State fragility and conflict nexus: Contemporary security issues in the Horn of Africa

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Abstract

Although research on natural resource and ethnic identity-based conflict abounds, studies which critically examine how the state fragility–conflict nexus shapes the contemporary security of the Horn of Africa are rather limited. Qualitatively designed, this study attempts to explore and explain security implications of such a nexus. Analysis of the regional security complex (RSC) and empirical data from the field reveal that conflict dynamics feed and fuel state fragility in the Horn of Africa sub-region. The presence of extra-regional security actors, who are competing for military bases along the coast of Djibouti, the spill-over effects of violence in Yemen, and the Iran–Saudi power rivalry, together with incompetent regional political leadership, tend to shape the security of the Horn. Hence, a new and innovative approach to contemporary security and political commitment are *sine qua non* since the existing institutions and policies are not fully capable of coping with the need for a new security regionalism. It is hoped that the recent rapprochement between Eritrea and Ethiopia, albeit at an embryonic stage, is and will be a positive force capable of bringing about a

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paradigm shift in security structure, and inducing a viable and sustainable economic, political and security community in the Horn of Africa.

Keywords: conflict dynamics, Horn of Africa, military bases, political community, regional security complex, state fragility

Introduction

While research on natural resource or ethnic identity-based conflicts in the Horn of Africa is widely available, studies which examine how the *state fragility–conflict dynamics nexus* shapes, and has implications for, the contemporary security of the sub-region are rather limited. *State fragility,* in this context, is the weakness of state institutions to provide physical security, including the basic good of the survival of citizens. Such weakness leads to corruption, ineffectiveness, undemocratic practices, as well as failure of state authority and legitimacy. By their very nature, fragile states lack the functional authority to provide basic security within their borders, the institutional capacity to provide basic social needs for their populations, and the political legitimacy to effectively represent their citizens at home and abroad (Clapham 2005:6–10). *Conflict dynamics,* on the other hand, are violent, variable, interactive, and interdependent acts, which are manifestations of the urgency of the needs and goals of the actors. Conflict dynamics may be conceptualised as a *cause, a symptom or a consequence* of state fragility. Violent conflict and state fragility fuel each other in the Horn of Africa as realities on the ground demonstrate. In other words, state authority, effectiveness and legitimacy in the Horn are weakened by the damaging effects of violent conflict, and state fragility manifests itself in and contributes to the conflict process with a serious consequence to the contemporary sub-regional security (Clapham 2017:17; Coleman and Tieku 2018:13). Hence, I argue in this article that the state fragility–conflict dynamics nexus is the most critical factor in shaping the contemporary security of the Horn of Africa.

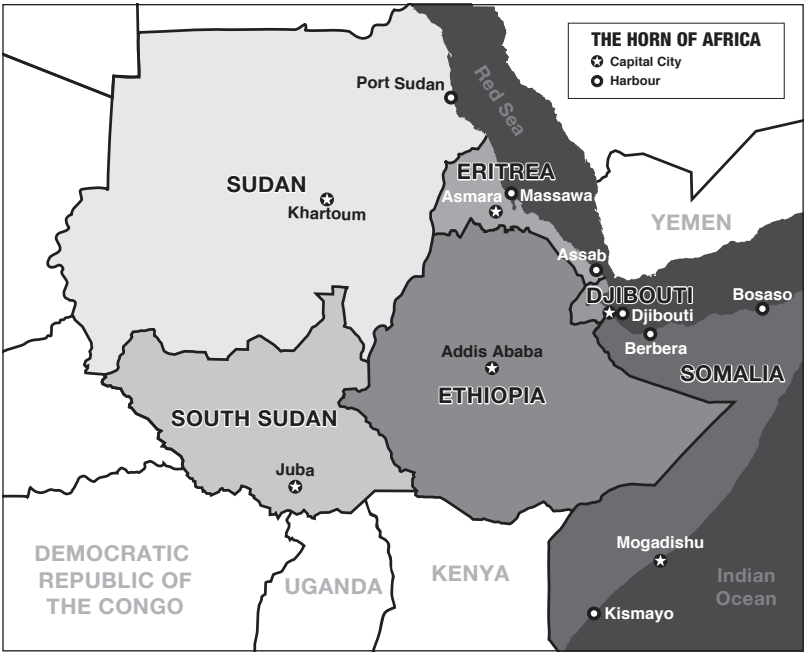
The objective of the present study is, therefore, to explore and explain the contemporary security implications of the nexus between state fragility and conflict dynamics in the sub-region. And the significance of the study lies in what it may contribute to scholarly literature and debate in the discipline as well as to coherent security policies and strategies in the Horn of Africa. The article has been structured as follows: first, it has already introduced a short background of the study, which is followed by a brief description of the research context where extra-regional security actors and their role in state fragility and violent conflict in the Horn have been outlined. Third, it lays out a framework of analysis and justifies why a *regional security complex* (RSC) is preferable in the Horn context. In addition, it discusses the nexus between state fragility and conflict dynamics in the Horn of Africa today. Finally, it analyses and synthesises how the nexus shapes the contemporary security of the sub-region, and it draws a conclusion. The study makes use of qualitative data collected from previous and current works on the theme, in-depth interviews with conveniently selected expert political cum policy analysts and civil society activists as well as online materials pertaining to the research context, which is described and discussed in the following section.

Research context

Three major points depict the research context: First, a brief physical and socio-political description of the Horn is provided; second, patterns of violent conflicts and state fragility in the sub-region are discussed; and finally, some of the major implications of the presence of external security actors or 'security overlays' in posing potential and actual security threats to the Horn are summarised.

