

Peace and Security in the Horn of Africa



History of the Horn of Africa

The Horn of Africa is the cradle of humanity, with it believed that modern humans emerged from the region some 100,000-300,000 years ago. During the ancient period, a series of kingdoms competed for resources in the region. Due to its strategic location, many of the kingdoms and small states became wealthy as traders between Mediterranean societies, such as the Roman Empire, and kingdoms in India and further east. This trading brought them into contact with Christianity relatively early in its history, and then Islam soon after its foundation in the 700s. This succession of religions has made the entire region not only ethnically diverse, but religiously as well, with Christians and Muslims will represented in

many countries, and smaller populations of Jews scattered throughout the region.

Due to its strategic location, the Horn of Africa started to attract the attention of European imperialist powers. This scramble became more pronounced when the Suez Canal opened in 1869.¹ Prior to the opening of the Canal, European interactions with the African horn was limited to small trading posts. By opening a pathway to India and the Far East, the Suez Crisis made European powers more interested in establishing a sizeable and more permanent foothold throughout the Horn. This Scramble for Africa was formally organized in the Berlin Conference of 1884-1885.² An additional pull for European powers in the area were the abundance of natural resources. By the end of the scramble, the Horn was divided between the French (controlling modern-day Djibouti), the British (controlling a portion of modern-day Somalia) and the Italians (controlling Eritrea and the rest of modern-day Somalia). Ethiopia successfully resisted

¹ "Suez Canal." *History.com*. <https://www.history.com/topics/africa/suez-canal>.

² "Berlin Conference of 1884-1885." *Oxford Reference*. <https://bit.ly/33p01T7>.

colonization efforts, defeating the Italians in 1896.³ Their independence would be preserved until they were attacked by the Italians in 1935, just prior to World War II.⁴ The boundaries set during this period largely remain the region's boundaries today.

During World War II, British forces occupied Italian East Africa. The British conquest of Eritrea was completed in 1941. Immediately after World War II, Ethiopia regained its independence and became a founding member of the United Nations. Despite their independence, the other areas of the Horn (Somalia and Djibouti) remained under European control. In an effort to decolonize the region, Eritrea sought independence, but was claimed by Ethiopia. The United Nations General Assembly passed Resolution 390, granting Eritrea to Ethiopia, but mandating a loose federal structure that would allow Eritrea some autonomy.⁵ Such a relationship would eventually sour and lead to a Civil War between Ethiopia and Eritrea.

Recurring Ethiopian-Eritrean Conflicts

In the 1960s, a movement for Eritrean independence was led by the Eritrean Liberation Front (ELF). 1962 saw the Ethiopian Emperor, Haile Selassie unilaterally dissolved the Eritrean parliament and annexed the territory.⁶ This was the start of a 30-year long conflict for independence. The conflict saw the deaths of nearly 50,000 people from violence and hundreds of thousands more in famines that were spurred on by the violence.⁷ In 1991, the Eritrean People's Liberation Front (EPLF), a successor of the ELF, defeated the Ethiopian forces in Eritrea and helped a coalition of Ethiopian rebel forces take control of the Ethiopian capital Addis Ababa.⁸

An independence referendum took place in 1991, with 99.83% of people voting in favor of independence. Despite, independence, Eritrea and Ethiopia became involved in a war, taking place from 1998-2000.⁹ Tens of thousands of people were killed due to the conflict and both nations engaged in forced-deportations of citizens of people from the opposite country.¹⁰ In June of 2000, both countries signed a peace agreement known as the Algiers Agreement. Although Eritrea was awarded Badme, the main center for conflict, only minor border changes ensured. The next twenty years saw continued tensions between both nations. The border conflict did not fully resolve until 2018. Eritrea and Ethiopia signed a joint declaration that formally ended the border conflict after nearly 20 years.¹¹

Continual Crises in Somalia

³“Menelik II, Independence in the Age of Imperialism.” *NBC Learn*. <https://www.nbclearn.com/portal/site/k-12/flatview?cuecard=69434>.

⁴“Italy’s conquest of Abyssinia.” *International Committee of the Red Cross*. <https://bit.ly/318Lidy>.

