Crisis in the Horn of Africa and Challenges to the US: 
From Past to Present

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ABSTRACT  
The Horn of Africa (HOA)\(^9\) is one of the most important regions of the world due to its economic and strategic importance. Important Sea Lines of Communication (SLOC) pass through this region which approximately shares 8 per cent of world trade and to mention a few, more 44 than per cent of the European energy trade passes through this region. However, this region became the victim of power politics and competition between the world powers, especially France, the US and China. Importance of this region can be analysed through the long colonial rule over the region which is reflected in the struggle for existential adherence among the modern-day world powers. Reflecting upon this, the present paper is an attempt to define and analyse the strategic importance of the HOA in the strategic policies of the US. Marred by the weak governments, piracy, clan-wars, and insurgency, the economic and maritime security becomes uncertain in the Red Sea. As the crisis has loomed large over the years in HOA, how the existing and impending instability will have repercussions on the US in its War on Terror and maintaining the peace and security of the important SLOC running through and across the region?

Historical Background

The HOA is one of the important regions of the world due to it’s economic, political and strategical importance. It is the easternmost extension of African land with coasts touching the Red Sea, the Gulf of Aden, and the Indian Ocean. A very important SLOC passes through the Red Sea which connects Europe with Asia through the Suez Canal, and more than 20,000 ships pass every year through this region (Stigset and Sulugiuc 2011). Due to its strategic location, HOA remains an integral part of the competition amongst the major world powers The HOA has a long history of colonial rule and which is also known as a Somalian peninsula during that time.

Amongst the most disturbed countries in the HOA, Somalia tops in political instability, economic crisis, religious extremism which had become the tug of war between France, Britain, and Italy during the colonial rule over the HOA countries. After the Cold War, the HOA became the prime focus of the US foreign policy to increase it’s influence in the HOA in maintaining it’s superpower status. Later, with the collapse of Somali state in 1991, the US forces began their operations by putting their active efforts in the United Nations Peacekeeping Missions, to maintain peace and stability in the country. However, the peace mission failed to establish peace in the country, forcing the US to return its participating forces and call off the mission form Somalia. The failure of the operation further led to the rise of Al-Shabab, Al-Qaeda, religious extremism, warlords and piracy in the region.

\(^9\) The “Horn of Africa” consists of Djibouti, Eritrea, Ethiopia and Somalia and the greater Horn of Africa, according to Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD), consists of eight countries namely Djibouti, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Kenya, Somalia, South Sudan, Sudan and Uganda.
With the industrial development in the European countries led to the rise in reliance on middle-eastern countries for energy resources- oil and natural gas which began to pass through the Red Sea (Woodward 2006: 9). The US policymakers realised the economic importance of the HoA and improved its cooperation especially with Ethiopia and Djibouti. However, the previous failure had seen the rise of terrorism, extremism, warlords, insurgency, Al-Shabab, and piracy in Somalia became the new challenge for the US in assuring the safety and security of the maritime traffic. Later, the rise of terrorism led to the attacks on the US embassies and the 9/11 attack in the aftermath of the stringent actions taken by the US forces. According to Woodwards, “time to time the Horn appeared on the agenda in the White House, mainly for geo-strategic reasons, and also occasionally at time of the greatest humanitarian need” (Woodward 2006: 2).

Failed and authoritarian states unstable the whole region which led a number of peacekeeping operation like Combine Joint Task Forces-Horn of Africa (CJTF-HOA), European Union Training Mission in Somalia (EUTM), African Union Mission in Somalia and the United Nations peacekeeping mission in Somalia. Most of these peacekeeping missions are coordinated through Djibouti and Ethiopia through the US and French forces as both have their permanent military base in Djibouti.

Challenges to the US

The rise of non-state actors: Al-Shabab to ISIS

The failure of the US forces in Somalia led to the rise of Al-Shaba and terrorism in the region. After the setback, the US withdrew its forces and left Somalia as it is which give a very natural environment to a terrorist organisation to grown as a threat to the whole world. It changed the social, political and economic structure of the HoA which forced the US to relook into its foreign policy and WoT in the HoA. Due to the unrest number of people in the region internal displaced which led clan war and clashes within the regional tribes. The rise of extremism raises the sentiments against the western countries (especially the US) led attacks on the US embassies in 1998. Al-Qaeda affiliated group blew up the US embassies in the Dar es...
Salaam and Nairobi. This led the US former President Clinton to authorise the missile attack on a factory in Khartoum, North Sudan (Woodward 2006). This further led to the rise of extremism in the region which increased pirate's attack on ships passing through the Red Sea and IOR.

To secure its economic, political and strategic interests, the US Department of Defence has identified the HoA, as the area for its counterterrorism operations against piracy, Al-Shabaab, AL-Qaeda, and allied groups. But, the strategic delay gave enough space to a terrorist organisation to plan attack which resulted in the 9/11 attack on the US soil. The US policy again shifted more aggressively towards the HoA. After 1993, it was the first time when the US troops again shifted to the HoA and established CJTF-HoA base at Djibouti in 2002 (Garrett 2003: 32-33). The operation of CJTF-HoA includes a number of countries like Eritrea, Djibouti, Burundi, Ethiopia, Kenya, Seychelles, Rwanda, Somalia, Tanzania and Uganda.