To begin with, located in northeast Africa (see Figure 1, below), the Horn of Africa is composed of six countries with a population of nearly 130 million and an area of 1 882 757 km^2 (2016 estimate).

Figure 1 - Political map of the Horn of Africa



ACCORD map

Of the six Horn countries, Djibouti, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Somalia, Sudan and South Sudan, two (Ethiopia and South Sudan with a total population of about 115 million) are landlocked and most urgently need seaports as outlets. They are currently also in dire need of sub-regional cooperation for economic, security, social and political purposes. It is worth noting at this juncture that these six countries were the former four countries, Djibouti, Ethiopia, Somalia and Sudan. Ethiopia became Ethiopia and Eritrea, whereas Sudan split up into Sudan and South Sudan. Hence, the rationale of using the six countries as comprising the Horn of Africa lies in their contemporary political history of conflict dynamics, fragility, and finally, the secession of the newly born countries of Eritrea and South Sudan. The Horn has eight major seaports: Assab, Massawa, Djibouti, Berbera, Bossaso, Mogadishu, Kismayu, and Port Sudan. Easy access to a seaport is essential for trade and security, but economic interdependence is

a factor of amicable relations and provides a sense of community amongst the Horn countries. It is to be noted that the pre-1991 Ethiopia was a coastal state, but because of 'the wrong political decisions made by the EPRDF [Ethiopian Peoples' Revolutionary Democratic Front] regime, the country remained landlocked, with implications for potential violent conflict leading to further state fragility and insecurity in the Horn'.[1]

Second, patterns of state fragility and violent conflict dynamics in the sub-region loomed larger towards the end of the Cold War, which marked the end of competition between the then superpowers, the United States (US) and the Soviet Union (USSR), to find proxies and allies in the Horn of Africa. In the aftermath of the Cold War, the international community appeared to have lost appetite to engage with the sub-region. The vacuum of external interest is currently being filled largely by the *Al-Qaeda*-affiliated *Al-Shabaab*, which maintains a momentum of wanton killing and destruction in Somalia with spill-over effects beyond the Horn. These originated and spread mainly from Kenya, but also from the devastating and erratic civil wars in South Sudan, which continued unabated irrespective of the mediation efforts by major global, regional and sub-regional actors, and from the unresolved internal violent conflicts in Sudan, mainly in Darfur. These conflicts are still going on at the time of writing, and have led to the overthrow in April 2019 of Omar al-Bashir, Sudan's leader, after thirty years in power (BBC News 2019).

Another kind of 'on and off' conflict dynamics has appeared since the 2008 Eritrea–Djibouti border conflicts in Ras Dumera, which has caused relations between the countries to fluctuate between 'on' and 'off'. Even greater uncertainty was reached after Djibouti's opposition to the lifting of United Nations (UN) sanctions against Eritrea in August 2018. The Eritrea–Ethiopia relations had been in a state of 'no-war, no-peace' until the July 2018 sudden, yet official end of the twenty-year stalemate and the commencement of a rapprochement under the leadership of the new Ethiopian Prime Minister, Dr Abiy Ahmed Ali (Underwood 2018:1–3).

1 In-depth interviews with a civil society leader, Addis Ababa, February 2018.

As a result of the state fragility and conflict situation, negative security externalities have prevailed in the contemporary Horn of Africa, largely in the form of internally displaced people, refugee flows, transnational organised crimes, violent extremism and terrorism, illegal cross-border trades and flow of small arms and light weapons. The 2018 Global Peace Index and State Fragility Index reveal that the Horn is the most negatively affected region. It is the only region in Africa where secession movements succeeded in breaking away from the previously incorporated entities – in both cases (Eritrea and South Sudan) with a significant potential security implication for the region. Despite South Sudan's independence on 9 July 2011, thousands of its people have been killed in armed conflicts, and millions displaced since 15 December 2013. The fighting is entrenched in a power struggle between the main political contenders, with overtones of ethnic politics of the Dinka and Nuer, represented by President Salva Kiir and Vice-President Riek Machar respectively. In the same vein, Eritrea had been on conflictual terms with most of its neighbours immediately following its independence in 1993, and remained in a state of 'no-war, no-peace' with Ethiopia from 2000 to July 2018 as stated above.

Despite these dismal scenarios, however, the international engagement with the coastal side of the Horn seems to have increased since the turn of the 21st century (Verhoeven 2017) making the sub-region the centre of gravity for current 'super-powers' and some of the most powerful countries of the gulf region. This brought significant actual and potential security implications to the Horn of Africa, which is the third point to be discussed below.

Several extra-regional actors and their 'security overlays' (Buzan and Waever 2003) are affecting security choices in the Horn, making state fragility and conflict dynamics more complex and posing further security challenges. A number of military bases along the coast of Djibouti and Somalia have, for instance, been established by Saudi Arabia, UAE (United Arab Emirates), Turkey, China, Japan, the US, NATO (North Atlantic Treaty Organisation), France, Germany and Italy. Major security developments have profiled the geo-strategic significance of the region from the perspectives of foreign actors, and over time the high concentration of security overlays have

created their own dynamics in the military base race. Governments within the Horn and in the larger region remained keen to exhibit more interest. Turkey, for instance, has established its first overseas military base – to date the largest in Mogadishu. The presence of such military and naval forces in the Horn has prompted security concerns from some of the member countries, however, including Ethiopia (Lee 2018:239; Zelalem 2018:24).

