

Options for Pakistan in the Horn of Africa

Policy Brief

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Source: Maps of World (<https://www.mapsofworld.com/answers/geography/region-called-horn-africa/#>)

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Introduction

The strategically located Horn of Africa comprises Djibouti, Eritrea, Ethiopia and Somalia. In some discussions, Kenya is also considered as an extended part of the region. The area holds a great potential for development but is mired in conflict.¹ In a desperate bid to create regional stability, Eritrea, Ethiopia and Somalia have created a regional bloc but neighbors are worried that this could destabilize East Africa.²

The peninsular horn juts out as the easternmost projection of the African continent. It forms the southern base of the Gulf of Aden. Djibouti sits on the mouth of the strategic Bab el-Mandeb Strait. This 20km wide entrance forms the mouth of the Red Sea. The Red Sea, like the Persian Gulf, forms one of the most important oil lanes in the world. The Bab is the equivalent of the Strait of Hormuz that guards the entrance to the Persian Gulf. The Hormuz is approximately 40km at its narrowest.

The Horn of Africa (Djibouti, Eritrea, Ethiopia and Somalia) covers approximately 2 million square kilometers (770,000 square miles) of landmass and is inhabited by roughly 115 million people (Ethiopia: 96.6 million, Somalia: 15.4 million, Eritrea: 6.4 million, and Djibouti: 0.81 million).

Unlike other parts of Africa, where people subscribe to primitive beliefs and animism, this area has a strong imprint of Abrahamic religions. There is a sprinkling of Jews in Ethiopia as Ethiopians for the most part are Christians. Muslims form the majority in Somalia, Djibouti and Eritrea.³ Ethiopia was the oldest Christian monarchy in the world⁴ until the latter was abolished in the second half of the 20th century.⁵

The earliest Muslims fled to escape persecution and sought refuge in the court of the Ethiopian king. The head of the Muslim delegation, Jaffar Tayyar, recited the verses of Surah Maryam before the monarch. The verses resonated with the king and he granted refuge to the Muslims.⁶

The Horn of Africa has a long history of external influences. Due to its proximity to the Arabian Peninsula, it was exposed to the message of Islam in the 7th century and a number of Arab sultans ruled Somalia and Djibouti until the Europeans replaced them.⁷ The most prominent among the latter were the Italians, British and French.⁸

Pakistan's interest in the region

Pakistan has a strong religious affinity with Somalia and Djibouti because almost all the people in these countries follow the Shafa'i school of thought. A small Pakistani diaspora had lived in this part of the world for a considerable time. These were small-time traders of Gujarati descent running profitable businesses in their adopted African homeland.⁹ Some of these families and their Somali spouses still live in a neighborhood of Karachi and follow a unique culture of their own. Before the civil war they had fixed seats in the Somali parliament.

Pakistan supported the Somalis in their struggle for independence and an official delegation participated in the Independence Day celebrations in Mogadishu on July 1, 1960.¹⁰ After World War II, Italy relinquished control and Somalia was given to the UN trusteeship. It remained under Italian administration for 10 more years until 1960 as part of UN trust territory. Upon independence, Somalia was merged with the residual Somali territory under the British protectorate to form the Somali Republic. Four years

¹ Redie Bereketeab, ed., *The Horn of Africa: Intra-State and Inter-State Conflicts and Security* (Pluto Press, 2013), xiii-xiv.

² Ingo Henneberg and Sören Stapel, "Cooperation and Conflict at the Horn of Africa: A New Regional Bloc between Ethiopia, Eritrea, and Somalia and Its Consequences for Eastern Africa," *Africa Spectrum* (August 18, 2020); "Why a proposed Horn of Africa bloc could destabilize the larger region," *The Conversation*, September 09, 2020, accessed January 14, 2021.

³ Nehemia Levtzion and Randall Pouwels, *The History of Islam in Africa* (Ohio University Press, 2000), 228.

⁴ Andrew Clark, "Ethiopia's Prince Selassie. The exiled prince from the world's oldest monarchy," *Financial Review*, June 22, 2017.

