MANAGING THE NEW EXTERNAL SECURITY POLITICS OF THE HORN OF AFRICA REGION

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INTRODUCTION

An important shift is underway in the relationship between the countries of the Horn of Africa and a diverse set of external security actors. The shift is most apparent in the growing foreign military presence in the Horn region.[1] Currently, military forces from the United States, Europe, the Middle East, the Gulf, and Asia are operating in the region.

Initially, security threats internal to the Horn were the focus of external security actors deploying to the region—to counter terrorist groups on land, and piracy and maritime crime at sea. In recent years, security developments external to the Horn have been behind the build-up of foreign military forces. Thus, while external actors remain engaged with the Horn's security challenges, commercial and military competition is increasingly driving foreign deployments to the region.

The foreign military presence in the Horn has begun to reshape the region as a security space, with maritime and littoral areas taking on an increased significance.[2] The foreign forces operating in the Horn have also been integrated into networks of military facilities and naval deployments that extend far beyond the region, linking the Horn to security developments in the Middle East and the Gulf, and the Indo-Pacific.

These rapid changes bring risks not just for the countries of the Horn but also for the external security actors, which operate in an increasingly congested and

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[1] Melvin, N., 'The foreign military presence in the Horn of Africa region', SIPRI Background Paper, Apr. 2019.

[2] Geographically, the Horn of Africa is normally understood to comprise Djibouti, Eritrea, Ethiopia and Somalia. As foreign military forces operate in ways that link deployments on land, in the air and at sea, for the purposes of this paper the Horn of Africa region is defined as a security space comprised of the four core countries plus Kenya, the Seychelles, South Sudan and Sudan, as well as key adjacent maritime areas—the southern Red Sea, the Gulf of Aden and the Bab el-Mandeb Strait. Foreign forces are also deployed beyond the Horn of Africa region but work closely with external military forces in the Horn, notably in Africa (Sahel), the Gulf and the Indian Ocean.

SUMMARY

● The Horn of Africa is undergoing far-reaching changes in its external security environment. A wide variety of international security actors—from Europe, the United States, the Middle East, the Gulf, and Asia—are currently operating in the region. As a result, the Horn of Africa has experienced a proliferation of foreign military bases and a build-up of naval forces. The external militarization of the Horn poses major questions for the future security and stability of the region.

This SIPRI Policy Brief is the third of three papers devoted to the new external security politics of the Horn of Africa. The paper highlights how the growth of foreign military forces in the Horn is transforming the region as a security space, and identifies priorities to help the countries of the Horn to manage the new external security dynamics. The other two papers in this series are 'The foreign military presence in the Horn of Africa region' (SIPRI Background Paper, April 2019) and 'The new external security politics of the Horn of Africa region' (SIPRI Insights on Peace and Security, April 2019).

competitive security environment. Looking ahead, the Horn region is likely to experience further militarization as its strategic importance grows in the context of rising international geopolitical rivalry. These developments underline the need for the Horn countries to develop means of managing the new external security politics.

This SIPRI Policy Brief aims to (*a*) outline the new external security politics of the Horn of Africa region, (*b*) identify the major shifts in the nature of security in the Horn as a result of the new external security politics, (*c*) explore the risks associated with the new external security politics, and (*d*) consider the priorities for the Horn countries in managing the new external security politics.

THE NEW EXTERNAL SECURITY POLITICS OF THE HORN OF AFRICA

The external security environment of the Horn of Africa region is being transformed through the simultaneous engagement of a diversity of foreign military actors (from Asia, the Middle East, the Gulf, Europe and the USA). The rise of foreign military forces reflects the increased significance of an East–West security axis (the simultaneous integration of the Horn into the Middle Eastern and Gulf, and Indo-Pacific strategic spaces). It is also the product of the interdependency of maritime (protection of choke points, sea lines of communication and naval competition) and continental (counterterrorism, support for peace operations, protection

Foreign military forces on land and at sea have become a permanent feature of the Horn of Africa's security landscape

of nationals and security of commercial interests, and the creation of military bases) security agendas. Together, these shifts are creating a new external security politics of the Horn region.[3]