By virtue of being the former colonial power, the French have historically maintained a military base in Djibouti. This has emerged as a key factor for geo-political contestation between maritime powers owing to its strategic location adjacent to the Red Sea, which is estimated to account for almost 4% of the world's maritime traffic in petroleum and produce of petroleum (Lee 2018:240). After 9/11, the United States opened a military base in Djibouti as an operational base for its 'War on Terror' focusing on *Al-Qaeda* targets in Yemen and Somalia. In 2007, piracy became a critical security issue off the coast of Somalia, threatening maritime commerce in the busy trade routes through the Bab-el-Mandeb Strait. This situation increased Djibouti's attractiveness as the most preferred base for international anti-piracy operations (Verhoeven 2017).

Unsurprisingly, the presence of these major powers in the Horn, each with its own military base, has attracted foreign rivalries to the Horn. China and Turkey, both currently ascending powers, are keen to translate their economic might into global security and political influence. China's key interest in international maritime trade, which is compatible with its Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), made Djibouti the main route for Chinese exports to Europe. China opened its first overseas military base in Djibouti, adjacent to the Doraleh Multi-purpose Port in 2017 (Lee 2018:241). In the same vein, Turkish investments are drawn to the Horn in response to the increasing foreign presence. Hence, the substantial Gulf influence in the region made it relevant for the wider intra-Middle East competition, which later erupted in the form of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) crisis, pitting Qatar and Turkey against the Saudi-led coalition. Much like those of the UAE and China, Turkish military bases carry a link with commercial port deals. In late 2014, the Turkish firm Albayrak Group took over the management of Mogadishu's port. At the end of 2017, Turkey announced

it had been given a lease to rebuild and operate Suakin, a former Ottoman port city in north-eastern Sudan. The agreement reportedly includes naval facilities and Sudanese–Turkish military cooperation (see Lee 2018:241; Zelalem 2018:20).

In a nutshell, the Horn of Africa is becoming a centre of contestation for major external global and regional actors. It should not be surprising if the countries of the Horn show their concern about the current and emerging security threats by observing who allies with whom, and what the consequence of such alignment might be. The complex nature of historical, cultural, ideological and religious intricacies between the Horn of Africa and the Middle East, competition between Riyadh and Teheran through their proxies, and presence of global actors from the West and the East, further complicate the security landscape of the sub-region. Sudan as well as Ethiopia are engaged in dam constructions for the development of their respective countries; Somaliland is in dire need of international recognition as a sovereign state; South Sudan and Sudan are replete with violence and in a quagmire of civil war at the moment, although there appears to be some improvement; Djibouti and Eritrea are still on 'bad neighbourhood' terms; and *Al-Shabaab* has an upper hand on Somalia's security. Furthermore, at the time of writing, Sudan has been excluded from the regional organisation, the African Union (AU) for the unconstitutional change of government (BBC News 2019). It may be inferred that each country of the Horn is fragile to some degree and has specific economic, political, security and social aspirations and fears that can effectively be addressed only collectively and interdependently through a regional security complex (RSC) approach, which is the subject of the following section.

Regional Security Complex as a framework of analysis

The RSC approach assumes a region to be: 'a set of units whose major processes of securitisation, de-securitisation, or both are so interlinked that their security problems cannot reasonably be analysed or resolved apart from one another' (Buzan, Waever and De Wilde 1998:10–15). In the case of the Horn of Africa, the 'units' (countries) are characterised by

durable patterns of amity and enmity taking the form of geographically coherent patterns of security interdependence. The essential structure of an RSC embodies: (1) a boundary, which differentiates the RSC from its neighbours; (2) anarchic structure, which means that the RSC must be composed of two or more autonomous units; (3) polarity, which covers the distribution of power among the units; and (4) social construction, which covers the patterns of amity and enmity among the units (Buzan and Waever 2003:53; Kay 2007:68–69).

Four points constitute the rationale for focusing on the *regional level* when investigating contemporary security implications of the nexus between state fragility and violent conflict dynamics in the Horn of Africa. First, the existing scholarship tends to seek the causes of state fragility, incomplete sovereignty or the absence of effective state authority over territory, in either purely systemic (global/international) or purely domestic (national/local) explanations (Lee 2018:285). On the contrary, the post-Cold War security problems confronting the contemporary world are found and addressed at the regional level. They are manifested, according to Lepgold (2003:3), in at least two ways: (1) the degree of negative security externalities in the region (how much a given conflict spills over or affects others); and (2) the extent to which there are states or other institutions as well as politically committed and transformative leaders capable of managing conflict in the region. I concur with the foregoing argument that conflict dynamics in the Horn of Africa arise from state fragility and they come in 'a regional package' (Zartman 2003:83–84). In other words, most if not all of the Horn of Africa conflicts do not take place between well-established states, but mostly inside states which are not in control of their internal dynamics, i.e. ungoverned spaces with privatised economies and security, and competing rebel groups, as well as multinational forces, vying for control of political space as evidenced in Sudan, Somalia and South Sudan at present. This means the locus of conflict and its management will become largely region-based. Hence, efforts to cope with violent conflicts, as well as to achieve order and security, will primarily involve arrangements and actions designed and implemented at the sub-regional level (Lepgold 2003:3; Zartman 2003:83–84; Lee 2018:239).