⁵ Richard Pankhurst, *The Ethiopian Royal Chronicles* (London: Oxford University Press, 1967), 139-43.

⁶ Ja'far Subhani, "Chapter 17: The First Migration," Al-Islam.org, accessed January 14, 2021.

⁷ Dr. Elnour Hamad, Professor Abdulla al-Fiki al-Bashir, and Dr. Abdulwahab al-Qassab, eds., *The Arabs and the Horn of Africa: The Dialectic between Proximity and Belonging* (ARCP, November 18, 2013).

⁸ Yishak Yared, "Colonialism in the Horn," hornofafrica.de, accessed January 14, 2021.

⁹ "Minister for Commerce and Industry, Mr. Osman Mohammad Adde has assured the Pakistani community in Somalia that it shall not be prevented from doing retail business," *Ummah: Voice of the Community, Volume 1*. (Central Institute of Islamic Research, 1964).

¹⁰ Tughral Yamin, *UN Peacekeeping Operations in Somalia 1992-1995: A Pakistani Perspective* (Karachi: Paramount Books), 46.

later, Somalia fought with Ethiopia over the Ogaden region. The country was run by a civilian government for the first few years until the 1969 military coup of General Mohamed Siad Barre. Barre held power for more than two decades. He attempted to regain the territories that the Somalis had lost over the years, which included portions of Djibouti, Ethiopia and Kenya, by invading the Ogaden region in 1977. Pakistan sent a military team to train the Somali army.¹¹ Since the area was familiar, the government of Pakistan had no qualms in being the first country to send troops to protect the UN humanitarian mission in Somalia in the early 1990s.¹² This also provided Pakistan an opportunity to break out of international isolation because of the end of the Cold War.¹³

In the 19th century, the British coaling stopped in Djibouti as a small military outpost protected its merchant vessels. Now all major countries of the world are scrambling to establish military posts in this small but important country. Both the US and China have bases in Djibouti. Camp Lemonnier is the US Naval Expeditionary Base, situated next to Djibouti-Ambouli International Airport in Djibouti City. It is home to the Combined Joint Task Force – Horn of Africa (CJTF-HOA) of the US Africa Command (USAFRICOM). The American drones and Special Forces operating in Somalia are also based here.¹⁴ The People's Liberation Army Navy (PLAN) has established its country's first overseas military base in

Djibouti.¹⁵ The Indians are also planning to set up a naval base in Djibouti in collaboration with the Japanese.¹⁶ The Saudis want a base in Djibouti to support their war effort in Yemen and¹⁷ a deal to that effect has been finalized with the Government of Djibouti.¹⁸ Pakistan's military presence in the area is limited to a few military observers deployed in Somalia. The only Pakistani diplomatic mission is located in Ethiopia, but given the importance of Djibouti, the Government of Pakistan is also making headways to set up an embassy there.¹⁹

Future Scope: The Way Forward & Recommendations

The Horn of Africa remains a restive region. Ethiopia has its problems, the government in Eritrea is busy quelling the revolt in the restive Tigray region,²⁰ and Somalia is wrecked by Al Shabab insurgency.²¹ However, the geopolitical and strategic importance of the region cannot be ignored: Not only does the Horn dominate the Red Sea and Indian Ocean, it also has tremendous natural resources.²² Somalia has significant offshore oil reserves,²³ and is favorite hunting ground for foreign fishing trawlers.²⁴ The Chinese are involved in building the urban areas and using their knowledge in developing cities. Similarly, in Ethiopia, the capital city Addis Ababa mirrors the Chinese model of urban development.²⁵

¹¹ *ibid*, 65.

¹² *ibid*, 66-67.

¹³ *ibid*, 12.

¹⁴ "Camp Lemonnier," *Naval Technology*, January 23, 2011, <https://www.naval-technology.com/projects/camplemonnier/>

¹⁵ Douglas Huneke, "The Ghost of Zheng He: China's Naval Base in Djibouti," *Berkley Political Review*, April 19, 2017, accessed January 15, 2021, <https://bpr.berkeley.edu/2017/04/19/the-ghost-of-zheng-he-chinas-naval-base-in-djibouti/>.