As a result of the build-up of foreign military presences, the Horn has become a multilayered security space. Since the end of the cold war in 1991, four overlapping but distinct external security engagements have developed in the region: (*a*) support for African regional and international multilateral efforts to manage and prevent conflict; (*b*) efforts to combat non-traditional security threats, notably terrorism, piracy and maritime crime; (*c*) the expansion of Gulf and Middle Eastern security into the Horn region; and (*d*) the integration of the Horn region into Indo-Pacific security dynamics. As a result of these engagements, foreign military forces on land and at sea have become a permanent feature of the Horn of Africa's security landscape.[4]

Over the past two decades, complex patterns of cooperation and competition between the countries of the Horn and external security actors, and among the foreign military powers themselves, have developed linked to the four external security engagements. Many of the external actors in the Horn region are undertaking several engagements simultaneously, for example, participating in peace operations, supporting counterterrorism activities, and being part of wider international security competition.

[3] Melvin, N., 'The new external security politics of the Horn of Africa region', SIPRI Insights on Peace and Security no. 2019/2, Apr. 2019.

[4] Melvin (note 3), pp. 5–27.

The respective significance of the four external security engagements is shifting, however, pointing to a structural change in regional security. During the first two post-cold war decades, addressing insecurity in the Horn and countering non-traditional security threats provided the motivation for the build-up of a foreign military presence. Currently, geopolitical competition is the principal driver of the regional build-up of foreign forces.

THE IMPLICATIONS OF THE NEW EXTERNAL SECURITY POLITICS OF THE HORN OF AFRICA

The regional security environment of the Horn of Africa is being affected by the new external security politics in a number of key ways.

Securitization

Since the onset of the US-led global war on terrorism in 2001, the Horn of Africa has become increasingly securitized and external powers have established a set of substantial security engagements to combat non-traditional threats. These engagements have often been conducted through multilateral frameworks, with international mandates and in coordination with regional security organizations. Nevertheless, the primary agents have been foreign military forces. As a result, the Horn region has experienced a significant increase in the numbers and capacities of foreign forces, and in the diversity of national armed forces present in the region. The pursuit of security has, therefore, involved the external militarization of the Horn region.

External militarization

The militarization of the Horn region involves three interlinked dimensions. First, a physical presence has been established in the form of foreign military infrastructure (bases, ports, airstrips, training camps, semi-permanent facilities and logistics hubs) and naval deployments. In recent years, a series of military facilities have been established, notably extending along the Red Sea, the Horn and the East African littoral, in addition to the established facilities of former European colonial powers (France and the United Kingdom). At the same time, warships (and maritime patrol aircraft) have deployed to the region on a permanent, semi-permanent and periodic basis.[5]

Second, once deployed, external military missions have taken on wider mandates. As a result, foreign military forces in the Horn are today pursuing local, regional and international security agendas from the region. For example, military bases created to enable counterterrorism and counter-piracy missions have subsequently been tasked with supporting peace operations, the protection and evacuation of citizens, crisis response and humanitarian assistance. Foreign military forces have also taken on the role of protecting sea lines of communication, as well as soft power projection.

In Somalia, the US-led counterterrorism mission has broadened in scope and intensified,

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[5] Melvin (note 1).

notably during the administration of President Donald J. Trump.[6] Despite the expansion of the mission, the military commitment appears to be an open-ended one.[7] The construction of Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) military facilities to prosecute the war in Yemen is being accompanied by measures to provide security for long-term commercial investments in the Horn.[8] At the same time, even though Somali piracy attacks have largely ceased, naval missions to the Gulf of Aden have continued, with expanded maritime security mandates that include countering people, arms and drugs trafficking and illegal fishing, as well as counterterrorism.

Third, in the context of rising international competition, the foreign military presence in the Horn has been integrated into networks of military facilities that stretch far beyond the region, notably in the Middle East and Indo-Pacific regions. The external military forces in the Horn have, therefore, acquired geostrategic significance.

In the context of rising international competition, the foreign military presence in the Horn has been integrated into networks of military facilities that stretch far beyond the region

The rise of maritime security

The presence of counter-piracy missions in the Horn of Africa since 2008 has highlighted the recent significance of the maritime domain for the region's security. Growing international interest in maritime security around the Horn has also translated into a need for coastal areas to support the naval presence. With increased commercial interest in the East–West trade corridor linking Asia to Europe and North America, and increased trade opportunities in the Horn (as well as the Horn being an entrepôt to wider African markets), littoral areas have gained further significance.