Second, in unstable communities or 'bad neighbourhoods' (Brown 2001:209), conflicts spread across states when internal turmoil pushes refugees away from danger and toward safety, or when soldiers use adjacent territory as sanctuaries. Conflict can also diffuse across boundaries through a process of social learning. A group that sees itself as marginalised at home might develop a stronger sense of its identity, and thereby its dissatisfaction, by observing a comparable struggle in other states. Groups that already are discontented might learn from conflicts elsewhere how they can become less vulnerable or more autonomous and metamorphose into a non-state actor status (see Buzan and Waever 2003:29–30). Security dynamics theoretically have a strong territoriality, and on this basis it can accommodate non-state actors without too much difficulty. Although some aspects of the new security agenda are de-territorialised, such as economic and environmental sectors, territoriality remains a primary defining feature of many (in)security dynamics. A *regional approach* can therefore provide both a much clearer empirical picture and a theoretically more coherent understanding of security dynamics (Buzan and Waever 2003:29–30).

Third, security dynamics are inherently relational, and therefore no nation's security is self-contained. Nevertheless, studies of 'national security' often implicitly place their own state at the centre of an ad hoc 'context' without a grasp of the systemic or sub-systemic context in its own right. In contrast, the region, or sub-region in the case of the Horn of Africa, refers to the level where states or other units link together sufficiently closely so that their securities cannot be considered separately from each other. The regional level is where the extremes of *national* and *global* security interplay, and where most of the action occurs. The general picture is about the conjunction of two levels: the interplay of the *global powers at the system level*, and clusters of close security interdependence at the *regional level*. Each regional security complex is made up of the fears and aspirations of the separate units (which in turn partly derive from domestic features and fractures). Both the security of the separate units and the process of global power intervention can be grasped only through understanding the regional security dynamics, which usually share

borders with other regional security complexes (see Buzan and Waever 2003:43; Kay 2007:213–287).

To grasp the full picture of the Horn, it is worth pointing out that the Horn of Africa RSC itself borders with the Middle East RSC whose pattern of security interdependence comprises more than twenty countries. The Middle East RSC stretches from Morocco to Israel and Iran, and it includes all of the Arab states (see Buzan and Waever 2003:187). It developed three sub-complexes: the Levant, the Gulf, and the Maghreb. A case might sometimes be made that the Horn of Africa constitutes a fourth weak sub-complex in this set (see Buzan and Waever 2003:188). Evidently, Somalia, Djibouti, and Sudan are all members of the Arab League, and there is a clear and persistent pattern of conflict and hostile intervention connecting them with Ethiopia, Eritrea, and sometimes even Egypt. However, Clapham (1996:128–129) and Tibi (1993:52, 59) argue that the Horn RSC is part of sub-Saharan Africa, and should *not* be considered part of the Middle East (as quoted in Buzan and Waever 2003:188) with which I concur.

From the three Middle East sub-RSCs outlined above, the Gulf Complex, which is subsumed under the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), is the most important one for its immediate neighbourhood to and significant impact on the Horn of Africa RSC. Centred on a triangular rivalry among Iran, Iraq, and the Gulf Arab states led by Saudi Arabia, the GCC was originally composed of Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Bahrain, Qatar, the UAE and Oman. It was formed in 1981 in response to the Iraq–Iran war, and is generally understood as being a response to fear of them (Tibi 1993:171). The 1979 revolution in Iran added a sharp ideological element to its rivalry with Saudi Arabia, since both states claimed leadership of competing Islamic universalisms (Chubin and Tripp 1996:15, 71). Egypt, although a central player in the Arab–Israeli conflict, is also prominent in the Gulf. It intervened extensively in Yemen during the 1960s, and during the Second Gulf War sided with the Gulf Arab states and Syria against Iraq (Tibi 1993:171). Currently, its presence is felt in the GCC and in the Djibouti military base race as has been discussed above. Hence, 'the GCC is as much a means of reinforcing the domestic security of a set of

anachronistic monarchical regimes as an alliance against external threats' (Acharya 1992:150). In short, the regional security dynamics of the Middle East RSC were exceptionally strong, and deeply rooted in the character of local politics and history (Tibi 1993:171). The impact of the global level has also been strong during the Cold War as well as the post-Cold War era on this RSC. In addition, there has been a rivalry between Saudi Arabia and Yemen (and within Yemen), which has generated a lot of local wars, (still going on at the time of writing, mainly as proxy of Iran and Saudi Arabia) and has at times drawn in wider Arab participation along rival royalist versus radical lines.

Consequently, the pouring in of small arms and light weapons, refugees fleeing the violence in Yemen to the Horn of Africa, and competition of Saudi Arabia and Iran to have allies from the Horn countries, using their commercial projects, investment, trade and aid leverage, are clear evidence of the effect of the proxy war in the contemporary Yemen on the Horn of Africa RSC. What is more, the close interaction with and allegiance of some of the Horn RSC countries, e.g. Djibouti, Somalia and Sudan, to the Arab League, is a conspicuous demonstration of the linkage of the two RSCs with far-reaching socio-cultural, economic, political and security effects. Even though these effects are not the object of analysis of this article, it ought to be underlined that their interface plays vital roles in the RSCs of both security clusters.

Equally important, in parallel with the GCC in the Gulf RSC, is the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD), as a regional economic community, which includes but is not limited to the six Horn countries. Various studies (e.g. Tadesse and Yonas 2006:13) and empirical experience in the sub-region reveal that IGAD's institutional and normative frameworks as security provider are weak as evidenced in the Eritrean–Ethiopian, Somali–Al-Shabaab, South Sudan or Darfur–Sudan violent conflict cases. Moreover, IGAD includes Kenya and Uganda, which belong to the East African Community, not the Horn of Africa. Hence, even though IGAD is the regional economic community of the Horn of Africa, it was not treated as the primary agency of the Horn of Africa RSC in this article. Furthermore, if IGAD were to be made a primary target, the topic might shift its focus to

the Greater Horn of Africa or East Africa RSC, which is beyond the scope of this study. Hence, the traditional Horn countries and their security interdependence are the object of analysis instead of IGAD per se.