⁵“General Assembly Resolution 390.” *United Nations*. [https://undocs.org/en/A/RES/390\(V\)](https://undocs.org/en/A/RES/390(V)).

⁶“Ethiopia profile- Timeline.” *BBC*. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-13351397>.

⁷“Ethiopia: Eritrea.” *Uppsala Conflict Data Program*. <https://ucdp.uu.se/#/conflict/275>.

⁸“Eritrea profile- Timeline.” *BBC*. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-13349395>.

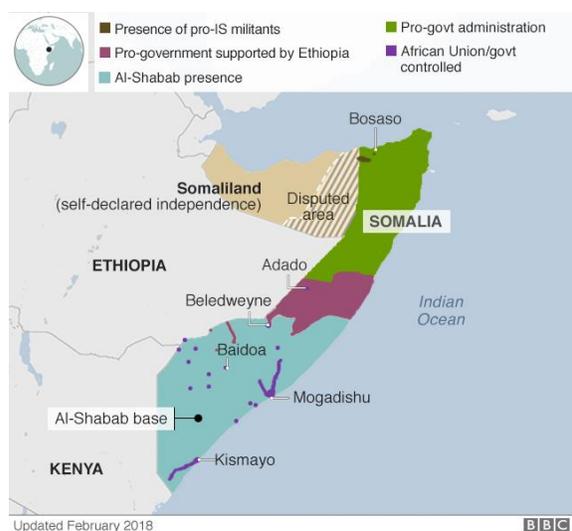
⁹“The War Between Ethiopia and Eritrea.” *Institute for Policy Studies*. <https://bit.ly/2Mzyg3E>.

¹⁰“Remembering Eritrea-Ethiopia border war: Africa’s unfinished conflict.” *BBC*. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-44004212>.

¹¹“Ethiopia, Eritrea sign peace deal at Saudi Arabia summit.” *Al Jazeera*. <https://bit.ly/2xnJRuZ>.

Somalia gained independence in 1960 after a brief period as a UN Trust territory. Somalia was created by combining Italian Somaliland with British Somaliland.¹² During the 1960s, Somalia had continual border disputes with Kenya and Ethiopia. After a Coup, Somalia became a Socialist state in 1970, but was quickly hit by a drought that caused a famine. In 1976, Somalia invaded Ethiopia to assert its claim over the Ogaden region.¹³ The Soviet Union supported Ethiopia and Somalia ended its socialist ideology and sought Western support.

Somalia made peace with Ethiopia in 1988, but peace did not prevent its President from being ousted in 1991. His removal sparked a power struggle between different clans. As a result, war lords in the formerly British portion of Somalia declared independence. The power struggle between the warlords and this move for independence sparked a growing crisis, with Somalia beginning to fall apart.¹⁴ The burgeoning civil conflict in Somalia was killing thousands of



innocent civilians and threatening the region's tepid food stability, threatening to starve thousands more. In 1992, the United Nations sent peacekeepers, authorized under Security Council Resolution 751, to Somalia to attempt to hold it together and end the fighting.¹⁵ Accompanying this mission were members from the United States military, but the United States' involvement famously ended in 1993 after two helicopters were shot down over Mogadishu and American lives were lost.¹⁶ Eventually, the United Nations forces left in 1995, not able to stop the violence, not able to ensure food was

delivered to innocent civilians, and not able to bring stability to Somalia.

Since this United Nations withdrawal, conflict was continued to reign in Somalia. Attempts at establishing a functioning central government have continually failed or fallen through. Given the weakness of the central government, Somalia faces an array of issues that it is hard pressed to solve. Somalia is considered the 2nd most fragile state in the world according to The Fund for Peace.¹⁷

Human Rights Abuses

¹² "Somalia: a history of events from 1950 to the present-in pictures." *The Guardian*. <https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/gallery/2012/feb/23/somalia-history-events-in-pictures>.

