

Review

# The effect of Somali armed conflict on the East African Sub-Region

Khadijah Sanusi Gumbi

Department of Political Science, Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria, Nigeria.

Received 18 February, 2014; Accepted 27 February, 2015

**This paper intends to look at the effects of Somali armed conflict on the East African Sub-region. The objective of this article is to examine the economic and political instability caused by the conflict in Somalia. This paper views economic hardship as one of the primary sources of the Somali armed conflicts. The Somali armed conflict strongly supports the “greed to grievance” assumption. At the level of individual gunmen, a fundamental and dangerous living was eked out through looting and extortion; for top warlords and their financial backers.**

**Key words:** Armed conflict, war, deprivation, divide, insurgency, insecurity.

## INTRODUCTION

The Eastern Africa region is known for decades as one of the hottest geographical spaces of internal dissidence and interstate conflicts. Africa's longest civil wars occur in this region (Assefa, 1999). It was the case of the Eritrean war of liberation against Ethiopian regimes. The civil war in Sudan is another civil war that is associated with one way or the other with the region. States have disintegrated in the Horn. The emergence of Eritrea and the prolonged absence of a recognized government in Somalia constitute the basis of anxiety in the community of states in that part of Africa. States affected by conflicts tend to bolster their security and try to weaken other states believed to be undermining their sovereignty. Inability of states to dialog with each other results in armed violence and the involvement of civilians in civil wars. Perception, attitudes and actions of parties to the various conflicts shape the process of militarisation in the region. States refuse to admit that there are real internal

problems. Victims of injustice are left with no other option but to fight for their survival. Where a conflict flares into armed violence it causes is linked to a neighboring state or another external power. Then conflict escalates beyond the control of the initial actors. Dissident groups launch recruitment campaigns among disenchanted civilian groups while governments go for forced conscription. Both ways, civilians must get involved voluntarily or by force. The situation, we are describing, makes the size of national armies and rebel formations bulge with units of irregular forces such as militias and self-defence groups. Experience from Sudan, Kenya, and Uganda shows those cattle rustlers and armed bandits take the advantage of civil wars or interstate wars to acquire modern assault rifles for their criminal motives. One of the most central challenges of academic discourse in contemporary Africa is to explain the endemic ethno religious and political conflicts that engulfed the region at

E-mail: [kgsanusi@abu.edu.ng](mailto:kgsanusi@abu.edu.ng).

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the end of the cold war. In a radical departure from the cold war era, the region has witnessed inter-state conflicts of different socio-ethnic and cultural aggregates within national territories. These conflicts, characterized by genocide, ethnic cleansing and unprecedented humanitarian tragedies in the form of internally displaced persons have resulted in state collapse in countries like Somalia (Best, 2009). The essence of this paper is to look at the effect of Somalian armed conflict on the East African sub-region with the view of finding solutions to resolving such conflict. The paper adopts the realist theory that traces the root of the conflict to a flaw in human nature. People are selfish and engage in the pursuit of personalized self-interest defined as power. The theory originates from classical political theory and shares both theological and biological doctrines about an apparent weakness and individualism inherent in human nature. Hence, the starting point for explaining conflict is at the individual level. Realism believes that competitive processes between actors primarily defined as states is the natural expression of conflict by parties engaged in the pursuit of scarce and competitive interests (Deutsch, 1973). This theory has three parts; descriptive realism, which sees the world as an arena of conflict, explanatory realism which seeks to show that there are genetic defects that push human beings into behaving negatively (Koestler, 1967) and that wars become inevitable because there is no mechanism to stop them from occurring. Prescriptive realism that builds on the argument of descriptive and explanatory realism, that is to say that decision makers have a moral justification to defend their fundamental interests and ensure self-preservation using any means necessary. Morgenthau, one of the leading exponents of realism, argues that the imperfection in the world, namely conflicts, has its roots in forces that are inherent in human nature; Human beings are selfish people naturally conflictive. The theory, however, has been accused of elevating the power to the status of an ideology. Nonetheless, realism has had a tremendous impact on conflict.

### **THE SOMALI ARMED CONFLICT**

The prolonged absence of a recognized government in Somalia constitutes the basis of anxiety in the communities of that part of Africa. States affected by conflicts tend to bolster their security and try to weaken other states believed to be undermining their sovereignty. It is as a result of the inability of states to dialog with each other in armed violence and the involvement of civilians in civil wars. Perception, attitudes and actions of parties to the various conflicts shape the process of militarization of the region. States refuse to admit that there are real internal problems. In Somalia victims of injustice are left with no other option but to fight for their survival. When a conflict flares into armed violence, its cause is linked to a

