

## Review Article

## Examining the Root Cause of Irregular Migration in the Horn of Africa

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**Abstract:** Since the end of the cold war, irregular migration within and across the Horn of Africa region has been quite unprecedented. Especially, its association with smuggling and trafficking networks and its human tragedy have put the region in a precarious situation. Every year tens of thousands of young people flee the region in an irregular way, most times causing them to make risky journey across deserts and seas to far-flung regions. Dominant media and political discourse tend to identify extreme poverty as the responsible factor for the larger flow of irregular migrants from the region. However, such representation seems to be based on stereotypes rather than on empirical researches. It seems that, a deeper understanding of the root cause is missing from the public debate and political discourse. This paper examines the root cause of irregular migration in the region. In doing so, by following a critical approach it demystifies the notion that poverty is the root cause which really is a consequence. It may also provide possible policy recommendations. Four countries of the region, namely Eritrea, Djibouti, Ethiopia, and Somalia, which to a different extent are origin for irregular migration, are discussed in this paper.

**Keywords:** Irregular migration, Horn of Africa, root cause, political instability and armed conflicts.

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### INTRODUCTION

Throughout human history migration has been used by societies as a strategy to overcome challenges, whether it is political, economic or environmental. What is unnatural, however, is the irregularity of the migration. Especially since the end of the Cold War, the issue of irregular migration has increasingly dominated the public and political discourse. A day rarely goes by without multiple media reports focusing on aspects of irregular migration (UNITED NATIONS PUBLICATIONS, 2018). Though their hidden character makes any quantification difficult, in 2015, 10 to 15% of the 244 million people who reside in countries other than their home countries are irregular migrants (G20 Global Displacement and Migration Trends Report, 2017).

In the Horn of Africa (HoA), irregular migration and its humanitarian and security implications has put the region in a precarious situation. Currently, the region is one of the most irregular migration producing regions in the world (IOM cited in Farah, Ibrahim and Otondi, Sekou Toure, 2015). Tens of thousands of young people from the region risk their lives by travelling in conditions of extreme hardship and attempting to enter Europe on unworthy sea vessels and overcrowded boats, which some time end in their

deaths (SØRENSEN, 2006). For instance in 2015, over 66,000 irregular migrants from the region enter Europe (IOM: Regional Office for Horn and East Africa, Nairobi, Kenya, 2016). Many unfortunate have lost their lives on the way by drowning in the Mediterranean Sea (*Ibid*).

In 2016, 1392 irregular migrants from the region died in the Mediterranean Sea while they are trying to cross to Europe (IOM - Missing Migrants Project - Latest Global & Figures, 2017). This includes deaths with some record only. In many cases, the dead bodies are never found or identified, especially of those who died in the deserts of Libya. This means that tens of thousands of families of the missing irregular migrants are living in limbo, not knowing if their relatives are dead or alive. Many of them also held as hostages by smugglers and traffickers where they are treated in extreme inhumane conditions.

The current unparalleled trend of irregular migration in the region arises one essential question: why are such a large number of people from the region migrating irregularly, most times causing them to make risky journey across deserts and seas to far-flung regions? In other words, what is the root cause of irregular migration in the region? This paper attempts to address this question. Also, by using critical approach it

demystifies the notion that poverty is the root cause of irregular migration in the region which really is a consequence. It may also provide possible policy recommendations. Four countries of the region, namely Eritrea, Djibouti, Ethiopia, and Somalia, which to different extent are origin for irregular migration, are discussed in this paper.

### Trends of irregular migration in the Horn of Africa

Since the end of the cold war, irregular migration within and across the HoA region has been quite unprecedented. Every year tens of thousands of young people flee the region in irregular way. The

number of desperate people who risk their own lives and the lives of their children in a desperate attempt to get to Europe and other regions is appalling. In 2009, IOM estimated that up to 20,000 male Somali and Ethiopian migrants were being smuggled to South Africa from the HoA annually (Horwood/IOM, 2009). By the end of 2019, Somalia and Eritrea are the top 10 countries of origin of refugees globally. As of October 2018, an estimated 551,000 Somalians and 306,300 Eritreans were refugees in neighbouring countries (UNHCR, 2018). And many unfortunate have lost their lives on their way.