The HoA countries are not strong enough to counter threats of terrorism due to the political, economic and social crisis in the HoA. They need foreign support to counter these threats. The economic crisis led Somalian to attack ships passing through the region which resulted in oil spilling on the high seas, kidnapping of a foreign tourist, and hijacking of the trade ships. In this regard, Professor Burgess of US Air War College writes that "the US forces need to train regional forces to counter these threats and need to win heart and minds of regional forces through social, economic and infrastructure development in the region" (Burgess 2005: 22). But the slow pace economic and political development further gave space to Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS) to spread its roots in the HoA. The HoA provided space to ISIS fighter after the collapse of their stronghold in Iraq and Syria. This becomes a serious threat to the US interests as the ISIS growing presence began to influence the local Al-Shabab extremist groups to adopt their tactics. As a result, in November 2017, the US military air strike on the ISIS fighters who were present in Somalia (Gibbons-Neff 2017).

Political Crises
The politics in the HoA is very complex and diverse due to internal and external power politics influence. Most of the HoA countries have authoritarian regimes whose leaders have been there for the last several years. These political leaders were supported by the US and the European countries from time to time. However, the US promotes democratic values, but the political crisis in the HoA countries led the US to support these leaders to maintain peace and development in the region. This political support gives a free hand to authoritarian regimes to maintain its power by violating human rights, jailing and executing political opposition. Ethiopia to leverage its good relationship with the US and invaded Somalia on July 20, 2006 (Model 2014: 70). The US removed the Islamic Courts of Justice (ICJ) with the help of Ethiopian forces in Somalia. ICJ was the homegrown remedy which rises against the instability, insurgency and political crisis in Somalia. The US doesn't want any Islamic influence in that region because of its strategic and economic importance but, after the removal of ICJ, Somalia again went into the crises of instability.

Eritrea blamed the US for backing unjust demarcation of the border and not supporting international stand for the demarcation on boundaries between Ethiopia and Eritrea. Both the US and Ethiopia have a mutual interest in the region which creating sense of insecurity in Eritrea. Eritrean president lamed the US for conspiring to topple his government and said the US as the historic enemy of Eritrea (Kidane 2008). In the same time, when the US pressurised Djiboutian president during a change of constitution of Djibouti, he got support from China. This act led to Chinese influence in the HoA. Later on, China opened its first official overseas naval base in July 2017 (Gao 2017).

Piracy
After 2007, the economic and political crisis in Somalia led to the rise of piracy in the Red Sea and IOR. The SLOC passes through the region is a lifeline of the European energy demand. If due to any security reasons SLOC closed through the Red Sea the other route via the Cape of Good Hope's will increases 50 per cent cost of transportation which directly impact on the economy every country doing trade through this region. Number of Shipped was hijacked, and many sailors and tourist were killed. A number of pirate attacks was maximum in 2011 after 160 pirates attack were registered in the region, which reduced to zero in 2015 and again increased to 5 pirates attack recorded in 2017-2018. The reason behind these attacks was no rule of law in Somalia, and it is still struggling to establish a working government in the country (The Statistics Portal 2018). The US overlooked HoA region and its relation with the HoA countries remained very complicated. According to Andrew, the US failed to address the challenges of piracy, civil war, radical Islam and insurgency in Somalia (Manners 2012). The US needs to address this issue otherwise it may lead to a direct threat to its political, economic and strata legít interest.

Terrorism in the High-seas
The Red Sea plays an important role in providing strategic depth to the US operations in maintaining peace and security. But with the passage of time the political, economic and security challenges in the HoA leads to
the rise of terrorism at the high seas. A number of terrorist outfits affiliated to Al-Qaeda working together with Al-Shabab tried to attack on foreign ships passing through Bab El Mandeb. In 2000, Al-Qaeda outfits operating from the Somali soil attempted suicide bombing on USS Cole which killed 17 US sailors (Etheredge 2011: 138). Moreover, the terrorist outfits are getting advance with new equipment’s and try to cut and tap the optical fibre which is an inessential infrastructure of the global economy. Due to the shallowness of water in the Red Sea, it is become very easy for a terrorist organisation to theft classified information and disrupt electronic transaction. This poses a big challenge to the US national security.

Challenges to Social and Infrastructure Development
The US needs to connect every aspect of the development of the region. Except for Ethiopia, these countries are one of the least developed countries in the world. Lack of infrastructure in the HoA leads to social insecurity, health and educational issues. The HoA don’t have clean water to drink which lead to a number of health issues. The aid provided by the US authorities is not used as the primary requirement of the HoA people. In this regard Prof. Burgess Said:

"The US military’s containment strategy, including plans to generate goodwill among sub-regional partners and build partnership capacity and win the hearts and minds of Somali pastoralists, did not appear to have been indicative of strategic knowledge and perspective.”

(Burgess 2013: 4)

Also, the fund Provided by the USAID to the HoA country delayed most of the time which led to the further crisis in the region. The US needs to develop basic infrastructure which helps them to educate and teach common people to become self-dependent.

Conclusion
The US needs the support of local expertise while making their policy for the HoA countries. Their official need to connect with the local authorities and common people to know the actual issues faced by them. Most of the time the US official stayed in the embassies because they are an easy target for the terrorist organisation. There is a need to reach out to the local and help the HoA people to relocate Internally Displace People because of the Civil War, drought, famine, human right violations and the insurgency. Also, the US needs to cooperate with regional governments on bases of international laws and principles which help to improve its relationship with countries like Eritrea.

Reference