neighboring state or another external power. Then conflict escalates beyond the control of the initial actors. Dissident groups launch recruitment campaigns among disenchanting civilian groups while governments go for forced conscription. There is a control economic resource to the detriment of the people in the country. It is seen in the social and political developments Somalia. The groups involved in this practice are oligarchies with narrow vested interests. The monopoly of power, scarce resources and denial of rights of others has resulted in civil wars that threaten the very existence of states in the region. The regime of Mohamed Siad Barre is another relevant example to support this statement. 'Studies on the disintegration of Somalia' (Adibe, 1995) indicate Siad Barre's totalitarian governance was responsible for the civil war that had deprived the country of a recognized political authority. Siad Barre introduced a clan system of governance that dominated economic and political life during his regime. He appointed loyalists to positions of leadership and power. The Somali National Movement emerged in Conflict and State Security in the Horn of Africa, 43 1981 to resist authoritarianism and brutality of the deprived people. The failure of the opposition to filling the power vacuum left behind by Siad Barre after his flight into exile in 1991 marked the beginning of disintegration of Somalia. The second issue was the country's poverty, which, combined with rapid population growth and urban drift on the part of a large pastoral population, produced growing land pressure in the countryside and an increasing number of unemployed young men who could potentially be recruited into armed groups or criminal gangs. But, Somalia's strategic importance in the Cold War enabled the Barre regime to attract high levels of foreign aid, giving it the ability to engage in patronage politics and to build one of the largest standing armies in sub-Saharan Africa. That large army helped to absorb the growing number of unemployed youths. Somalia had made irredentist claims on neighboring states since independence, and its aspirations to unify all Somali populations in a single Somali state culminated in a disastrous war with Ethiopia in 1977-78. Somalia lost, and the heavy casualties, refugee crises, and recriminations that ensued accelerated an already pronounced drift toward repression and authoritarianism. By 1980, two weeks clan-based armed insurgencies arose, both based in Ethiopia, and northern Somalia was under military rule. The 1980s saw Somalia become one of the most repressive and predatory regimes in Africa, and Barre resorted to dividing and ruling tactics, exacerbating clan divisions. At this point, the country was ripe for armed conflict. The country's pre-war profile matches up with the factors most frequently cited in conflict vulnerability analysis as rendering a country susceptible to armed conflict.

Somalia is destitute; its government was repressive and predatory, fueling deep grievances; the government was highly dependent on a rentier economy, in this case,

foreign aid derived from the country's strategic importance; and that source of revenue began to plummet quickly as the Cold War waned in the late 1980s. Somalia had not had a previous civil war one of the factors cited as among the most accurate predictors of a new civil war but, it had endured a terrible interstate war with neighboring Ethiopia that had the effect of militarizing the country. The most important factor rendering the country vulnerable to armed conflict was the combination of the Barre regime's profound levels of corruption, its clannish divide and rule tactics, and its willingness to resort to very heavy-handed lethal force against its own population in the quest to remain in power. Civil war in 1988 engulfed Somalia, and in January 1991 multiple clan-based militias drove the Barre government out of the capital, Mogadishu.

Several factors triggered the armed conflict. A secret deal between Barre and Ethiopian dictator Mengistu to cease hosting insurgencies at one another's expense had the unintentional effect of prompting the Somali National Movement (SNM) to launch an attack into northern Somalia in order to establish a presence in Somalia. The government's response to the SNM offensive involved "systematic" human rights abuses and the murder of thousands of northern civilians, producing a flow of 300,000 to 500,000 refugees into Ethiopia. In response, Western aid donors froze assistance to the government. The waning of the Cold War reduced Somalia's strategic importance, making it easier for donors to suspend aid. In retrospect, the Somali state was a castle built on sand, the loss of external funds meant that the government lost its ability to hold together the policy by a combination of patronage and coercion. Grievances against the Barre regime quickly found expression in a proliferation of clan-based liberation movements, which found ready recruits in the growing ranks of deserters. The fall of the Barre government did not produce an accord between the victorious armed factions. Instead, they began fighting among themselves in what developed into a devastating war of predation in 1991-92. A number of factors worked against Somali's ability to reach a power-sharing accord. One was the legacy of deep distrust between the clans shown by Barre as part of his divide and rule tactics. Second, a wave of retaliatory attacks on tribes associated with the Barre government produced a massive wave of ethnic cleansing across all of Somalia. This ethnic polarization would prove to be a major impediment to reconciliation. It also meant that some clans were able to occupy militarily and control the most valuable real estate in the country, the capital and productive riverine farmland nearby at the expense of other groups. Occupiers of this property had reduced incentive to promote reconciliation that would invariably require return of stolen private and government property. Third, a war economy quickly developed, in which militias and their financial backers had powerful incentives to perpetuate a state of war. (<http://www.operationspaix.net>).