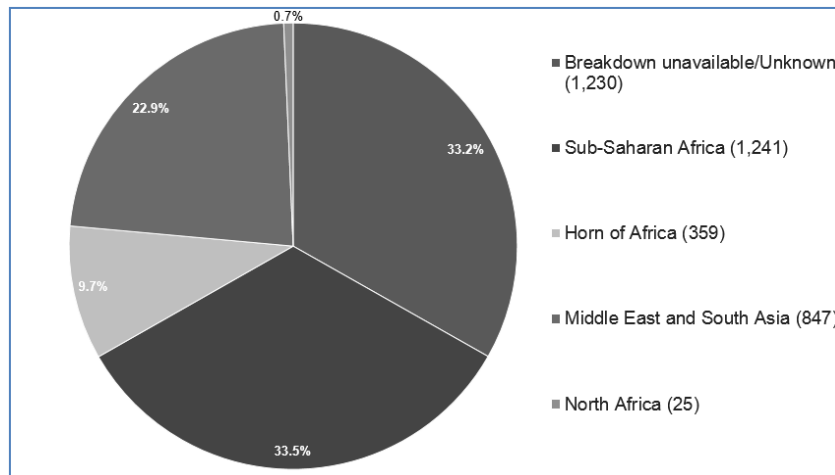


**Fig-1: Political Map of the Horn of Africa Region**

Source: UNHCR, adapted by CRS

In 2016, 1392 irregular migrants from the region died in the Mediterranean Sea while they are trying to cross to Europe (IOM - Missing Migrants Project - Latest Global & Figures, 2017). The real number of the deaths are unknown, as many of the irregular migrants are unregistered and numerous of them die and disappear in remote areas and their bodies are never discovered (*Ibid*). Also in 2013, in one incident, 387 irregular migrants from the region have died when their boats capsized in Italian waters nearby the town of Lampedusa (International Organization for

Migration, 2016). This includes deaths with some record only. In many cases, the dead bodies are never found or identified, especially of those who died in the deserts of Libya. This means that tens of thousands of families of the missing irregular migrants are living in limbo, not knowing if their relatives are dead or alive. And despite all the risks involved, thousands of people still choose to migrate irregularly (Mutume, 2006), in order to escape the unbearable situations at home and ensure their safety.



**Fig-2: Deaths of irregular migrants in the Mediterranean Sea by their region of origin, 2015**  
**Source: IOM, 2015. Missing Migrants Project**

Note: due to the irregular nature of the migrants, all data are estimates.

Contrary to what the western media and politicians claim, most of the irregular migrants of the HoA do not initially move to the Western countries. For

instance, in 2016, just five African countries, among the world’s poorest nations, hosted 2.5 million irregular migrants which are more than the whole of Europe combined that were only 2.3. million (Human Rights Concern – Eritrea, 2017).

**Table-1: Trend of irregular migration in the HoA**

Countries	Scope and Scale of Irregular Migration
Djibouti	As estimates of 2014 show that, globally there were 860 Djiboutian refugees registered (World Bank, 2016 cited in Maastricht Graduate School of Governance (MGSoG) 2017a). It is not surprising to see that the number of Djiboutian refugees is low, because there is no serious reasons to expect large number of migration flow from the country. In most cases, Djibouti serves as a transit for most irregular migrants in the region. For instance, between 2011 and 2014 (inclusive) approximately 243,000 people transited Djibouti en route to Yemen (Horwood, 2015).
Ethiopia	As of 2016, there were 96,394 Ethiopian refugees and 107,047 asylum seekers registered globally (UNHCR, 2017c). For example, between 2006 and 2014 (inclusive) a minimum of 410,000 Ethiopians arrived in Yemen (Horwood, 2015). Ethiopians dominate irregular migration flows into Yemen ( <i>Ibid</i> ). In addition, the UNHCR reports that between 2006 and March 2016 more than 512,000 Ethiopians were registered as moving along the shores of the Red Sea, the Gulf of Aden and the Arabian Sea (RMMS, 2016 cited in Maastricht Graduate School of Governance (MGSoG) 2017b). Kenya, South Africa, European countries and the United States are the main countries of destination for Ethiopian refugees.
Eritrea	According to UNHCR, there are 450,000 Eritrean refugees and asylum seekers registered worldwide (UNHCR Eritrea, 2015 cited in GSDRC 2016). As of June 2015, the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR) record estimates that, 383,869 refugees and 60,157 asylum-seekers originating from Eritrea ( <i>Ibid</i> ). The main destinations for Eritrean refugees are Sudan, Ethiopia, Israel, European countries and the United States ( <i>ibid.</i> ). According to RMMS (2014), in 2014 European countries have received the highest number of Eritrean asylum applicants (RMMS, 2014 cited in (GSDRC, 2016).
Somalia	According to UNHCR, as of December 2016 there were 1.01 million Somali refugees and 60,412 asylum seekers registered globally (UNHCR, 2017b cited in(Maastricht Graduate School of Governance (MGSoG), 2017c). Ethiopia and Kenya are the main destination countries for the majority of Somali refugees and asylum seekers. For example, in 2011 and 2012, over 210,000 Somalis entered Kenya and were registered at the Dadaab refugee camp (Horwood, 2015). European countries, South Africa, and the US are also destination countries for Somali refugees and asylum seekers (Maastricht Graduate School of Governance (MGSoG), 2017c).