Finally, a regional approach specifies what to look for at four levels of analysis and how to interrelate them: (1) Domestically, in the states of the region, particularly their locally generated vulnerabilities. (2) State-to-state relations, which generate the region as such. (3) The region's interaction with neighbouring RSCs such as the Gulf RSC in the Middle East. Finally and essentially, (4) the roles of global powers in the region. With regard to the interrelatedness of the levels, it may be added that in the case of the Horn, the interplay between the global security structures (for instance, the presence of the US, China and Germany) and the regional security structures (mainly the presence of the Gulf countries) is of great importance (Buzan and Waever 2003:50–51; Kay 2007:12–19). On the whole, the regional approach is more of a necessity than a choice to understand the nexus between state fragility and conflict dynamics in the Horn of Africa.

State fragility in the Horn of Africa

State fragility is understood and conceptualised in a number of ways. For Acemoglu and Robinson (2012:376–377) as well as for Herbst (2000:254–255), state fragility is symbolised by extractive state institutions that expropriate power and wealth: thereby impoverish the people and block economic development, and at the same time initiate savage conflict. Fukuyama (2012:10; 2015:302) implies that state fragility is the failure of the perceived legitimacy of the government that binds the population together by making them willing to accept its authority both internally and externally. Mills and others (2017:231) point out that ten of the sixteen countries in the 'very high alert' categories in the 2016 Fragile States Index are in sub-Saharan Africa. They further state that six of the bottom ten countries in Transparency International's 2015 Corruption Perception Index are African. As empirical evidence reveals, in the 'Horn of Africa, states are fragile and their structures lack political will and capacity to provide the basic functions needed for poverty reduction, development

and to safeguard the security and human rights of their populations'.[2] Daily experience demonstrates in Somalia, South Sudan, Sudan and in some parts of Ethiopia since 1991 (e.g. Benishangul Gumuz, Gambella, South Omo, Ethiopia Somali Region, Oromia Region of Moyale, Gedeo and Guji, Sidama and Wolaita of Southern Regional State, various parts of the Amhara National Regional state, to mention just a few) how the failure of state institutions to maintain basic security leads to violent conflict and violent conflict fuels state fragility. This situation plays a major role in shaping the contemporary security of the sub-region as small arms and light weapons are being circulated *en mass*, refugees flee their abode, statistics of internally displaced people as well as trans-border organised crimes swell up. Consequently, ungoverned spaces are being created, and serve as safe haven for non-state actors who claim to provide security to their respective communities at grassroots by further weakening already fragile states of the Horn as, for instance, Ethiopia, Somalia, South Sudan and Sudan. It follows that when fragility refers to the situation in the Horn, it implies that fragility is in fact a property of the prevalent political system. A 'fragile state', hence, is incapable of fulfilling its responsibility as a provider of basic services and public goods, which in turn undermines its legitimacy. This has consequences for society as a whole: threatening livelihoods, increasing economic downturn and causing other related crises which affect human security and the likelihood of widespread armed conflict in the sub-region (see Fragile State Index Team 2018).

Regional Security Complex analysis of the Horn further demonstrates that primordial enmity or resource deficiency is not as much a critical factor for conflict in the Horn of Africa as the failure of authority, legitimacy and effectiveness of the state (see Deng 1996:48; Zartman 2003:82; Wolf 2011:951). The evidence comes from the current situations in Ethiopia and Somalia. The Hobbesian hypothesis is that in the absence of a political Leviathan, life for individuals will be nasty, brutish, and short (Hobbes 1999:96). In Somalia citizens live in constant fear of attacks from *Al-Shabaab* – a non-state actor, which emerged as a result of the failure

2 In-depth interview with a political/policy analyst, Addis Ababa, March 2018.

of authority, legitimate power and effectiveness of the state. In the 1970s and 1980s, the horror of extreme political repression reigned in Ethiopia during the military regime, the worst case of which was ushered in under the EPRDF regime since 2005. State-sponsored terrorism based on ethnic identity politics indeed made life of individual citizens nasty, brutish and short, but fortunately, since April 2018, there are some modest positive changes in Ethiopia in terms of openness and a democratisation process.

It is legitimate to argue that in the Horn of Africa state fragility is more responsible for violent conflict dynamics than economic underdevelopment – as the analysis of its RSC reveals. This does not mean, however, that political and economic developments can be divorced – as was frequently insinuated in the discourse on 'developmental state', particularly in the Ethiopian political-economy literature since 2005 (see Lefort 2015:360). Hence, the Horn of Africa's economic and political failures are tightly linked with each other and with state fragility and violent conflict dynamics. Economic improvement alone, even if it could be achieved, has therefore not broken the cycle of violence in Ethiopia. For more than two decades there has been double digit economic growth, but no end to the killings, forced disappearances, torching and dispossessing of citizens' properties, and basic human rights violations across the country. It may be concluded that fragile states in their very nature are unable to meet, or at least manage their population's demands and expectations through the political process (Verhoeven 2017:16). It may be inferred from the analysis of the Horn RSC that whereas the understanding of the security threats posed by fragile states merits further investigation, the lessons learned from the Horn of Africa indicate that fragile states are an ideal breeding ground for domestic or state-sponsored as well as international terrorism, national and transnational organised crimes, human trafficking, and armed conflicts.

