conflicts' exact origins, scale, sustenance and implications. Furthermore, the region's conflicts are usually continuations of previous conflicts spanning out of control and they, themselves, can very easily either set off or further complicate other conflicts (Joireman, 2004:186).

All in all, in the longer term, turmoil and conflict will continue to threaten large portions of the Horn of Africa which is shackled to its tangled history. All of the region's states will continue to try to survive as cohesive and united entities and to defend their territorial integrity with far greater zeal than expected. But, they will still be unable to control unregulated population movements both within and across unresolved borders and to militarily overcome rebel movements *once and for all*. Making matters worse, the states in the Horn of Africa will continue to be engaged in a cutthroat geopolitical chess game across the region, with leaders unable to fully get into the minds of their counterparts as well as professionally assess their real intentions and precipitously trying to keep one step ahead of each other in order to avoid being eclipsed. The author would

like to emphasize, in the strongest possible way and for whoever is interested in the security of the entire Horn of Africa, that the coming two years (Ethiopian 2010 elections, Djiboutian 2011 elections, Sudanese 2010 elections, ICC controversy and 2011 referendum) will define the region's geopolitical map for the upcoming fifteen or twenty years.

Finally, to the question whether the Horn of Africa forms, in Buzan's terminology, a security complex, given all the factors mentioned in this paper, the answer is a definite yes. In fact, the generalizable theory advanced by Buzan fits the Horn of Africa like a glove. Healy accurately noted that 'historical patterns of amity and enmity are deeply etched in the region. Conflicts typically stem from factors indigenous to the region, the most enduring being centre-periphery relations in Ethiopia and Sudan. There is also a tradition of outside powers making alignments with states within the regional security complex' (Healy, 2008a:40). Nonetheless, the author will leave the readers of this paper to judge whether this last answer by proxy holds or not.

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