¹⁶ "India Set to Operate Massive Military (Naval) Base in Djibouti with Japan," *The EurAsian Times*, October 17, 2018, accessed January 15, 2021.

¹⁷ Habib Toumi, "Saudi Arabia 'to open military base in Djibouti'," *Gulf News*, March 8, 2016, accessed January 15, 2021.

¹⁸ John Aglionby and Simeon Kerr, "Djibouti finalising deal for Saudi Arabian military base," *Financial Times*, January 17, 2017, accessed January 15, 2021.

¹⁹ "Pakistan will open Embassy in Djibouti: Chairman Senate," *Dawn*, December 30, 2020, accessed January 12, 2021.

²⁰ Gabriel Negatu and Cameron Hudson, "War in the Tigray region of Ethiopia," *The Frontier Post*, November 12, 2020, accessed January 15, 2021.

²¹ "Al Shabab's Insurgency and Somalian Imbroglio in the Horn of Africa," *Eurasia Review*, January 15, 2021, accessed January 15, 2021.

²² "Report: Horn of Africa Borderland Communities can Achieve Economic Prosperity," The World Bank, May 19, 2020, accessed January 15, 2021.

²³ Heidi Vella, "Sizing up Somalia: a new offshore oil frontier in the making," *Offshore Technology*, July 6, 2020.

²⁴ Sarah M. Glaser, Paige M. Roberts and Kaija J. Hurlburt, "Foreign Illegal, Unreported, and Unregulated Fishing in Somali Waters Perpetuates Conflict," *Frontiers in Marine Science*, December 6, 2019, <https://www.frontiersin.org/articles/10.3389/fmars.2019.00704/full>

²⁵ Tom Goodfellow and Zhengi Huang, "Contingent infrastructure and the dilution of 'Chineseness': Reframing roads and rail in Kampala and Addis Ababa," *Environment Planning Journal*, November 19, 2020, accessed January 15, 2021.





Source: CNN Style (<https://edition.cnn.com/style/article/addis-ababa-china-construction-style/index.html>)

China also built the first metro system in Sub-Saharan Africa in Addis Ababa. Its two lines cut through the heart of the city, and carry at least 30,000 passengers an hour, who pay 6 birr (\$0.30) a ride.²⁶ The project is similar to the Orange Line being constructed by the Chinese as a mass transit in Lahore.

The following roadmap is recommended for increasing the scope of relationship with the countries in the Horn of Africa:

- Pakistan can enhance its bilateral relations as well as build its goodwill with African states by sending humanitarian missions to African countries more frequently. Recently, Pakistan sent Pakistan Navy Ship (PNS) *Nasr* to Djibouti, Niger and Sudan, which have been affected by natural disasters.²⁷
- The approval for opening of an embassy in Djibouti is a welcome step that will augment bilateral relations based on our religion, shared values, cultures and commonalities of interests. Focused efforts need to be initiated in this regard.
- Once the embassy is established, Pakistan may consider Pakistan Navy's joint operations and

collaboration with the Chinese People's Liberation Army Navy (PLAN) support base in Djibouti to counter piracy and terrorism.²⁸

- Pakistan may consider opening its embassy in Somalia to revive our historical, religious and cultural ties.
- Pakistan can help Somalia and Eritrea by participating in international efforts meant for rebuilding, reconstruction and rehabilitation of these conflict-ravaged countries, upon the return of normalcy, through collaboration with Chinese companies.
- Not many entrepreneurs would consider venturing into conflict zones. But Djibouti and Ethiopia are certainly areas that need to be explored for trade, construction and development of infrastructure for which Frontier Works Organization and National Logistics Cell can look into possibilities of cooperation.
- The retired armed forces officers, who have served in Africa with UN peacekeeping missions, may explore the possibility of joint ventures in establishing security companies in Djibouti, Somalia, Ethiopia and Eritrea.

²⁶ "How Addis Ababa came to look like a Chinese city," *Post-Courier*, September 3, 2018.