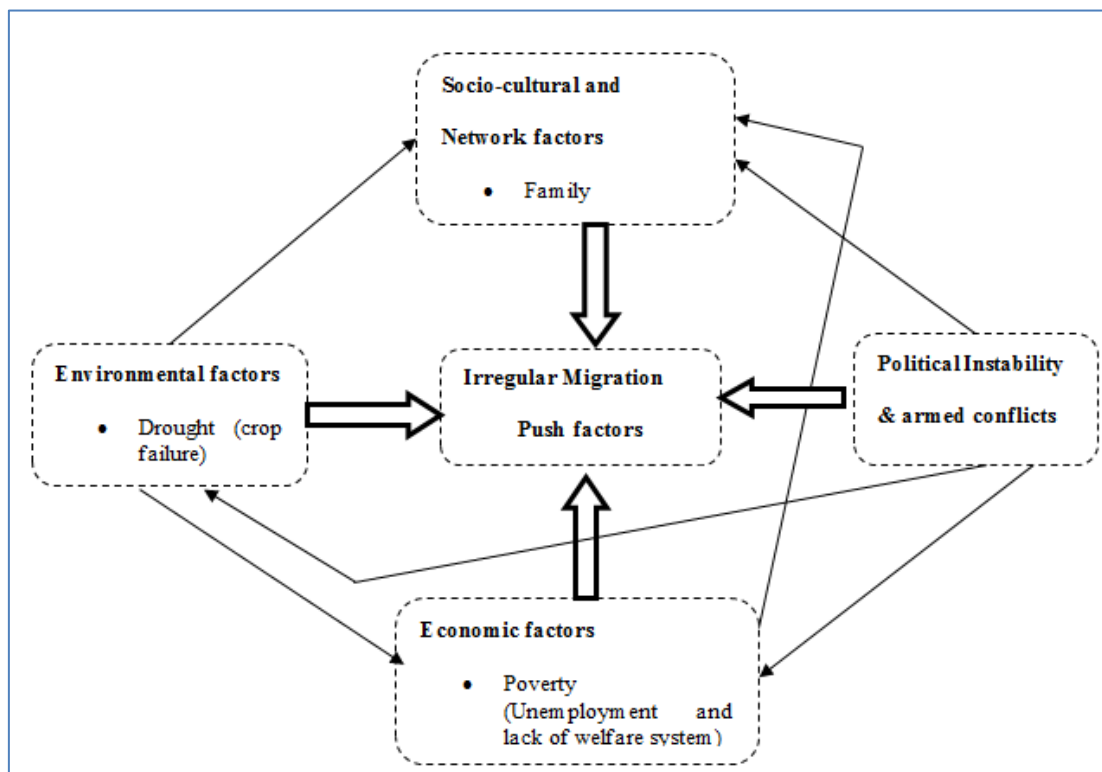
**Analyzing the driving factors of irregular migration in the HoA**

The factors that cause people to migrate in an irregular way differ from region to region, and from period to period. However, often there is a tendency to generalize the factors, which emerges from the analysis of a particular national or regional case. For instance, if poverty had been the major driver of irregular migration in certain parts of Africa, irregular migration across the continent has to be explained as the result of poverty. Of course, Africa as a whole faces challenges associated with low economic development which causes to unemployment and poverty (Marchand *et al.*, 2016). However, in the case of the HoA region, political instability and armed conflicts rather than poverty has been forcing many people to flee their home country.

Often irregular migration in the HoA region context is viewed solely in relation to poverty, overlooking political instability and armed conflicts that are extensive in the region. Though scholars like McAuliffe, Khadria, and International Organization for Migration (2019); Kibreab (2009); Haas (2017); McDowell and Morrell (2010); Koser & McAuliffe (2013); McAuliffe (2013) cited in Kuschminder, Bresser and Siegel (2015), suggest that the causes for irregular migration in the region are complex set of

economic, environmental, socio-cultural, political, and indeed sometimes personal factors, they emphasize much on poverty. Such notion is based on stereotypes, assumptions or journalistic impressions rather than on sound empirical evidence. And it seems that the issue of irregular migration has been politicized before it has been analyzed.

Experts and politicians alike are deeply divided over the best concepts for analyzing or for addressing the issue of irregular migration in the HoA. Even in scholarly literature, several myths about the main factors that cause irregular migration in the region persist. It is evident that political instability and armed conflicts have negatively influenced the peace and the livelihood of the population of the region, causing an extensive irregular migration. And it would be injustice to consider to those who have fled home due to political instability and armed conflicts as economic-induced migrants. In this backdrop, this section attempts to introduce an analytical framework for understanding the root cause of irregular migration in the region. The framework analyzes four different factors (economic, environmental, socio-cultural and networks, and political) and their relationships in order to pinpoint the main driving factor.