Thus, the shift to the sea has broadened Horn security, supplementing the established continental focus of international security actors. Furthermore, the rise of the maritime dimension in Horn security has blurred the conventional regional security division between the Horn, the Middle East and the Gulf, and the Indian Ocean.

The intermixing of commercial and military interests

Over the past decade, the growing external security presence in the Horn region has been accompanied by rising commercial interest. Alongside the proliferation of military facilities and increased naval presence there has also been a rapid expansion in foreign-owned and managed ports in the Horn region, as well as in transport infrastructure generally. While Turkey, China and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) have led these developments, European countries have also sought to increase their investments.[9] Their engagements are frequently supported by new

[6] Schmitt, E., and Savage, C., 'Trump administration steps up air war in Somalia', *New York Times*, 10 Mar. 2019.

[7] Browne, R., 'US military mission in Somalia could take seven years to complete', CNN, 13 Apr. 2019.

[8] Manek, N., 'UAE military base in breakaway Somaliland to open by June', Bloomberg, 6 Nov. 2018.

[9] Manek, N., 'European banks may fund Djibouti airport after China deal nixed', Bloomberg, 11 Apr. 2019.

forms of development finance.[10] Thus, as a result of shifts in trade, commerce and security that are external to the region, the Horn of Africa has emerged as a key link in extended networks of bases, ports and trading routes for integrated military and commercial purposes.

The rise of geopolitics

The emergence of non-traditional security threats was the catalyst for the arrival and consolidation of external military forces in the Horn. However, this military presence is now acquiring independent significance as part of wider security competition largely external to the region. Within this security dynamic, it is the geopolitical positioning of the Horn rather than its particular security challenges that is the principal motivation for external interest. Growing strategic rivalries in the Middle East and the Gulf, and increasingly across the Indo-Pacific region, are strengthening hard security competition involving the Horn region. Thus, the region is being integrated into broader geopolitical and geoeconomic agendas.

The shifting regional security policy of the USA

In the post-cold war decades, US support for multilateral approaches to the non-traditional security challenges of the Horn helped to open up the region to a range of new foreign security actors. This notably led to the deployment of a diversity of naval forces to the region on counter-piracy missions from 2008 onwards. Subsequently, the US focus on the rise of China in the Asia-Pacific region has encouraged regional security actors to take a stronger role in the Horn.

The current US efforts to balance and, increasingly, counter the rise of China as an international military power in the Indo-Pacific region are raising questions about what priority the USA will give to the Horn region and, importantly (given the regional interconnection of US military forces), the Middle East and the Gulf. For the USA, the Indo-Pacific security region does not include the Horn, but rather it extends from the western shores of continental USA to the west coast of India.[11]

Already during the administration of US President Barack Obama, the USA signalled a pivot to Asia in its security policy. Against this background, the decision in 2015 to support the Saudi Arabian-led coalition in the Yemeni civil war, rather than intervene militarily itself, underlined that the USA was looking to regional powers to play a new security role.[12] In this context, regional powers—notably from the Middle East and the Gulf—have projected military force into the Horn region and taken on new security responsibilities.

However, the 2018 US Africa Strategy suggests that the USA has shifted to seeing Africa as part of a wider geopolitical struggle with

The emergence of non-traditional security threats was the catalyst for the arrival and consolidation of external military forces in the Horn

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[10] Young, K., 'Sudan's windfall from the Gulf and the perils of new development finance', American Enterprise Institute, 23 Apr. 2019.

[11] White House, National Security Strategy of the United States, Dec. 2017, pp. 45–46.

[12] Northam, J., 'US confirms it is supporting Saudi military operations in Yemen', National Public Radio, 25 Mar. 2015.

China (and Russia). The US National Security Adviser, John Bolton, has also indicated concerns about how the increase of military forces around the Bab el-Mandeb Strait affects strategic access to the Red Sea.[13] Although the USA retains the ability to ensure access, given its overwhelming capabilities, in the current conditions of relative military decline and global overstretch, US naval dominance could be challenged by a further build-up of regional and international powers in and around the Horn region.

