

Abstract

The Changing Face of Rangeland Conflict in the Eastern Horn

This paper explores how the political economy of the eastern Horn of Africa region (Somalia, Kenya, and Ethiopia) is influencing changes in pastoralist conflict. The research design is based on a macro-micro approach. Pastoralist conflict has been confined to the rangelands since the colonial region, and for the most part, conflicts have reflected internal factors in the presence of inter-ethnic competition over land and resources. There are several reasons why any forward-looking analysis must now focus on the larger picture.

The first is the advancing penetration of capital across the region. While commercialization has contributed to pastoralist conflict over recent decades, the impact of international capital is altering the nature of resource based conflict in many pastoralist areas. The second factor is the situation in stateless Somalia, which continues to be a magnet for Islamist radicalism and counter-terrorism initiatives generating political reverberations within Muslim communities and regional states. The Somali malaise sustains the role of Somalia as epicenter of the eastern Horn conflict system, and in turn raises the question of how intervention influences the contest between Islamist and sub-nationalist ideologies versus democratization in neighboring countries—including the autonomous but yet to be recognized Republic of Somaliland. The gradual development of a regional peace and conflict management infrastructure under the auspices of IGAD and the African Union is a third factor subsuming both negative and positive feedback loops into rangelands conflicts.

There are a host of other issues such to be considered within this framework, e.g.: spread of information via digital technologies, roads and infrastructure development, legal reforms and de facto de-concentration of administrative and political decision making, the price of oil and renewable energy sources, the impact of civil society across system scales, population demography and migration, climate change and other environmental variables, and local economic adaptations and cultural resilience in the face of far-reaching change.

The analysis will examine these trends and empirical developments in the region to develop insights into pastoralist conflicts, its impact on internal and cross-border security, and related issues. It is necessary to disaggregate the matrix of policy and strategies manifesting on the national level. Kenya and Ethiopia, for example, have cooperated within the regional framework of IGAD and the African Union, but have pursued contrastingly diverse strategies on the national level.

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