**Fig-3: Author’s demonstration of the relationship between the different driving factors of irregular migration in the HoA**

### **Economic Factors**

The analysis of economic factors includes factors related to poverty, unemployment, and lack of welfare system (pension plans, social security system, health insurance, etc.). According to (Martini, 2015) youth unemployment is the main drive for irregular migration in the region. Pointing to this, she noted that Djibouti and Somalia registered unemployment rate at 60 and 47 percent respectively, which is one of the highest in the world (*Ibid*). Similarly, Horwood (2015) and Council of the EU (2015) make the same claim and add that, destitute and unemployment as the main drivers of irregular migration in the region. The irony however is that, some of the destination countries which the irregular migrants trying to migrate have high unemployment rate when compared to the origin countries. For instance in 2019, Eritrea had 6.5 percent unemployment rate, Ethiopia 1.8 percent, Somalia 14 percent, and Djibouti 11 percent, which is way better than Greece (18.1 percent), Spain (14.7 percent), and South Africa (27.3 percent) (The World Bank Group, 2019). Thus, as we can see clearly from this statistics unemployment rate is not an indicator for irregular migration in the region.

In line with this view, (Stevis and Parkinson, 2016) report that, specifically in the case of Eritrea, poverty and military conscription has been the main cause of irregular migration. Equally, Fernandez (2017) observes that poverty and unemployment as the main push factors of irregular migration in Ethiopia, pointing out that job creation as a major step to curb the mass exodus in the country. Congruently, Marchand et al (2016) stress that, in Somalia and Djibouti poverty is the main factor causing the irregular migration. This notion, however, begs another question - if poverty is the root cause of irregular migration in the region, why don't we see destitute Ugandans, Tanzanians, and Kenyans in the flow of irregular migration?

As shown clearly in Figure 1.4, political instability and armed conflicts has a direct and severe effect on the economic factors. The economic life of the people in the region has rigorously damaged by the political instability and armed conflicts. As such, many people who were unable to enjoy a safe and stable life were left with no choice rather than to migrate across borders to support themselves and their family.

Viewed through the analytical lens of economic factor, the European Union in collaboration with the Horn of African Countries has launched the Khartoum Process initiative to tackle irregular migration in the region. Apparently, development aid and fighting human traffickers appear to capitalize the political and financial leverage of the initiative. However, it has not been able to come up with any

optimal solution. The reason is that, its failure to address the root cause. Addressing poverty rather than political instability and armed conflicts in the region is not less than treating the symptom of a chronic problem. Equally, it is also denying the very fact that those irregular migrants are fleeing a life threatening situation. It is important to note that, despite economic hardships most people do not want to migrate irregularly over borders and risk their lives; rather they often wish to remain with their families and friends.

### **Environmental Factors**

Environmental factors are one of the many factors that affect irregular migration indirectly rather than directly. Thus, it is difficult to directly attribute climate change and other environmental factors to irregular migration. In spite of this, (Kibreab, 2009) argues that, as is common in arid and semi-arid places, drought in HoA is affecting the livelihood of the people negatively and forcing them to leave their homes irregularly. Similarly, Research and Evidence Facility (REF) (2017), pointed out that agriculture in the region (mainly dependent on rain-fed) have frequently hit by the severity of climate shocks such as drought, floods, and heat, forcing many people to migrate (*Ibid*). According to Weiss and Reyes (2009), gradual environmental change and extreme environmental both influence irregular movements of people in the region.

In line with this view, Afifi, Tamer, RadhaGovil, Patrick Sakdapolrak and Koko Warner (2012) argue that, pastoralists and farmers who relied on agricultural and pastoral activities are the most exposed groups to climatic stresses in the region. Since this had a direct and negative impact on their livelihoods and food security, they forcibly migrate (*Ibid*). They further argue that, even those not directly involved in agricultural and pastoral activities are also indirectly affected by the rising food prices and the declining turnover and profit among traders (*Ibid*). Similarly, the UN Office for the Co-ordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) (2016) emphasizes that, a serious of successive seasons of drought, which severely and directly impacting pastoral and agro-pastoral communities forced many Somalis to flee their home irregularly.

Though the negative impact of environmental challenges in the livelihood of the society in the region is undeniable, the argument that it constitutes the root cause for the irregular migration is unfounded. As shown in figure 1.4, environmental factors are directly affected by political factors. In politically unstable environment, where wars and conflicts are prevalent, the environmental challenges get worst. In politically stable environment, however, environmental challenges could easily be mitigated by activities like forestations,

terracing, and building water reservoirs. The effectiveness of environment management, such as alleviating drought, is very much dependent on the presence of political stability.

Especially pastoralists and farmers, who are often the most vulnerable groups to environmental pressures, could have developed a wide range of coping and adaptation strategies if they had peace and stability. However, due to political instability and armed conflicts and the continuous existence of conflicts and wars in the region, their life has been unstable. Thus, irregular migration has been the common reaction for decades in the region.