²⁷ "PN ship sails off to Africa on humanitarian mission," *Dawn*, January 18, 2021, www.dawn.com/news/1602124.

- Pakistan National Shipping Corporation (PNSC) has a fleet of 11 ships with a total carrying capacity of over 831,000 tons of all types of cargoes on several geographical routes covering almost the whole world. The average cost of importing a container in Africa is about \$2,492 compared with \$935 in East Asia and the Pacific and \$1,488 in Latin America and the Caribbean (Brenton and Isik, 2012). PNSC needs to compete with international shipping companies by offering the most economical freights for African ports including Djibouti.
- Another big opportunity in the promotion of trade, economic cooperation and investment in Djibouti, Somalia and Eritrea, having access to ports, is the construction of big warehouses, plants for cement, sugar and textiles, and steel mills and tanneries for possible supplies to land-locked states adjacent to the Horn of Africa countries.
- Africa offers a big market for pharmaceuticals. The private sector dealing with pharmaceuticals should spearhead a well-organized marketing campaign by taking Pakistan's embassies/high commissions on board for the export of pharmaceuticals to the Horn of Africa and adjacent land-locked countries.
- Pakistan has made significant achievements in the fields of science and technology, information technology, telecommunications, agriculture, agro-based industries, biotechnology and alternative energy sources. Pakistan should share its experiences in these areas with Djibouti, Somalia, Ethiopia and Eritrea.
- Pakistani private commercial banks such as Habib African Bank Ltd, United Bank Ltd, Habib Bank Ltd, Bank AL Habib Ltd, Muslim Commercial Bank Group, and Habib Bank Ltd are operating successfully in East and Southern Africa. The government must encourage more Pakistani private sector commercial banks to open branches in African countries that face open seas and connect with land-locked countries.
- Pakistan has an edge in providing educational facilities, training and capacity building courses, seats and scholarships in professional institutions, defense training institutions, such as in the Foreign Service Academy under Pakistan Technical Assistance Program (PTAP) and Special Technical Assistance Program (STAP). There is an imperative need to increase these facilities, especially the number of seats, scholarships, gratis courses, and frequent interactions for African nationals.
- The African diplomats, defense forces officers, professionals, and students, who acquired education, training, and capacity building in Pakistan, can be the real assets for Pakistan. They have a soft corner for Pakistan and hence, can nurture the country's soft image. Some of them have reached the pinnacle of their careers and are holding key positions in their countries. Pakistan should engage these Africans and seek their support for Pakistan's position on important issues. For this, an active database must be maintained of African nationals and officials who have been trained by Pakistani ministries, departments and training institutions, for reviving relations and association with them through updated contact information. It is further recommended that databases of different training institutions, ministries and departments should be integrated as one main database available to all entities concerned and Pakistan's missions abroad for contacts and interaction.
- For education and scholarly exchanges, some pragmatic and doable recommendations are that courses on Africa should be offered in Pakistani universities and training institutes along with selected African languages, such as at NUML. There should be optimal utilization of sufficient funds available with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MoFA) and Economic Affairs Division (EAD) under Special Technical Assistance Program for academic research and scholastic improvement. Moreover, regular interactions and networking between HEC, Africa area studies centers, Africa Division at MoFA and EAD must take place. There can be exchange of African and Pakistani students under agreements and linkage programs between African and Pakistani universities and purchase of books on Africa as well as the subscription of African journals published around the world by official libraries of Pakistan. Furthermore, Pakistan's research institutes need to establish dedicated African studies centers for research in areas of mutual interest for forging closer institutional engagement with Africa.
- Pakistan's Africa policy needs to be reviewed, revised and revamped in terms of prospects for the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA), which has become a buzzword in modern lexicon for relations with the African countries by setting short-term, medium-term and long-term goals.

This will lead to a holistic strategic policy based on robust political, diplomatic and economic engagement, vibrant defense cooperation, and

people-to-people contacts by involving the public and private sectors, armed forces' institutions, and the Pakistani diaspora in Africa.

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