¹³ "Somalia profile- Timeline." *BBC News*. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-14094632>

¹⁴ "Somalia-UNOSOM I Background." *United Nations*. <https://peacekeeping.un.org/mission/past/unosom1backgr2.html>

¹⁵ "UNSC Resolution 751." *United Nations*. <https://www.un.org/securitycouncil/sanctions/751>

¹⁶ "The Legacy of Black Hawk Down." *Smithsonian*. <https://www.smithsonianmag.com/history/legacy-black-hawk-down-180971000/>

¹⁷ "Fragile States Index." *The Fund for Peace*. <https://fragilestatesindex.org/>

The Horn of Africa has a long and profound history of rampant human rights abuses. Djibouti, Eritrea, Ethiopia and Somalia have relatively authoritarian governance structures, and tolerate little dissent. In many of the region's countries, basic United Nations-recognized rights are routinely violated. A culture of human rights abuses contributes to a perpetual cycle of violence both between countries and within countries. Forging lasting peace in the region is will depend, in part, on improving the region's human rights situation.

According to World Without Borders, Eritrea has the 3rd worst freedom of the press rating.¹⁸ Since Eritrea's independence in 1993, Freedom House has classified Eritrea as Not Free.¹⁹ In 2001, the government shut down all independent media in 2001. The United Nations Human Rights Council has found numerous human rights violations under the regime. The Special Rapporteur for Human Rights in Eritrea is not allowed into the country to conduct investigations, but has, through interviews with Eritreans who have escaped the country, found that there are many challenges. Eritrea regularly imprisons opponents of the state arbitrarily and for an indefinite period. Additionally, all 18-year-olds are conscripted into military service for an indefinite amount of time. National service is one of the primary factors as to why 15% of the population has fled since the 1998 Eritrean-Ethiopian war²⁰. As of December 2017, almost 300,000 Eritrean refugees were living in Sudan and Ethiopia. Several researchers believe conscripted service, "is less about conflict with Ethiopia than a way to keep people weak and unable to mount resistance to the government. They suggest the authorities are unlikely to demobilize tens of thousands of militarily-trained men and women who bear a grudge against them, with no prospect of finding them alternative employment. (the guardian source)."²¹

The Crisis of Weak States

Despite the number and scope of human rights violations in the region, many nations are weak states, allowing bad non-state actors like terror groups fester and forcing their citizens to live in substandard conditions. While in 2016, the United Nations argued that Somalia was no longer a failed state, but a fragile one, the reality reflects something quite different.²² Al-Shabaab uses Somalia as a base from which to conduct violent attacks on Somalians as well as fund and organize terror efforts throughout East Africa and Europe.²³ For example, Al-Shabaab attacked a university in Kenya in 2015, killing 147 people.²⁴ Pirates also continue to use Somalia as a base to

¹⁸ "2019 World Press Freedom Index." *Reporters without Borders*. <https://rsf.org/en/ranking>

¹⁹ "Eritrea." *Freedom House*. <https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/2019/eritrea>

²⁰ "Despite the peace deal with Ethiopia, Eritrean refugees are still afraid to return home." *PRI*.

<https://www.pri.org/stories/2018-09-13/despite-peace-deal-ethiopia-eritrean-refugees-are-still-afraid-return-home>

²¹ "It's just slavery": Eritrean conscripts wait in vain for freedom." *The Guardian*. <https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2018/oct/11/its-just-slavery-eritrean-conscripts-wait-in-vain-for-freedom>

²² "Somalia no longer a failed state, just a fragile one says UN." *The Guardian*.

<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/dec/23/somalia-no-longer-a-failed-state-just-a-fragile-one-says-un>

²³ "Al-Shabab." *Council on Foreign Relations*. <https://www.cfr.org/backgrounder/al-shabab>

²⁴ "Al-Shabaab's Kenyan Ambitions." *Crisis Group*. <https://www.crisisgroup.org/africa/horn-africa/kenya/al-shabaab-s-kenyan-ambitions>

attack the vital international shipping routes that go through the region. Despite international efforts in the early-2000s, which increased naval patrols throughout the area, the pirate issue cannot be completely solved until the Somalian government establishes better control over its own territory.²⁵ An African Union peacekeeping mission has had some notable successes in stabilizing Somalia, but it cannot put Somalia back together alone. Unfortunately, Somalian political elites remain unable to compromise and form a stable governing central authority.²⁶

Such a weak state complicates efforts to solve the region's other dire problems. How can economic growth be sustained and promoted if the government cannot even meet the basic needs of its citizens or deliver basic services? The weakness of states in the region is a leading contributor to continued instability and are the major roadblock to the peaceful resolution of conflicts.