Thus, US security policy regarding the Horn of Africa is at a key moment. After years of viewing the Horn exclusively through a non-traditional security lens, the US has recognized that the Red Sea and the Bab el-Mandeb Strait are strategically important to its ability to challenge China, notably in the Indo-Pacific region. The Trump administration has indicated that competing with China in Africa is a geopolitical priority, but the Horn region remains outside the US Indo-Pacific security strategy.[14]

In order to bridge the strategic uncertainty, the USA is looking to enhance its security partnerships with India, Japan and Australia in the Indian Ocean, while encouraging European allies to increase force deployments.[15] If there is a further build-up of military forces in the western Indian Ocean, notably by China, US regional forces in the Horn region are likely to be integrated with the Indo-Pacific security theatre.

THE RISKS ASSOCIATED WITH THE NEW EXTERNAL SECURITY POLITICS

Over nearly two decades, the rising presence of foreign military forces in the Horn of Africa has promoted an opaque security environment. The proliferation of military bases and facilities and the growth of naval forces mean that a variety of countries are now operating in the region through a complex set of bilateral security agreements, and with diverse national and international mandates—linking the Horn to an array of geopolitical and geoeconomic agendas.

Thus, the new external security politics present a number of challenges to the region. Notably, the growth of foreign security interests in the Horn region, and the increasing significance of mixed military-commercial relations, has led to the rise of proxy competition. This situation risks becoming a source of significant instability and fragmentation, with political transitions in the region increasingly influenced by external security competition.

Middle Eastern and Gulf security politics

In recent years, Somalia has emerged as a venue for Gulf and Middle Eastern proxy competition. In 2017, a variety of Gulf countries sought to gain influence through the presidential elections.[16]

US security policy regarding the Horn of Africa is at a key moment

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13 White House, Remarks by National Security Advisor Ambassador John R. Bolton on the Trump Administration's New Africa Strategy, 13 Dec. 2018.

14 Ayres, A., 'The US Indo-Pacific Strategy Needs More Indian Ocean', Council on Foreign Relations, 22 Jan. 2019.

15 Hannah, H., 'The great game moves to sea: Tripolar competition in the Indian Ocean region', War on the Rocks, 1 Apr. 2019.

16 Cannon, B. J. 'Foreign state influence and Somalia's 2017 presidential election: An

During 2018, the contest between Gulf countries in Somalia grew so destabilizing that the African Union (AU) and the European Union (EU) both publicly called on external actors to cease meddling in the country.[17] As external security actors have backed different national and regional political forces, this competition has contributed to a further weakening and fragmentation of Somalia.[18]

In 2019, a variety of external actors sought to influence the political transition in Sudan following the overthrow of the regime of President Omar al-Bashir. The AU and the EU openly criticized the coup.[19] The USA sought influence on the transitional military government through the possible removal of Sudan from the US list of state sponsors of terrorism.[20] Saudi Arabia and the UAE issued statements in support of the transitional military council; and key figures in the transitional council have close ties to GCC states as a result of Sudan's involvement in the Saudi Arabian-led Arab and African coalition fighting in Yemen.[21] The transitional council was quick to issue a statement confirming it would remain in the coalition.[22] Saudi Arabia and the UAE also offered $3 billion in aid to Sudan.[23] Turkey, which has been building closer commercial and security ties with Sudan, including a possible Red Sea naval facility on Sawakin (Suakin) island, indicated that the overthrow of President al-Bashir was directed against it as part of a wider struggle with Egypt, Saudi Arabia and the UAE.[24] Russia, which has deepened its ties with Sudan in recent years and possibly aims to establish a naval facility at Port Sudan, is reported to have been providing proxy support to the al-Bashir regime against the popular protests as it sought to ensure continuity in its relations, including safeguarding naval access to Sudanese port facilities.[25]

In April 2019, Eritrea accused Turkey, Qatar and Sudan of 'conducting sporadic acts of subversion' in a bid to obstruct the peace process with Ethiopia.[26]

External security actors have backed different national and regional political forces, contributing to a further weakening and fragmentation of Somalia

analysis', *Bildhaan: An International Journal of Somali Studies*, vol. 18, no. 1 (2019), art. 6.

[17] Reuters, 'External actors urged to stop meddling in Somalia's affairs', Al Jazeera, 30 May 2018.

[18] International Crisis Group, 'Somalia and the Gulf Crisis', Report no. 260, 5 June 2018.