Conflict dynamics in the Horn of Africa

In the context of the Horn of Africa, conflict dynamics could be a *cause, a symptom or a consequence* of fragility, which explains why it is a dimension of most indices of fragile situations. What the analysis of the framework of

the RSC of the Horn portrays, is that the very state formation in the Horn of Africa is contested: hence, it is pregnant with conflict dynamics from the outset. It is either a readymade gift from the colonial masters (top-down, except in the Ethiopian case), or a usurped possession acquired through a coup d'état or a rebellion by indigenes from the jungle (bottom-up). In either case the state does not represent the whole society; hence, it has neither *de facto* nor *de jure* legitimacy. Consequently, perceptions and feelings of exclusion from politics and 'state ownership', and/or of marginalisation from economic as well as social goods (such as education, health services and infrastructure), constitute conflict dynamics which serve as a *cause* as well as a *symptom* of state fragility (see Clapham 2005; 2017). State fragility in turn leads to civil unrest, communal violence and armed conflict (Collier and Sambanis 2005; UNESCO 2013; Williams 2015). When the state does not deliver the basic services it is supposed to, when its authority is limited or arbitrarily exercised, or its legitimacy systematically questioned, the social contract and public trust weaken to the point where public dissatisfaction easily transforms into violent contestation by sectors of society as has usually been the case in the Horn of Africa. In attempts to regain order, the state has often responded with violence to the violence caused by its own failures – as demonstrated specifically in Ethiopia since 2005, South Sudan since 2013, and Darfur in Sudan since February 2003. As a result, the Horn of Africa RSC has remained the crucible of conflict dynamics feeding and fuelling state fragility as the following discussion of their nexus further reveals.

The nexus between state fragility and conflict in the Horn of Africa

Almost all the countries of the Horn which comprise the RSC have experienced intra- and inter-state conflicts of varying degree and intensity over different time periods (see Kassahun 2012; Clapham 2017). What is visible on the ground in the Horn of Africa RSC is that the insecurity of ruling elites within their domestic sphere plays a significant role in shaping the dynamics of (in)security overall. As already pointed out, state fragility and violent conflict dynamics are directly related in the Horn

of Africa. Consequently, their nexus shapes the contemporary security of the Horn. In the Global Peace Index, the level of peace in the Horn is labelled '*medium*', '*low*' or '*very low*' as measured by using internal and external peace indicators (Global Peace Index 2018:80).[3] Likewise, the State Fragility Index rates the status of the states in the Horn as '*high warning*', '*alert*', '*high alert*' and '*very high alert*' on the basis of *input, process* and *output* criteria (Fragile State Index Team 2018:16).[4] As can be seen in Table 1, the higher the rank of the Global Peace Index and the total score of the State Fragility Index, the lower is the level of peace and the more severe the fragility of state in a given country.

3 *Internal peace indicators include*: (1) level of perceived criminality in the society; (2) number of internal security officers and police per 100 000 people; (3) number of homicides per 100 000 people; (4) ease of access to small arms and light weapons; (5) number of jailed persons per 100 000 people; (6) intensity of organised internal crimes; (7) intensity of violent crimes; (8) likelihood of violent demonstrations; (9) political instability; (10) political terror scale; (11) impact of terrorism; (12) number and duration of internal conflicts; (13) number of deaths from organised internal conflicts; (14) internal conflicts fought. *External peace indicators include*: (1) relations with neighbouring countries; (2) military expenditure as a percentage of GDP (Gross domestic product); (3) financial contribution to the UN peacekeeping missions; (4) number of armed services personnel per 100 000 people; (5) refugees and IDPs; (6) weapon exports; (7) deaths from external conflicts; (8) external conflicts fought (9) nuclear and heavy weapon capabilities.

4 (1) *Input indicators*, also known as structural or *de jure* indicators, refer to the existence and quality of enabling structural conditions. Input indicators focus primarily on the legal framework, institutions and procedures in place in a given country. The testing questions commonly require 'yes' or 'no' answers. The questions are about issues as the following: the division of powers (executive, legislative, the judiciary) that guarantees the independence of the different branches of the state; the ratification of core international human rights conventions; the existence of regulations and public institutions overseeing public expenditure; country membership of regional and international organisations. (2) *Process indicators*, also known as responsibility or *de facto* indicators, measure efforts made to achieve certain outputs or outcomes. For example: health expenditure as percentage of GDP; military expenditure as percentage of GDP; international transfers of major conventional weapons; pupil-teacher ratio in primary schools; number of ex-combatants receiving professional training. (3) *Output indicators*, also known as performance indicators, measure results of actions. For example: number of conflict-related deaths per year; unemployment; violent demonstrations and social unrest; trade balance as percentage of GDP; incidents of victimisation that have been reported to the authorities. Regarding the generation of data, we distinguish four types relevant for measuring fragility: public statistics, expert data, opinion polls and content analysis.

Table 1: The 2018 Global Peace and State Fragility Indices of the Horn of Africa

The 2018 Global Peace Index				The 2018 State Fragility Index		
Country	**Level of peace**	**Peace index [5]**	**Rank among 163 countries**	**Level of state fragility**	**Fragility index [6] (Total score)**	**Rank among 178 countries**
Djibouti	Medium	2.269	115	High warning	87.1	42
Eritrea	Low	2.522	138	Alert	97.2	19
Ethiopia	Low	2.524	139	High alert	99.6	15
Sudan	Very low	3.155	153	High alert	108.7	5
Somalia	Very low	3.367	159	Very high alert	113.2	2
South Sudan	Very low	3.508	161	Very high alert	113.4	1

Source: Collated and tabulated by the author from Global Peace Index 2018 and State Fragility Index 2018

5 Nations considered more peaceful have lower index, e.g. Iceland Global Peace Index of 2018 is 1.096 whereas countries replete with violence (or low level of peace) have higher Global Peace Index such as South Sudan whose Global Peace Index is 3.508. Whereas Iceland ranks 1st among 163 countries (high level of peace), South Sudan ranks 161st (low level of peace). Simply put, violent countries have more militarisation, more internal and external violence going on at present and higher crime rate; hence, higher Global Peace Index.

