



Institute for Islamic Strategic Affairs

Horn of Africa: Reappraising the Challenges to Regional Security



Horn of Africa: Reappraising the Challenges to Regional Security

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In recent months, a number of emerging variables have shifted the security calculus in North-East Africa, deteriorating a miasmatic situation still further. Revelations of corruption in AMISOM, the culpability of regional actors in transnational criminal circuitries and a reliance on antiquated strategic frameworks supplement new trends of intra-Jihadi competition. Despite being consistently overlooked by the international media, this collective trajectory alludes to the theatre's diminishing stability and indicates a weakening in local peace-building efforts. While the extent of this regression remains unclear, the global community needs to recalibrate its approach, integrating the new realities now framing multilateral security and development efforts on the ground.

The motion affirmed by the Somali Parliament compelling a withdrawal of all intervening Kenyan forces, has reanimated concerns of systemic corruption plaguing both AMISOM and the broader region. These allegations suggest extensive Kenyan military participation in illicit sugar and

charcoal markets operating out of Kismayo worth between \$200 and \$400 million per year.ⁱ Journalists for Justice (JFJ) claim the profits are trifurcated between the KDF, elements of the Interim Jubaland administration and al Shabaab affiliates.ⁱⁱ By facilitating access to key revenue streams this cartel has directly benefited the group on a "scale greater" than when Shabaab controlled the port in 2012, thereby perpetuating essential economic lifelines prolonging the insurgency.ⁱⁱⁱ

Beyond Kenyan commanders on the ground, there are further indications the smuggling network undergirds an elaborate patron-client framework in Nairobi and therefore enjoys the "tacit cooperation of leaders at the highest echelons of the Executive and National Assembly" and in Kenya's ministries of Defence and Immigration. As such, an entrenched war economy in Kismayo has significant implications: these financial circuitries rely on insecurity and by engaging in systematic rent-seeking behaviour the KDF has every incentive to exacerbate political instability, and by extension the

longevity of al Shabaab, in the Somali periphery despite its ascribed role in the AMISOM counter-insurgency campaign. By representing such a substantial contingent of AMISOM's ground forces, Kenya presents a double bind. Paradoxically, either a withdrawal or the continuation of an unregulated military presence will directly undermine the legitimacy and operational cohesion of the peace-keeping mission in Somalia and could provide space for a militant resurgence across the region. It is therefore crucial to recognise the regional crisis is not the unilateral product of Jihadism, but the consequence of a multifaceted criminal-insurgency-patronage nexus that extends far beyond Somalia.

Similarly, the construction of a 450-mile long wall along the Kenya-Somali border provides an excellent metaphor for the broader misconceptions currently undermining Nairobi's approach to Islamic radicalism.^{iv} It relies on a security paradigm defined by antiquated understandings of al Shabaab and continues to perceive the ideological dimensions of the insurgency as spatially confined and fundamentally Somali-centric. In reality, the Shabaab franchise has become increasingly diverse,

integrating a range of subsidiary organisations across the region, shifting its identity, aspirations and thereby transforming both the theatre and the nature of its Jihad.^v The group should therefore be understood more as a polycentric movement, actively cultivating non-Somali recruits, incubating autonomous regional insurgencies and adopting external aims as its own.^{vi}

This includes its affiliate al Hijra, an indigenous outfit operating inside the Kenyan polity, which continues to exploit the grass-root grievances characteristic of traditionally suppressed local communities. Compounded by a violent security apparatus monopolised by Christians and a government attempting to satiate its evangelical base, the country's Muslim minority has been steadily disenfranchised, particularly in the relatively impoverished North-Eastern periphery.^{vii} In contrast to the affluent suburbs of Nairobi, Muslim majority towns along the border are experiencing up to 75 per cent youth unemployment and even 90 per cent in Garissa, increasing susceptibilities to the salaries offered by al Hijra recruiters.^{viii} The systemic marginalisation and politically sanctioned internment of ethnic Somali

refugees has similarly accelerated radicalisation processes, producing local audiences that are increasingly receptive to Shabaab's discourse. While in military terms the highest regional threat continued to emanate from the group's Somali node, the seductive ideology Shabaab, disseminated under a rubric of victimization, has inherently transcendental properties, which provides an abstract narrative that can be quickly adopted and internalised across the Horn of Africa. Hidalgo aptly summarises: "facing a lack of opportunity, corrupt governments and religious and ethnic marginalisation, susceptible East Africans have had few reasons not adopt extremist views".^{ix} In this sense, beyond blocking the entry of further refugees and superficially ameliorating symptoms of regional instability, the proposed idea of a border wall fails to address the deeper, domestic dimension of Shabaab's resurgence, namely the matrix of local grievances that continue to enflame violence within Kenya. As such, unless there is a fundamental reappraisal of the metrics defining counter-insurgency success, political stability, and the West acknowledges the role 'troop contributing countries' have in perpetuating the conditions fuelling

regional insecurity, the situation will only deteriorate further.