### **Socio-cultural and Network Factors**

Communal life is the socio-cultural makeup of the society of the HoA region. In this backdrop, Martini (2015) argues that, a big push factor for the migration of young people in the region is the expectations of parents and extended families. Martini asserts that, in countries where there is no social welfare system that supports the needy aged people, young people once they have grown up are expected to support their families (*Ibid*). In such pressing situation, if the young people could not find a job at home to support themselves and their family, the only choice that they have left with is to take an irregular migration and jeopardize their safety and life (*Ibid*).

Viewed through the analytical lens of social factor, a report from IOM ((UN, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division, 2017) argues that, the “get rich quick” attitude of the new generation is another social push factor for irregular migration in the region. The report asserts that, the existence of richer migrant relatives encourages migration by reinforcing the belief that emigration is a way to prosperity (*Ibid*). In the case of HoA societies, being an immigrant in the Western countries is believed to be a symbol of social prestige (*Ibid*). In other words, if remittances of migrants cause greater inequality in the sending people, emigration encourages to more emigration.

Smuggling networks contribute significantly to irregular migration in the HoA, argues Marchand *et al.* (2017). Thus, irregular migrants’ access to smuggling networks is important factors shaping where and how they decide to migrate (Overseas Development Institute, working paper 430, 2015). However, smuggling is a reaction to the tight control of borders by the destinations countries, not the cause of irregular migration. The working paper further highlights that; potential migrants may get encouragement from family members in host countries through information and remittances (*Ibid*). Furthermore, family networks and information through the social media and internet

encourage potential irregular migrants by diminishing the risks and reducing the costs of irregular migration (*Ibid*).

The argument that socio-cultural and network factors are the root cause of irregular migration in the region is a moot point. A close reading of figure 1.4 shows that, political instability and armed conflicts has an indirect impact on the Socio-cultural and Network factors. As such both the factors are the consequence of political instability and armed conflicts. The fact that the countries in the region often lack political stability to focus to assist their citizens in times of unfavorable situations, and the fact that the people are already victims of repeatedly violent conflicts, the population has left with no choice but to turn to irregular migration as a way to cope with the situation. Hence, the continuous practice of irregular migration in the region in response to the political instability and armed conflicts has almost developed into a culture.

As highlighted in the preceding analysis, the three factors (economic, environmental, and socio-cultural and network) can hardly be the root cause of irregular migration in the HoA region. They are rather by-product of the political instability and armed conflicts. For this reason, the hypothesis that poverty is the root cause of irregular migration in the region which several scholars might like to argue is unequivocally refuted.

### **Political instability and armed conflicts**

Political instability and armed conflicts as a factor is of crucial importance to the analysis of this study; therefore it is described in more detail than it has been done for the previous factors mentioned so far. The HoA has experienced active conflict for decades. Whereas conflicts in other parts of Africa cool down after the end of the cold-war, in the HoA it persisted (Soliman *et al.*, 2012). The region still hosts the deadliest cluster of inter-state conflicts such as the conflict between Ethiopia and Eritrea, Ethiopia and Somalia, and Eritrea and Djibouti. Furthermore, Somalia and Ethiopia also have intra-state conflicts. Besides, most of the countries in the region host their neighbors’ armed resistance groups, or at least are accused of doing so (Kibreab, 2009).

The two-decades plus long Somali conflict has forced over 1 million Somalis seeking refuge (Life and Peace Institute, 2015). The conflict between Ethiopia and Eritrea has forced thousands of young people of both countries to leave their home. Thus, Eritrea and Somalia have made the headlines as the second and third largest contributors of irregular migrants to Europe.



It is natural to ask, why political instability and armed conflicts in the region is prevalent. Before addressing this question, it is important to shed light on what the HoA region constitutes. The HoA is a region of strategic importance. Its geostrategic location - along the Bab-el-Mandeb strait that connects the Gulf of Aden with the Red Sea - has made it as one of the most super powers contested regions in the world. This has become possible with the opening of the Suez Canal in 1869, which has transformed the Red Sea from being a mere strip of water into a vital artery in the international maritime trade. All sea-bound trade between Europe and Eurasia must transit through its narrow passage.

In a broader context, one can say that the Bab-el-Mandeb strait that locates in HoA region is one of two maritime chokepoints (the other being the Suez Canal) that link Europe with South, Southeast, and East Asia. This makes control over the region very significant for any power, and it's not for nothing that most great powers divided their navies to the region over the past three decades seemingly to combat piracy (Korybko, 2016). Particularly since the end of the cold war, the super powers intervention, in the name of terrorism, human rights, and piracy coupled with the inauspicious leadership in the HoA countries, turned the region into the most volatile and conflict-torn place in the world (Farah and Otondi 2015; (Life and Peace Institute, 2015). As such, irregular migration within and beyond the region is extensive, making the region one of the most irregular migration producing regions in the world (Farah and Otondi, 2015).