6 Nations considered more violent have higher Fragility Index; hence, 'Very high alert level' and least resilient or sustainable. For instance, Finland is the lowest in fragility index, 16.9 and ranks 178th in fragility among 178 countries. It means Iceland is least fragile or most sustainable whereas South Sudan's Fragility Index is 113.2 and it ranks 1st in fragility ranking among 178 countries. It means South Sudan is the least resilient and most fragile country.

As can be observed in Table 1, South Sudan and Somalia are the most fragile in terms of *state fragility* in the Horn of Africa and least peaceful in terms of *conflict dynamics* in the world. The other four countries in the Horn have also been ranked high in state fragility and medium to low in peacefulness (for detailed discussions, see Global Peace Index 2018:9; Fragile State Index Team 2018:16) What follows from the analysis, is that state fragility and violent conflict are so closely interlinked that these two interrelated phenomena shape the type and level of contemporary security of the Horn of Africa RSCS. This situation is daily experience in the Horn since the end of the Cold War and has critical security implications as discussed in the following section.

Implications of the nexus for contemporary security of the Horn

The above analysis of RSC reveals that the Horn of Africa is replete with actual and potential insecurities at grassroots, national and sub-regional levels, which emanate from the nexus between violent conflict dynamics and state fragility. Internally, most of the contemporary insecurities prevalent in the Horn are related directly to the failure of the political leadership and state institutions to deliver required public goods to the citizens. Externally, the increased involvement of foreign countries in the Horn's ports has significant impacts on the Horn itself, since the substantial flow of foreign funds from investments and rents from military bases give foreign actors considerable political and economic weight with regard to the Horn's security. Resultantly, however, foreign political cleavages are transported into the Horn of Africa by foreign states through their financial capacity, by which they are capable of combining commercial deals with political pressure and even occasional threats of cutting off financial aid – as some policy analysts of the Horn of Africa think.[7] Consequently, the political leaders of the region become more vulnerable and more loyal to the foreign states than to their fellow citizens. They use the money pumped in by the

7 In-depth interview with a political/policy analyst, Addis Ababa, April 2018.

foreign companies to maintain the security and military apparatus, which they use to suppress any dissenting voices of their own citizens.

Furthermore, regional balances of power also shift as hundreds of millions of dollars are invested and military bases are established, altering the status quo by funding actors involved in inter-state rivalries (see Verhoeven 2017; Van den Berg and Meester 2018). For example, Ethiopia's decision to take a 19% stake of the Berbera port deal is appreciable, as the country needs to diversify its reliance on Djibouti for import and export, and may need to keep an eye on the activities of the UAE. This might upset its neighbours, however, particularly Djibouti and Somalia, which are concerned, respectively, about losing trade and seeing a breakaway state gain international recognition. In the same vein, the large amounts of foreign funding have brought changes to local political settlements, not least because the funds from abroad may empower certain political actors within individual Horn countries to challenge existing political settlements in favour of the foreign powers (Verhoeven 2017; Van den Berg and Meester 2018). The amount of the investments and their impact, have significant implications for internal and external security of the Horn.

Moreover, studies indicate that currently the most crucial element that brings Gulf capital to the shores of northeast Africa is geopolitical (Verhoeven 2017). The Emirati and Saudi investments in the ports of Berbera (Somaliland) and Assab (Eritrea) and in upgrading old and constructing new military facilities, the on-going Saudi support for Sudan's Dam Programme, and the promises of billions of Qatari funding for agriculture, light manufacturing, and social services in Darfur are all to be understood in the light of escalating rivalries between Middle East sub-RSCs (Verhoeven 2017). Two fault-lines are relevant, though. Firstly, the proxy war between Iran and Saudi Arabia is the major factor that is shaping much of the violence in the contemporary Middle East/Gulf RSC with significant impact on the Horn RSC. Teheran perceives the Saudi-American alliance, and the attendant partnership with Israel, as the root cause of regional instability, and reckons that only armed resistance can

stop the menace of US imperialism and Wahhabism. To make matters worse, the renewed economic sanctions of August 2018 by the Trump administration on Iran might further fan the flame in the Middle East/Gulf RSC with important security implications for the Horn. As a result, the Horn of Africa's eastern flank is becoming an extension of the battlefield, with Teheran and Riyadh accusing each other of seeking to use African allies to commit aggression against the other. Because of the Saudi ruling family's perceptions of Iran as an existential threat, no efforts are spared to counter it. This has not only meant rallying all Gulf Cooperation Council states (including Kuwait, Qatar and the UAE) to support the Saudi-led war in Yemen but also persuading Sudan, Eritrea and Somalia through investment, loans and central bank to central bank transfers to sign up to the pro-Saudi camp and keep Iranian ships out of the Red Sea.[8]

The second defining geopolitical fault-line stimulating a renewed and intensified interest in the Horn RSC is the growing intra-Gulf Arab enmity. While Saudi Arabia continues to see itself as the regional hegemon, Qatar and the UAE both feel capable of and entitled to an independent foreign policy in which they pursue their own interests in and ideological vision of the Middle East and Northeast Africa. Their aid and investment into the Horn are thus driven by the same geopolitical objectives as that of their Saudi friends-cum-rivals: commercial projects are first and foremost meant to consolidate political relations and gain greater influence in regional politics cum security (Lee 2018).

