

The Horn of Africa: Imperial Showground, Next Frontier for International Politics, and African Conundrum

There has been a shift in the traditional superpower and structural diplomacy framework, and it has been recognised that this has transformed each side's ideological perspectives and strategic methods. As a result, new actors from a wide variety of fields have emerged as powerful forces in politics, the economy, the military, and the media. Just as conventional diplomacy is being rethought, so too are ideologically-based strategic alliances.

Competition is noticeable not only for natural resources but also for a strategic alliance and preeminent geopolitical position. It is no surprise that globalisation has altered many of the 20th century's constants and variables. Challenges and possibilities are intertwined, and interdependence on major nations is significantly more significant and more diverse than it was during the cold war.

However, one variable remains constant for the global south, notably the African continent, which continues to exist on the periphery. African countries are still the recipients of conditional aid, which includes both humanitarian and technical assistance. Hence, their choice does not matter with regard to the hosting of military outposts, as they have no bargaining power, and most negotiations take place in an uneven power dynamic.

The Horn of Africa serves as a paradigmatic case because it is the site of a complex military presence. What distinguishes it is that Djibouti, Eritrea, Somalia, and Sudan have increasingly become "international security players" on the playing field. Djibouti is unique in that it hosts a diverse military contingent from all over the world, including the United States, Europe, the Middle East, the Gulf, and Asia. The official countries now present in Djibouti are China, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, Spain, and the United States, as stated by Neil Melvin in his SIPRI article published in April 2019.

Melvin also noted the presence of the United Arab Emirates (UAE), Egypt, Israel, Russia, Saudi Arabia, Turkey, and Somalia in Eritrea, Sudan, and Somalia. Qatar and its close ally Turkey have supported the central authority in Mogadishu. On the other side, Saudi and UAE opponents have supported Somaliland and Puntland's local governments, which are seeking independence from Somalia. It is becoming increasingly worrying and unclear whether or not the expanding military presence of Japan, the United States, China, and European nations in Djibouti would serve as a conflict hellhole.

The Horn of Africa was characterised by protracted military conflicts, large-scale displacements, civil war, severe food crises, and maritime terrorism (piracy) from the 1970s to the end of the 1990s. Currently, the region signifies a break from the past, yet, the new frontier is inconvenient due to the overwhelming presence of several international military units. However, the political and economic landscape of the Horn of Africa has changed significantly during the past half-century. Additionally, the shift in the balance of power is being caused by Ethiopia's resurgence as an economic force as the second most populous nation in Africa.

Somalia and the South Sudan peace accord between diverse factions and the peace agreement between Ethiopia and Eritrea are new occurrences that have brought relative stability.

The new leaders of Ethiopia, Sudan, and Somalia stand at a crossroads in their efforts to preserve the long-established momentum for independence as a nonaligned movement. The internal struggle in Ethiopia has also dashed hopes. As a result, the foreign power behind the TPLF and OLF-Shane has gotten more convoluted, leading to the emergence of grimmer scenarios. On the other hand, giving up makes them vulnerable to being taken over by geopolitical actors.

The Horn of Africa has currently contested territory for Western imperial powers and the rising powers of the Gulf states. The ambitions of regional nations and their people are hampered by the expansion of military and diplomatic activities in the region. The presence of foreign powers is, in the end, subject to the discretion of individual governments.

Nonetheless, it could influence the sub-regional and regional institutions, such as the Intergovernmental Authority for Development (IGAD) and the African Union, to pursue an existing treaty or shared security interest. In any case, the main debate centres on the degree to which these countries are forthcoming regarding the deal reached with the military base's current occupier. How long are these military outposts expected to remain in these nations? What is the responsibility of the subregional and regional organisations?

In contrast, the African Union mandated the establishment of the African Standby Force in accordance with Article 13, the governing document for arrangement in all five subregions of Africa. In contrast, neither the African Union nor IGAD has commented on the Horn of Africa's substantial military presence. There is also no alternative solution presented that can replace the external powers currently maintaining peace and stability in the region. What is more, the strategic geopolitical advantage of the region should be translated into building local capability with preferred partners to benefit the inhabitants under the reign.

According to the Institute for Security Studies, on August 27, 2019, over thirteen African nations were visited by the United States, France, and other regional entities. There are thirty-four bases on the continent, with the United States having the most. Over seven thousand troops followed France. Yet, Djibouti is the epicentre of this presence, with about eleven foreign military bases. Equally, Djibouti is the highest revenue collector, with an estimated USD 300 million annually.

Foreign military outposts are a source of revenue for some, despite their presence being a source of security concerns for many African nations. In addition, growing military investments and seaport expansions will rapidly alter the geopolitical dynamics on both sides of the Red Sea. Still, it will cause significant reactions among the involved parties in the long run. Before it is too late, the enormous investments in seaports and the military along the coast require considerably greater transparency.

What can the countries of the Horn of Africa, the IGAD, and the African Union learn from the large-scale deployment of non-African forces on African soil? The presence of military powers in Africa needs to be analysed in light of the economic and security benefits of African countries and the goals of external powers. Although African governments have seized the opportunities as a foreign direct investment to support their weaker economic positions.

Consequently, due to the investment in and leasing of land for military bases, African nations put their internal and external decision-making processes and their sovereignty at stake.

Given the abovementioned realities, African nations should strengthen their economic capability through cooperation with regional actors to protect the African coastlines. In order to change the status quo, the African Union, the regional blocs, the member states, and the citizens all need to work together in a coordinated manner.

With this knowledge in hand, the Red Sea's growing geostrategic importance should be redirected away from the competition of external powers and toward the building of indigenous security capabilities. In addition to these details, people and regional organisations should have access to information regarding bilateral and multilateral relations with non-African nations.

The African Union has to form a specialised special task force to generate leverage to decide Africa's international maritime borders. It is essential to capitalise on the relevance of geostrategic significance and redirect efforts towards African collaboration on the continent. In addition, it should be necessary to increase local investments in order to compensate for an existing agreement with imperial forces.

Finally, African agencies must make unrelenting efforts, especially since the management of the Red Sea, water security, and governances may attract new geopolitical powers as a new frontier. Signs of ethnic-based disputes and political instability sponsored by outside forces have sparked internal battles in the Horn of Africa, which have claimed the lives of thousands of innocent individuals.

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