[19] EEAS, 'Statement by High Representative/Vice-President Federica Mogherini on the situation in Sudan', Delegation of the EU to Sudan, 11 Apr. 2019; and Siaw, L., 'African Union gives Sudan 15 days to establish civil rule', CNN, 16 Apr. 2019.

[20] VOA, 'Sudan delegation to visit US to discuss removal from terror list', 21 Apr. 2019.

[21] Agence France-Presse, 'Coup "not appropriate response" to Sudan's challenges: AU', *Daily Nation*, 11 Apr. 2019; Emirates News Agency, 'UAE welcomes appointment of Al-Burhan new head of Sudan's transitional military council', Statement by UAE Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation,

14 Apr. 2019; Saudi Press Agency, 'Kingdom affirms its support for the brotherly Sudanese people's views on their future', 13 Apr. 2019; and de Waal, A., 'A cruel April in the Sudan Spring?', Africa Arguments, 12 Apr. 2019.

[22] Asharq Al-Awsat, 'Sudan says will remain in Arab coalition to restore legitimacy in Yemen', 16 Apr. 2019.

[23] Abdelaziz, K., 'Saudi Arabia, UAE to send $3 billion in aid to Sudan', Reuters, 21 Apr. 2019.

[24] Tastekin, F., 'Erdogan claims Sudanese coup actually targeted Turkey', Al-monitor, 18 Apr. 2019.

[25] Seregichev, S. 'Business as usual for Russia in Sudan', *Moscow Times*, 17 Apr. 2019; and Elbagir, N., 'Fake news and public executions: Documents show a Russian company's plan for quelling protests in Sudan', CNN, 25 Apr. 2019.

[26] Eritrean Ministry of Information, 'Press statement', 3 Apr. 2019.

Indo-Pacific strategic competition

While the overspill of Middle Eastern and Gulf security competition is now well established in the Horn, the integration of the region into the emerging geopolitics of the Indo-Pacific region is nascent. However, as military competition increases around the Horn among Indo-Pacific military powers, notably centred on India, the USA and China, the countries of the region are likely to face significant pressures from one camp or another, or to seek neutrality. These pressures are already evident in the islands of the Indian Ocean. In 2018, the instability in the domestic politics of both the Maldives and Sri Lanka was magnified by the wider geopolitical competition between China and India.[27]

In the Horn of Africa, Djibouti has emerged as an arena for geopolitical jockeying.[28] China's presence in Djibouti and, notably, the substantial financial debts that Djibouti has built up with China are seen as a strategic concern for the USA and France, both of which have substantial military bases in Djibouti.[29]

The build-up of military forces in the Horn of Africa has taken place without regional consultation on the strategic implications for the Horn countries of being integrated into wider security agendas

The challenge to regional security institutions

The build-up of military forces in the Horn of Africa has taken place without regional consultation on the strategic implications for the Horn countries of being integrated into wider security agendas. As a result, much of the external security engagement in the Horn has bypassed the regional security architecture and is instead managed through bilateral arrangements.

The emergence of the maritime dimension as a key security space constitutes a further challenge for the region. The Horn countries lack significant maritime policing and naval capacities and have only weakly developed maritime expertise. Even more significantly, there is no unified regional position or interest in terms of maritime issues, while the Horn faces major international powers focused on the region. In this context, the Horn's regional security organizations have often been marginal to the evolution of the maritime security agenda.

In response to the emerging regional strategic challenges, Saudi Arabia has proposed that a new regional forum be created to manage the shifts in the Horn and Red Sea.[30] This approach raises the prospect of a Middle Eastern security alliance extending into the Horn, effectively undercutting efforts to develop African regional security frameworks.[31]

[27] Pararajasingham, A., 'Sri Lanka's constitutional crisis: The geopolitical dimension', *The Diplomat*, 30 Oct. 2018; and Betigeri, A., 'Island diplomacy: A storm in the Maldives', Lowy Institute, 24 Oct. 2018.

[28] Lintner, B., 'Risks bubbling beneath Djibouti's foreign bases', *Asia Times*, 28 Nov. 2018.

[29] Irish, J, 'Macron warns of Chinese risk to African sovereignty', Reuters, 12 Mar. 2019; and White House (note 11).

[30] Al Lawati, A., 'Saudi Arabia vies for influence in Africa with new club', Bloomberg, 12 Dec. 2018; and Kahlin, S., 'Saudi Arabia seeks new political bloc in strategic Red Sea region', Reuters, 12 Dec. 2018.