It may be inferred from the above discussions that the Horn of Africa RSC and the dominant states of the Middle East/Gulf RSC are locked in an interdependent but unequal relationship that has deep historical roots as well as significant power to shape the contemporary security of the Horn RSC. Both sides of the Red Sea have built strategies of engagement that allow them to maximise the benefits from the asymmetric relationship, in terms of their own internal political context. Economic flows in both directions are subordinate to the overarching goal of maintaining power.

8 In-depth interview with a political/policy analyst, Addis Ababa, April 2018.

The main reason for the Horn of Africa incumbents to continue to court Gulf aid, investment and political support remains the same: maintaining regime security.

Finally, there is a serious concern that the expanded policy of the GCC, specifically with regard to Saudi Arabian and UAE military presence in Djibouti, may adversely affect Ethiopia's interests, specifically in the event that tensions between Ethiopia and Egypt over the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GERD) escalate owing to the widely held perception that the GCC coalition would align with Egypt. A related fear is the prospect of the GCC states pressuring the Djiboutian government to apply pressure indirectly on Ethiopia as Djibouti is Ethiopia's major route to a seaport (Zelalem 2018).

Bearing in mind such contemporary implications of state fragility and conflict dynamics for security in the Horn, it should be obvious that the security challenges should be approached and addressed from local, sub-regional and global perspectives.

Conclusion

The objective of this study was to critically examine the implications of the contemporary regional security of the nexus between state fragility and violent conflict dynamics in the Horn of Africa. The article highlighted the severity of state fragility using the State Fragility Index, the pattern of conflict dynamics using Global Peace Index and the nexus of the two in the Horn of Africa, using as analytical framework the Regional Security Complex. It has emphasised the significance of the current and emerging role of security overlays in the state fragility and conflict dynamics in the Horn, thereby implying the necessity for Horn countries to develop coherent security policies and strategies. The study unearthed developments in the wider Red Sea region, which have turned the Horn's coastline into a strategic location for foreign actors and resulted in an international military base race. The activities of these foreign powers have a significant impact on the security of the Horn: foreign cleavages are being imposed on the

Horn, fusing with the Horn's own cleavages, while domestic and regional balances of power are shifting. In spite of these security predicaments, there are economic opportunities emerging from foreign rivalries played out in the Horn, and Horn governments are seizing them to maintain primarily their respective regime securities. Policy makers have apparently taken into account the increasing strategic relevance of the region to a variety of foreign actors and they include the role of foreign influences, particularly of the Gulf States, China and Turkey, into their thinking on the economics, politics, and security of the Horn's ports and the region (Van den Berg and Meester 2018).

The above analysis and discussions point in the direction of a new and innovative approach to contemporary security in the Horn of Africa with political commitment being in the forefront. Existing institutions and policies need to become fully capable of introducing a new regionalism in the Horn of Africa. What is still rampant in the sub-region, as one can observe on the ground, can be listed as follows: neo-patrimonialism, clientelism, corruption, political and economic marginalisation, nepotism, ethnic- or clan-based politics (with attendant internal displacement of persons on the basis of their ethnic identity), and dysfunctional state apparatus (which is merely meant to keep the regime intact). These practices are indeed (further) weakening social fabric and state institutions. Disregard for human rights, lack of commitment to eradicate poverty and deprivation, growing educated youth unemployment and the tendency to neglect global responsibilities in an increasingly integrated world are indeed intensifying state fragility and conflict dynamics in the Horn. What fragile states therefore need, most urgently and indispensably, are strong institutions capable of delivering public goods, state effectiveness and authority with accountability, integrity, responsibility and transparency, as well as investing in and empowering the youth. Employing the emphatic phrase of the Romans, it may surely be said that such an agenda is *sine qua non* to entrench sustainable security, to provide resilience to statecraft and to reduce conflict in the Horn of Africa.

Finally, so as to address the issues of state fragility and violent conflicts in the sub-region, it is imperative to deal with structural violence internally as well as externally, rather than over-focusing on sovereignty and territoriality at an individual country level (even though regional security is strictly tied to territoriality). It is high time the Horn of Africa countries started thinking and acting in terms of one economic, political and security community in the RSC. Although at an embryonic stage, the current initiatives and positive moves by Eritrea and Ethiopia will be an encouraging starting point in the right direction to mitigate state fragility and conflict dynamics in the Horn. When the two countries were at war, as well as on 'no-war, no-peace' status, both Ethiopia and Eritrea sponsored armed groups to fight each other in proxy wars, some of which took place as far away as in Somalia. Each country hosted the other's opposition or rebel groups and acted as safe haven by backing them financially and materially. Eritrea has border disputes with Sudan and Djibouti, but since Ethiopia has good relations with both, there is now a better chance of addressing these grievances since all of them are in the same RSC. And now that Ethiopia and Eritrea are no longer in direct confrontation, the overall stability of the Horn of Africa ought to improve. The Horn owns eight seaports, but stable and dependable access to ports for the landlocked yet rapidly growing populations and economies of South Sudan and Ethiopia necessitates thinking and acting in terms of an interdependent community that shares common security aspirations and fears. This is the essence of an RSC. If the political elites in the Horn start thinking and acting as a political/security community with committed, transformative and innovative leadership, contemporary regional security could improve and negative security externalities may give way to positive peace and prosperity in the Horn of Africa.

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