Environmental Degradation

Systemic conflicts in the region have degraded its environment, promoted resource scarcity and contributed to decrease in biodiversity. Compounding these conflict-promoted issues are the weakness of governance that the region faces. During the 1970s and 80s the region faced repeated food shortages and famines due to drier than expected conditions. Often, these famines were made worse by the conflicts that raged; yet despite the ending of most of the region's intense conflicts, the Horn of Africa is still food insecure.²⁷ Damage to the soil, reliance on undependable rainfall, and a high rate of population growth has made the region food insecure. With the effects of climate change expected to make an impact in the next decades, the region is supposed to get drier still.²⁸ Already, Ethiopia is facing its worst drought in 50-years, and these droughts will only get longer and more intense as climate change wrecks greater and greater havoc.²⁹

In Ethiopia, 92,000 hectares of forests and woodlands are lost each year due to poor agricultural practices, such as overgrazing, and resource mismanagement.³⁰ The Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) of the United Nations has taken strides to improve agricultural practices by improving education for farmers, diversifying the type and number of livestock, and planting more trees to prevent soil erosion. Such steps are important in helping prevent permanent environmental calamity, but more must be done to ensure the region is climate resilient. Already it is believed that over one-quarter of Ethiopia's land has been degraded, helping reduce Gross Domestic Product by 3%.³¹

²⁵ "Piracy threat returns to African waters." *CNN*. <https://cnn.it/2A67WZv>

²⁶ "Lessons Learned in Somalia." *Council on Foreign Relations*. <https://on.cfr.org/2NriYg7>

²⁷ "Food Insecurity in the Horn of Africa." *Food and Agricultural Organization of the United Nations*. <https://bit.ly/2nGvL7f>

²⁸ "How will climate change affect the Horn of Africa." *World Economic Forum*. <https://bit.ly/2osCUsi>

²⁹ "Ethiopia's farmers fight devastating drought with land restoration." *The Guardian*.

<https://www.theguardian.com/sustainable-business/2016/may/02/ethiopia-famine-drought-land-restoration>

³⁰ "Action Against Desertification." *Food and Agricultural Organization of the United Nations*. <https://bit.ly/2B8qqbM>

³¹ "Land Degradation in Ethiopia: Causes, Impacts and Rehabilitation Techniques." *Journal of Environment and Earth Science*. <https://www.iiste.org/Journals/index.php/JEES/article/viewFile/12963/13288>

A Role for the United Nations

Despite numerous high-profile failures by the United Nations in the Horn of Africa, the United Nations still has one of the best opportunities to solve the maladies facing the region. The recent peace agreement between Eritrea and Ethiopia is a notable success of the United Nations and should help spur further improvements in the region. Already, Djibouti has asked the United Nations to help find a path to peace in its own border dispute with Eritrea.³² Moreover, even though the United Nations' previous intervention into Somalia ended in disaster, the African Union's peacekeeping mission has met with some remarkable success. Clearly, the United Nations has a role to play in helping solve the regions endemic insecurity. On the development front, United Nations led projects have helped spur economic growth, reduce rural poverty, and improve access to education. While countries neighboring the region have a role to play, the United Nations must be a leader and coordinate these efforts for a common cause.

Questions to Consider

- What role should the United Nations and other multinational organizations play in increasing political stability in the area?
- How can the international community work to further develop the economies of these regions?
- What programs should be instituted in order to provide basic services, including education, health care, and clean water, to the citizens of these nations?
- Should significant action be taken to ensure peace between these nations? If so, what should be done?

³² "Djibouti asks UN help to end border dispute with Eritrea." *Associated Press*.
<https://www.apnews.com/cd6cf3024ba24afe9baa58852397d5ab>