[31] De Waal, A., 'Beyond the Red Sea: A new driving force in the politics of the Horn', African Arguments, 11 July 2018; and de Waal, A., 'Pax Africana or Middle East security alliance in the Horn of Africa and the

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While competition and political fragmentation have been features of the new external security politics of the Horn of Africa, multilateral cooperation and efforts to promote peace have also emerged, highlighting the possibilities to build new and cooperative ways to manage the security challenges of the Horn region.

In response to the rise of piracy, the Code of Conduct concerning the Repression of Piracy and Armed Robbery against Ships in the Western Indian Ocean and the Gulf of Aden (Djibouti Code of Conduct) was adopted in 2009 by countries from Africa and the Middle East. In 2017, the Jeddah Amendment expanded actions under the Code to include those against transnational organized crime in the maritime domain, maritime terrorism, illegal, unregulated and unreported fishing, and other illegal activities at sea essential for the Blue Economy.[32] Equally, the Shared Awareness and Deconfliction (SHADE) coordination meetings, a political platform started in Bahrain in 2008 to coordinate the activity of international naval forces operating counter-piracy and counter-people smuggling operations, has proven to be effective at bringing together a diversity of navies.[33]

Some of the new external security actors have sought roles in promoting peace and stability. Thus, the states of the Gulf have made important contributions to the stabilization of the region, including supporting the Ethiopia–Eritrea peace process in 2018.[34]

The Horn countries have also begun to develop their own multilateral responses to the shifting security environment. At the February 2019 Council of Ministers Meeting of the Inter-Governmental Authority on Development (IGAD), member states agreed 'to protect the security and economic interests of the region including maritime security, migration, fight against terrorism, prevention of Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated (IUU) fishing; pollution and dumping of the toxic waste'.[35] A task force was later established to provide a platform for dialogue between countries in the region and international players on these issues.[36]

The Horn countries have begun to develop their own multilateral responses to the shifting security environment

If the Horn countries can take greater responsibility for tackling regional non-traditional security, notably in the maritime domain, this will reduce the need for outside powers to deploy forces to the region. Strengthening regional security capacities is, therefore, a means of reducing external militarization. However, as highlighted in this series of SIPRI papers, it is international competition among global and

Red Sea?', World Peace Foundation, Occasional Paper no. 17, Jan. 2019.

[32] International Maritime Organization, 'Djibouti Code of Conduct'.

[33] Rider, D., '43rd SHADE meeting held', Maritime Security Review, 29 Nov. 2018.

[34] Mitchell, C., 'The UAE's active role in Horn of Africa peace-making', *The National*, 27 Dec. 2018; and Manek, N., 'Saudi Arabia brokers a new Ethiopia–Eritrea peace deal', Bloomberg, 17 Sep. 2018.

[35] IGAD, 'Communique of the 46th Ordinary Session of IGAD Council of Ministers', 27 Feb. 2019.

[36] Oluch, F., 'Task force to co-ordinate regional interventions', *East African*, 6 Apr. 2019.

regional security actors across Asia and the Middle East that is increasingly driving the Horn's new external security politics, rather than local security challenges. This competition is dynamic and fluid, with formal alliances at best embryonic, which makes efforts to manage the new security environment particularly difficult.

In order for the Horn countries to better navigate the strategic competition spilling into the region from outside, this paper identifies five priority areas for action: (*a*) promoting transparency in military affairs; (*b*) strengthening regional resilience; (*c*) recognizing the role of values in security; (*d*) managing new security geographies; and (*e*) improving strategic capacities.

Promoting transparency in military affairs

The build-up of foreign military forces in the Horn region, notably the establishment of onshore military facilities, has been conducted in opaque ways, often involving informal networks, and in the context of commercial agreements that lack transparency. For example, it is unclear whether status of forces and visiting forces agreements have even been concluded for all of the foreign military forces operating in the Horn. The build-up of foreign military forces has also taken place outside the purview of regional security organizations.

An initial step to improve transparency would be to establish a mechanism linked to the AU Political and Security Council in order to monitor and report to member states on the mandates, capabilities and sizes of foreign military forces operating in the Horn region.