### ***Horn of Africa and external powers***

The cause of armed conflicts in the HoA region is motivated by the geo-political interest of external powers but also internally driven (Research and Evidence Facility (REF), 2017). The end of the bipolar world order that shaped international relations over the past fifty years has left the United States as the sole remaining superpower. As such, the United States has forced to make dramatic policy changes that affect all parts of the globe. It began to define its foreign policy through the lens of acquiring and maintaining military and economic supremacy in the world (Kagan, 2008). Of particular concern to American leaders is that, to prevent the re-emergence of any rival power that could dominate any region that is critical to the U.S. interest (Cheney, 1993). The rhetoric of piracy and the so-called terrorism have been at the forefront of the U.S. foreign policy to pursue its global interests, citing it in plans to intervene in several countries. The decision to send up to 30,000 marines, infantrymen, and other troops to Somalia is a case in point.

After the end of the Cold War, the HoA region was accompanied with a major geopolitical reconfiguration. The politics and security of the region

are increasingly and visibly about controlling the Red Sea waterway. Consequently, its internal dynamics are often affected by broader super powers and supra-regional dynamics such as the Western countries and Gulf States' increasingly active engagement in the politics of the region (Council of the European Union, 2015). It must be noted that, without the connivance of local players the external interferences could not have materialized.

The U.S. pursued a strategy proactive engagement in the HoA, as was the case elsewhere in the third world, to impose its leadership and shape the global environment in a way to serve its interest. The U.S. interest in the HoA region could be summarized into three main points. First, secure (control) the Red Sea/Suez Canal sea route communication, which is vital for the East-West trade; at the same time prevent the influence of major powers in the region, especially China. Second, ensure Israel's ability to maintain adequate maritime access to the Red Sea and thereby to the world trade. Finally, secure a springboard for rapid military intervention in the Gulf region, had it is forced to vacate its bases in the region.

According to U.S. policy-makers, the objectives stated above could be realized as long as the following targets are met. First, a strong Ethiopia that could posture its power in the region while remaining a client to the U.S. Second, a weak Eritrea, which possibly be incorporated under some arrangement partially or fully into Ethiopia. Finally, a divided and weak Somalia that serves as an excuse to possess a strong military presence in the region, preferably in Djibouti.

The US has long wanted to control and militarize the Red Sea waterway for its premeditated geopolitical ends. To accomplish this objective, it had to create a circumstance where the rest of the world would accept the continuous presence of its fleet operating in this strategic international water. Thus, in 1992 it came with an agenda what it called "Operation Restore Hope", a humanitarian intervention in Somalia. In 1992, the Security Council unanimously adopted resolution 794, stating that the situation in Somalia (inter-clan fighting, the absence of a stable government, and widespread famine) constitutes a threat to international peace and security (UN Security Council, 1992).

Acting under Chapter 7, the UN Security Council authorized the UN Operation in Somalia II (UNOSOM II) under the United States' central command that deployed 30,000 military troops (Lusignan, 2005) on the pretext of establishing a secure environment for humanitarian relief activities (*Ibid*). Contrary to what has promised, the military intervention

worsened the situation in Somalia, creating instability in the country that transcends the hinterland. The impact has been grave in the region, especially off the coast of Somalia and the Indian Ocean, thereby causing serious international concerns on piracy. Again, in 2006 the US contracted Ethiopia to invade Somalia on the disguise of war against terrorism. The consequences of the two military intervention in Somalia has not only created a piracy problem but has also exacerbated the humanitarian crisis in the country causing an extensive irregular migration (Kibreab, 2009).

It is worth noting that, the issue of piracy in Somalia is not a problem by itself rather it is a consequence of the consecutive direct and indirect US military intervention in the country. Successive external military intervention left Somalia without a strong central government that can protect the sovereignty of its coastal waters. Thus, the absence of Somali Navy and Police coastguard has become a blessing in disguise for many western fishing companies to engage in illegal fishing in the Somalia waters (Steenhard, 2012). The most irresponsible and dangerous activity has been the dumping of nuclear and toxic wastes; including nuclear material, in the Somalia waters by several fictitious Western firms (*Ibid*).

The illegal foreign fishing trawlers have depleted the stock of fish in the Somalia territorial waters and polluted it by dumping nuclear and toxic wastes. As such, there have been reports (UNICEF and UNEP reports) of serious unusual skin and respiratory infections, abdominal hemorrhages and others diseases on the people of Somalia (Steenhard, 2012). In response to the hideous and irresponsible activities of the western firms, Somali fishermen who have formed themselves into bands of local coast guards started to target ships that illegally enter into the Somalia water. Though the target was for the illegal ships, there were several incidents whereby legal ships were attacked indiscriminately, creating a threat to the busiest shipping lines in the world.