Moreover, the weaknesses framing multilateral peacekeeping and peace-building processes have been compounded by endogenous cleavages now seemingly defining the landscape of regional Jihad in East Africa. While al Shabaab pledged allegiance to al Qaeda in 2012^x and maintains close, historical linkages with AQAP in Yemen, discernible cracks are starting to proliferate. Recent attacks launched by pro-IS militias around Bossaso^{xi} have followed the defection of Sheikh Abdiqadir Muumin, leader of Shabaab's Puntland affiliate along with 20 of his followers in October to Islamic State.^{xii} Hansen argues it is not difficult to see the local allure of IS as they "control territories, they are part of a larger narrative... they are part of the re-emerging caliphate... ISIS is acting. Where is al Qaeda? They are nowhere to be found".^{xiii} Integrating Boko Haram and Sinai affiliates, the IS franchise has diffused the idea of Global Jihad and exported ideological competition to Africa, directly challenging the previously hegemonic al Qaeda network on several fronts.

A key example is IS's increasing monopoly over the recruitment of foreign fighters, including ethnic Somalis, depreciating Shabaab's military capacity and popular standing. In retaliation, the Amniyat (internal police) have launched a series of violent purges against 'Daesh sympathisers'^{xiv} and the leadership has sanctioned the immediate beheading of "anyone saying he belongs to another Islamic movement".^{xv}

However, it is important not to overstate the permeation of IS across the Horn of Africa. Meleagrou-Hitchens argues the group doesn't really have a serious regional presence: "it's not embedded, it hasn't got the kind of connections and networks that al Qaeda has".^{xvi} Beyond brand recognition, it therefore appears IS has little to currently offer al Shabaab, suggesting the nexus between AQC and its subsidiaries in East Africa will remain cohesive for the near future. Indeed, contemporary references to intra-Jihadi competition may in reality derive from historical fissures fragmenting Shabaab's leadership. With the violent consolidation of an internal autocracy under Godane, and its subsequent dilution after his death in 2014, has generated space for personal and broader clan feuds to metastasise.

The discursive mobilisation of 'new' Islamic State entities could therefore actually reflect political disputes within al Shabaab, with various factions invoking the threat of defection as a front for resolving pre-existing grievances. As such, Somalia's alleged experience of IS may be the product of organic, local divisions, rather than the inculcation of exogenous ideological norms. Regardless of its origins these cleavages have the propensity to reanimate regional violence and it remains a trend requiring further monitoring.

To conclude, there are a number of emerging challenges undermining the regional stability of North East Africa and they invariably remain fluid and operationally inter-dependent across social, political and economics spheres. In this context, a holistic reappraisal of the situation is necessary. Unless contemporary peace-building approaches are substantively revised to appreciate these new security dimensions, any policy-prescriptions will remain compromised.

About resources, militancy and organised crime in West and Horn of Africa programme

Brief Background and Scope:

Africa's GDP is the most rapidly growing of any continent but corruption, crime, and militancy are rife. Much of this centres on the continent's wealth of natural resources, including petroleum etc. Foreign investment in Africa has grown exponentially over the last decade and will continue to rise. Consequently, foreign & African governments and criminal/militant groups' interests and sphere of influences will clash with increasing intensity over the coming years. This will have direct implications on energy, regional and global security agendas. Furthermore, areas such as West and Horn of Africa regions are strategically located which enhances their role in the international trade system through shipping routes and trans-national linkages etc. The creation of AFRICOM reflects the rising global importance of the region, with the export of oil from the continent expected to increase drastically by 2025. Yet, with the region still lacking institutions of effective governance and reliable security structures, the levels of violent insurgency have jeopardised economic development in countries such as Somalia, Ethiopia, Mali and Nigeria. Different militant groups finance their operations through employment of traditional criminal enterprises, such as smuggling and drug sales. Resources are also exploited for revenue by both criminal organisation and militant groups. Militant organisations such as Al-Shabab and other Jihadists and nationalist movement operating primarily in Somalia & Sahel – have exploited the security vacuum that exists in the regions. In addition, issues such as piracy continue to effect maritime security whilst increasing costs for counter-piracy measures.

The implications of this are severe on all three fronts - energy security, regional security and global security. While to address these problems and develop solutions, we must confront all three now and holistically, with due appreciation and regard to their interrelated attributes.

Programme's Deliverables:

1. Mapping the interplay between resources, militant groups and the dynamics of organised crime in West/Horn of Africa.
2. Conflict forecasting and risk analysis of the current and future dynamics of militancy, resources, organised crimes and their repercussions on energy security, regional and global security.
3. Situation analyses on above issues, regional positioning and global powers interests etc.
4. Alternative policy analyses that may serve in policy making on regional and global governance levels
5. Creating a useful guide and knowledge base for stakeholders and public for future oil, gas and aid endeavours in West/Horn of Africa.

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