Strengthening regional resilience

While the drivers of foreign military interest in the Horn increasingly lie outside the region, intraregional competition among countries of the Horn is a major factor in the militarization of the region. Horn countries have sought support from external security actors to bolster regime security, to strengthen their position vis-à-vis neighbours, and in return for financial assistance and investment. Thus, for example, the breakaway region of Somaliland has been keen to encourage the establishment of foreign military bases as part of its efforts to achieve international recognition.[37] External security actors have also become more involved in the Horn on assessing that regional instability presents a threat to their interests or offers an opportunity to advance their agendas.

If major powers are drawn into the internal instability and conflicts of the Horn and these become part of their international competition, as occurred during the cold war, there is the risk of further fragmentation and a substantial escalation of regional conflicts. In the context of the new external security politics, therefore, there is a renewed imperative for Horn countries to strengthen their coordination and cooperation, and to resolve regional conflicts.

The build-up of foreign military forces in the region, notably the establishment of onshore military facilities, has been conducted in opaque ways

[37] Getachew, A., 'Somaliland seeks recognition by hosting naval bases', Anadolu Agency, 11 Jan. 2019.

Recognizing the role of values in security

With the Horn region increasingly part of international security competition, countries in the region are at risk of becoming third parties in wider contests. This is particularly the case when economic and security agreements are concluded in non-transparent and informal ways, often involving only elites. This raises concerns about the role of narrow interests and corruption in shaping the direction of foreign and security policy. In such a context, leadership transitions become high-risk events for political leaders and international patrons with security and commercial interests in particular countries, as with Sudan in 2019. This highlights the key role of improving governance, ensuring a free media, strengthening institutions and rule of law, and advancing anti-corruption measures as part of policies to protect national security and sovereignty.

Managing new security geographies

A major challenge for the countries of the Horn is the shift of the regional security agenda beyond continental security to encompass maritime (including naval) and transcontinental security dynamics. However, while Horn countries and security organizations may be able to adapt to the new external security environment, they will probably only ever be able to ameliorate the regional impact of developments from the Middle East and the Gulf, and the Indo-Pacific.

This situation is highlighted by the emerging discussion about regional security in the Red Sea. While Horn countries can strengthen their voices in key areas, they will struggle to manage major power competition over strategic access to the Red Sea. With the Horn region already integrated into the security competition of the Middle East and the Gulf and fast emerging as a subregion of the Indo-Pacific, extra-regional pressures appear set to intensify.

If the Horn countries are to address the challenge of the new external security politics more effectively, they will need to raise their strategic horizons. A priority should be to ensure that their perspectives, interests and influence are present in the wider emerging strategic debates and discussions on the future security architecture of the Indian Ocean.[38]

A major challenge for the countries of the Horn is the shift of the regional security agenda beyond continental security to encompass maritime (including naval) and transcontinental security dynamics

Improving strategic capacities

With the Horn of Africa affected by security developments originating beyond the region, effective action will require the ability to analyse and understand international geoeconomic and geopolitical developments. However, most countries of the Horn region have underdeveloped capacities to conduct 'big picture' assessments of international security developments across government, and, at best, weak capacities in think tanks and civil society in this area.

[38] Patil, S., 'A security architecture for the Indian Ocean', India Foundation, 4 Sep. 2018; Roy-Chaudhury, R., 'Strengthening maritime cooperation and security in the Indian Ocean', International Institute of Strategic Studies, 6 Sep. 2018; and Jeffery, C., 'Why the Indian Ocean region might soon play a lead role in world affairs', The Conversation, 14 Jan. 2019.

Navigating the emerging external security environment will, therefore, require improvements in strategic foresight. Substantial investment in human capital and the creation of institutions capable of conducting such analysis will be critical. Governments will also need to provide the space for national and regional debate about foreign and security policy priorities.

CONCLUSIONS

The new external security politics of the Horn of Africa constitute a major challenge to the region. If the Horn is not able to manage the growing presence and regional interests of foreign military actors, it risks increased fragmentation and becoming a part of wider international security competition, over which it is likely to have little influence. The region could even become the venue for the sort of destabilizing external competition last seen during the cold war.

The international political and economic shifts that are driving the new external security dynamics of the Horn region are, at the same time, also a major opportunity, bringing new investments, infrastructure and connections to world markets. Taking advantage of the opportunities and managing the challenges will, however, require a significant shift in the approach of the Horn countries to their relations with external security actors.

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