For the Western countries and their media outlets, this is an act of piracy, but for the Somalis this is an act of protecting and defending their sea and sovereignty. In fact the fishermen preferred to be called as '*badaadinta badah*' meaning saviors of the sea or coastguard (Steenhard, 2012). In this backdrop, it is suffice to say that the root cause of the maritime piracy in the Somalia waters is the fictitious Western firms illegal fishing and waste dumping in the Somalia waters, though such narrative has never appeared in the international media.

With the excuse of countering Somali pirates, the U.S. joined its French partners in Djibouti by moving into Camp Lemonnier in 2001 (France never

left the country after independence), thus giving it an on-land presence from which to project naval power if it chose to do so. The United Kingdom also joined the club to support its Western allies. Russia, China and India (we do not know who comes next) are there too, but for the purpose of watching the West and showing that they will not allow NATO to totally control this strategic maritime.

To the reasons stated above, the HoA is tormented by the inter-state and intra-state war and conflicts, frequently orchestrated by the hidden or naked external intervention of the Western powers. Ethiopia and Eritrea went three times into a border war in 1998, and have been caught in a deadlock for more than 15 years. Ethiopia's invasion of Somalia in 2006, as a pretext of war against terrorism, has exacerbated the already existing enmity of the two countries, which left Somalia with grave security and humanitarian crisis (Reitano, 2016). Eritrea - Djibouti border conflict deadlock has also jeopardized any kind of cooperation between the two countries.

It is understandable that external intervention has negatively influenced the peace, stability, and the livelihood of the population in the region. Nonetheless, there are still some researchers who consider the mere symptoms rather than the chronic problem as the root cause of irregular migration in the region. For instance, United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR, 2009), Danish Immigration Service (2014), and (Martini, 2015) argue that indefinite military conscription as the main cause of irregular migration in Eritrea. Similarly, (Campbell, 2009) and (Kibreab, 2009) suggested that irregular migration from the region (especially in Ethiopia, Eritrea and Djibouti) is directly linked to the autocratic politics of the governments that deprive the citizens' political and socio-economic rights. Likewise, (Weiss and Reyes, 2009) asserts that, in Somalia, civil war and the absence of a functioning state prompted irregular migration.

Contrary to these arguments, however, in the case of Eritrea and Ethiopia, the major cause of irregular migration is the border war that exists between the two countries. The two countries went into border conflict from 1998 to 2000. Though the border conflict was came to an end by the Algiers Agreement in 2000, and the Eritrea-Ethiopia Boundary Commission (EEBC) rendered its ruling and declared Badme – the flash point – Eritrean sovereign territory, Ethiopia refused to abide by the agreement and continues to occupy sovereign Eritrean territory. Ethiopia's defiance to comply with the ruling, which is final and binding by nature, is strongly encouraged by the U.S administration. As a guarantor of the agreement, the position taken by the U.S. is contrary to its responsibility. As a result, the situation has held the two



countries into a war footing, forcing many young people to take irregular migration.

Unlike the economic factor, as is claimed by many authors, currently political instability and armed conflicts is one of the main factors globally forcing many people to flee their home country in an irregular pattern. The situation in Syria, Afghanistan, and Iraq strongly support this argument. For instance, Syria is plagued with violence and conflicts for several years through a bloody civil war exacerbated by external intervention, mainly the US and Russia. According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR cited in Koser 2015), so far the political instability and armed conflicts in Syria has forced hundreds of thousands of Syrians to leave their home country, making the country with the highest number of irregular migrants in the world.

As shown in figure 1.4, political instability and armed conflicts directly affects all the other factors. If political instability and armed conflicts is rampant in a country, the whole livelihood of the society is unstable. Political instability and armed conflicts obstructs the economic and social life of a society. Also it destroys the environment on which the people depend for their daily life. In general, unstable economic livelihood leads a society into poverty, which then forces people to take irregular migration as a remedy. In other cases it might seem that economic hardship leads to political instability and armed conflicts, but in the case of HoA it is the political instability and armed conflicts that led to economic hardship, then to irregular migration.

Though, the Western countries, through their perverse military and political intervention, are often the culprit for irregular migration, they are the least affected by it. In most cases, the countries who are most affected by irregular migration are those who have nothing to do in the making of it. For instance, Uganda, Sudan, Ethiopia, Morocco, and Libya have much larger irregular migrants than the Western countries combined. The same is true in the case of Syrian refugees, where Jordan, Lebanon, and Turkey are the countries which are most affected. In the contrary, the Western countries, especially the U.S. has very little irregular migrants if any. It is an irony to see that, those who instigate the cause for the irregular migration are least affected by it, while those who have nothing to do with it are paying the price.