## **THE EFFECT OF SOMALIA'S ARMED CONFLICT ON EAST AFRICAN SUB-REGION**

New and festering conflicts also contribute to the shackles of poverty, as widespread civil violence across several Eastern African countries significantly hampers prospects for economic development. While, many parts of the world today see a decrease in wars both inter and intrastate sub-Saharan Africa continues to be a hotbed of violence. As a result of armed conflict, many Africans are routinely forced to flee their homes; sometimes entire villages are emptied out. The net effect in countries like Burundi, Ethiopia, Kenya, Somalia, and Uganda alone there are over 2.2 million internally displaced persons. According to the World Health Organization report (2013), 72 percent of all deaths in Africa are directly attributable to infectious diseases, compared to 27 percent in all other WHO regions combined. Absence of shelter, food, and water for significant periods of time, and illness and further abuse while they are displaced ruins any sense of security or, importantly, hope for a brighter future. Compounding this vicious circle of deprivation is the growing threat from terrorist organizations preying upon not only Western targets in the Eastern Africa region, but also upon innocent local populations.

One of the most recent and disturbing developments is that al-Shabaab, the Islamist insurgent group aiming to oust the Somali Transitional Federal Government, has begun carrying out terrorist attacks outside of that country. In July and December 2010, the terrorist group claimed responsibility for attacks in Kampala, Uganda, and Nairobi, Kenya, respectively, killing over 75 people and wounding even more. Extreme poverty and inadequate public health opportunities, internal political strife, interstate wars, trafficking in small arms, and the lack of established structures and processes to promote democracy fuel a vicious circle that prevents large swathes of the continent from participating in much of the active progress.

It was against this backdrop that the UN Security Council passed Resolutions 1373 (2001) and 1540 (2004) the resolutions were seemingly ill-connected to the daily challenges facing the Global South. In much of East Africa, inadequate national financial systems, porous borders, lack of technical expertise and operative controls over sensitive materials, and occasional reluctance to enact more rigorous standards for fear of derailing economic and development objectives have yielded an environment ripe for terrorist groups to flourish and for the nefarious transit of sensitive WMD (Weapons of Mass Destruction) materials and technologies. Similarly, emphasizing counterterrorism as a global priority while focusing attention on the high-profile groups that seek out Western targets is unlikely to build authentic support in the face of more pressing challenges to developing world governments. The consequences of such a scenario will be continued instability and insecurity, and the suffering

or death of untold numbers of people. Terrorism will jeopardize the foundations of the global economy, erase gains made by the global development community, and reverse the forces of globalization already stressed by the worldwide economic slowdown. For donors and recipients alike, strained financial resources and the growing confluence of security and development challenges mean that neither can be treated nor solved in isolation.

For this reason, bridging the security/ development divide in order to build collaboration and joint strategies, ameliorate proliferation concerns, reinforce counter-terrorism efforts, and provide an agenda of opportunity beyond those countries traditionally will be central to defending international security in the long term. The transition from grievance driven insurgency to a war economy driven by looting occurred with extraordinary speed. In the two-year civil war that ensued, all of the clan militias fought primarily to gain control over areas to loot. As famine conditions resulted, and 240,000 Somalis lost their lives, external food aid itself became a principal item in the war economy (Report, 2011). The war in 1991-92 deepened clan animosities and sharpened the competing narratives or, more precisely, litanies of grievances of rival tribes. No other viable form of political organization outside of the clan was possible even the coalitions, which were attempted, were family alliances and efforts to establish civic organizations that competed with militias were dangerous and futile. The one partial exception to this rule, the Islamist movement Al-Ittihad al-Islamiyya, attempted to create a movement that transcended clan in 1991, but was unable to stand up to clan militias. The complete collapse of the state and the marginalization of family elders meant that gunmen and warlords were a law unto themselves. Opportunities to profiteer from criminal violence were virtually unlimited in 1991-92. During this period, state collapse and armed conflict constituted mutually reinforcing pathologies. Not surprisingly, this environment proved ideal for the ascent of unscrupulous and myopic leadership which actively fomented clan divisions and lawlessness (Watara, 2002). The Somali case also demonstrates that once a government is allowed to collapse entirely and for an extended period, it becomes much harder to revive the collapsed state. State failure cannot be permitted to fester without exponentially increasing the difficulties of restoring government institutions.

Therefore, observers of political development in the region will conclude that armed resistance movements always threaten state security. Thus, inter-state tensions in East of Africa constitute a significant exacerbation of arms flow, which intensify militarization. The amount of weapons that infiltrate the country involved in revenge support for armed opposition movements encourage communities to arm themselves for purposes other than that of the civil wars on the ground. Researchers (Berman and Sams, 2000) identify similar problems of interwoven conflict that leaves small arms unchecked within state boundaries or across common borders.