Paradoxically, often the Western countries picture the irregular migrants of the HoA as victims of circumstances as if these circumstances are not part of the problems that they have created in the region, and as if the victims are not their responsibility. The point is that, irregular migration in the HoA is the consequence of the Western countries' misguided policy and

intervention in the region, which has plagued the region with political instability and armed conflicts. And it is sufficed to say that, all the economic, environmental, and social challenges of the region are very much connected - either directly or indirectly - to the factor of political instability and armed conflicts.

## CONCLUSION AND POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

This paper examines the root cause of irregular migration in the HoA region. The results demonstrate irregular migrants from the region flee home for reasons of safety, freedom and survival. The findings stress the incessant political instability and armed conflicts in the region have seriously disturbed the safety and livelihood of the society. For this reason, the people of the region have been using irregular migration as the only way to ensure their survival.

The results also challenge the common understanding that the root cause of irregular migration in the region is poverty. The concept of the root cause of irregular migration in the context of HoA is deliberately overlooked. Dominant media and political discourse tend to identify extreme poverty as the root cause. However, such representation is fundamentally at odds with empirical evidence that shows the root cause is political instability and armed conflicts. As shown in figure 1.4, political instability and armed conflicts, directly or indirectly, affects all the other factors.

The phenomenon of irregular migration in the HoA has evidently become a defining political and socio-economic reality demanding a genuine and sustained response. For the HoA, an already war-torn zone, irregular migration and its humanitarian and security implications has put the region in a precarious situation. Every year thousands of young and educated people, who constitute the main workforce, flee the region in search of safety and better life. A large number of them have been victimized by the merciless human traffickers and smugglers. Yet many of them die in the high seas of Mediterranean and Libyan Desert while they are trying to cross to Europe.

For the past quarter century, inter and intra-state wars and conflicts, orchestrated by the Western powers have been characteristic within the countries of the region. Currently the region retains a significant risk of inter-state conflict such as the conflict between Ethiopia and Eritrea, Ethiopia and Somalia, and Eritrea and Djibouti. Furthermore, Somalia and Ethiopia also have intra-state conflicts. The region has plagued by a number of active conflicts and hostilities, making the region one of the most irregular migrants producing in the world.

External interventions have not only prevented the people of the region from solving their internal problems by themselves, but they have been the major cause of the problems. It is worth noting that, part of the misery that has been vested upon the region has not only been created by the external powers but also by their hiring's and acolytes who work as presidents and higher government officials.

A politically motivated approach of conflict resolutions rather than a process that upholds the rule of law has proven to be an utter failure in the region. The unconditional implementation of the final and binding decisions of the Eritrea-Ethiopia boundary decisions, the political reconciliation and reconstruction of the state of Somalia, peaceful resolution of the Eritrea-Djibouti border conflict, and the immediate and unconditional lift of the unjust sanctions against Eritrea and Somalia are among the outstanding political issues that should have deserved priority.

Against this backdrop, poverty alleviation programs has been prescribed by policy makers as the right approach for tackling the root cause of irregular migration in the region. The Khartoum Process launched between the European Union and the HoA Countries is one of the initiatives which has used this approach and utterly failed to come up with any effective and comprehensive solution. Development aid rather than addressing the root cause, which is political instability and armed conflicts, appear to capitalize the political and financial leverage of the initiative, which is not less than treating the symptom of a chronic problem.

The Khartoum Process's approach is also very dangerous in its nature. The suggestion that it has, that only sustainable development will eradicate the root cause of irregular migration, attempts to introduce the notion that those who arrive at Europe shores are only trying to escape poverty, in denial of the fact that they are victims of political instability and armed conflicts. Initiatives like the Khartoum Process will not stop the flow of irregular migration in the HoA, because they do not address the conditions which create them.

For the Western countries, if they really think that they are flooded with the Horn of African irregular migrants and want to reduce it; one simple solution is to stop participating in making of it. That for sure will stop the flow of irregular migrants to their shores. The same is true with the irregular migration and refugees from Syria, Afghanistan, Yemen, and Iraq. The misguided policy and incessant intervention of the Western countries, especially the U.S. is making the world more unstable, causing tremendous suffering and displacement on the human life.

Armed conflicts and political instability in the HoA region, not only has displaced the people but it has also distracted the countries' democratic nation-building process for a long time. As such, the political will of governments of the region has fallen short behind the aspiration of their peoples, leaving the fundamental social, economic, civil and political rights of their citizens unfulfilled. Thus, a representative government which supports the rule of law also holds a pivotal role in efforts to mitigate irregular migration in the region.

When these concerns are not addressed in time, the results are the infamous and sometimes unending armed conflicts that have dwarfed the region's socio-economic development for decades. And as long as political instability and armed conflicts in the region are not addressed thoroughly, the flow of irregular migrants, the risk journey in the hope of ensuring survival, and the danger of being trafficked will definitely continue.

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