Particular communities or groups take advantage of the chaos to load goods. It illustrates the complexity of the problem involving nearly all the countries in the region. Cattle rustling, highway banditry, and a communal vengeance have not only increased within the past decade, but also resulted in massive casualties than in the past. The reason is that elements of communities have easy access to modern weapons. They receive training from rebel movements or members of their communities purged from national armies for political reasons, and main parties to a conflict sometimes exploit them. Disruption of family life is the standard feature of insecurity in the East African sub-region. This situation leaves psycho-social effects on the population such as trauma in abducted children and women. Civilian militarization entails risks of child conscription, increased sexual vulnerability of girls and women, increased hatred and vengeance and loss of hope.

The UN has supported the idea of the inviolability of the national boundaries of African states that existed at the time of independence (Bakwesegha, 1997). Consequently, it has not been willing to become involved in adjudicating domestic disputes that involve the issues of secession or irredentism. On the other hand, in cases where it was perceived that the right of the people of certain territories to self-determination was being denied, the UN has consistently attempted to engage in diplomatic efforts to secure that right. For example, in the case of Namibia, after years of diversionary tactics and foot-dragging on the part of South Africa, the UN was able to establish a peacekeeping presence in the country, and to organize and supervise multi-party elections that led to Namibian independence in 1990. It was the first time the UN had chosen to take sides and to define a country's domestic problems as an international security issue. By the time the UN decided to intervene in the Somali civil war, it was clear that humanitarian considerations had come to take precedence over state sovereignty.

### **Attempted ways of resolving the conflict on the East African region**

The armed conflict in Somalia has translated itself into terrorist activities in the area. Reference was drawn from the laws and bills that were passed by countries like Uganda, Tanzania and Kenya (Table 1).

Kenya has received substantial amount of foreign assistance for its counter-terrorism programs. Preventing the transit of small arms and light weapons within and across national boundaries in Eastern Africa has a logical nexus with global efforts to prevent the proliferation of nuclear, biological, and chemical weapons of mass destruction. For instance, both require enhanced human and technical capacity at border crossings, including better-trained and equipped border agents and improved arms-detection gear and techniques. International

**Table 1.** The countries that passed bills/laws on anti-terrorism.

Countries	Year
Uganda	Anti-terrorism act 2002
Tanzania	Anti- terrorism law 2003
Kenya	Anti-terrorism bill

Source: International Journal of conflict and violence, 2009.

nonproliferation donors have long provided a wide variety of practical assistance tailored to these needs in the area of WMD detection and proliferation prevention. This dual benefits assistance includes the provision of long-term regional advisors, short-term experts, equipment and training to foreign governments in support of the mutual nonproliferation, export control, anti-terrorism, and border-security objectives. In the case of the US State Department, assistance programs that focus on “enabling the border control, and other law enforcement agencies in high-threat countries to detect, identify, and interdict such contraband, and investigate the illegal transfer of materials used in the production of WMD.” Although, each of these assistance programs were proffered under the auspices of WMD nonproliferation, the capacities they yield directly 31 benefit national and regional efforts to prevent the illicit movement of small arms and light weapons across the borders of Eastern Africa. Recognizing the serious threat posed by SALW, the government of Kenya has already launched an array of efforts designed to shore up that country’s ability to prevent trafficking. For example, the Kenya Ports Authority has made remarkable strides in implementing the International Maritime Organization’s ship and port facility security measures. In April 2008, the Kenyan government set up a new monitoring unit to control trafficking along its coastline. Kenyan authorities are also strengthening border security through the acquisition of sophisticated detection and inspection equipment for border points and providing training to relevant personnel. In conjunction with heightened port and safety measures, the Kenya Anti-Corruption Commission together with the Kenya Revenue Authority have stepped up efforts to investigate and prosecute customs control and border-security violations involving the diversion of transit goods. The Kenyan government is also providing incentives to traders that comply with stricter regulations. For example, the Kenya Revenue Authority has started a new initiative designed to integrate modern risk-management measures into the control of transit trade. In aggregate, these efforts will go far to prevent the transshipment of small arms and light weapons across the borders of Somalia and beyond to neighboring Kenya.

## Conclusion

In the analysis of Somali armed conflict, this paper strongly supports the “greed to grievance” assumption. At the level of individual gunmen, a fundamental and dangerous living was eked out through looting and extortion; for top warlords and their financial backers. Fortunes were made from everything from export of scrap metal to diversion of food aid. The Somali case confirms the assumption that access to conflict resources is critical to the rise of armed Conflicts. The liberation movements that after 1991 degenerated into clan militias had access to lootable on the land, including international food aid that poured into the country and beyond borders by 1992. The high number of unemployed youths provided a pool of cheap recruits for the militias. Finally, the fact that the wider region was awash in cheap weaponry made it easy for army to arm themselves and engage in sustained battles in the area. However, the efforts made by countries within the region must be acknowledged and the only means, to end these conflicts, is to stop small arms trade in East Africa and across Africa as a whole.

## Conflict of Interest

The author has not declared any conflict of interests.

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