

Enhancing Regional Security Cooperation to Prevent Terrorism and Arms Smuggling in the Horn of Africa

General Assembly 1

Issue Description:

The Horn of Africa is a geopolitically vital yet persistently unstable region, comprising states such as Somalia, Ethiopia, Eritrea, Djibouti, Kenya, and Sudan. Its proximity to major global trade routes, including the Red Sea and the Gulf of Aden, makes regional security not only a local concern but an international priority. Chronic political instability, weak governance structures, protracted armed conflicts, and porous land and maritime borders have enabled terrorist organizations and transnational arms smuggling networks to flourish.

Terrorist groups, most prominently **Al-Shabaab**, exploit these structural vulnerabilities to operate across borders, conduct attacks, and recruit fighters. Arms smuggling plays a central role in sustaining such groups, with small arms and light weapons flowing into the region from conflict zones in the Middle East and North Africa, particularly Yemen and Libya. Illicit weapons are trafficked through unregulated ports, remote border crossings, and informal trade routes, reinforcing cycles of violence and undermining state authority.

While individual states have implemented counterterrorism and border security measures, these efforts are often fragmented and reactive. The transnational nature of terrorism and arms trafficking has exposed the limitations of unilateral approaches, highlighting the need for stronger regional coordination, shared intelligence, and collective enforcement mechanisms to effectively address these interconnected threats.

Current Stance:

Regional and international actors increasingly recognize that terrorism and arms smuggling in the Horn of Africa require cooperative security responses. The **African Union (AU)** has prioritized counterterrorism and regional stabilization through initiatives such as the African Union Transition Mission in Somalia (ATMIS), aimed at weakening Al-Shabaab and transferring security responsibilities to Somali institutions. The **Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD)** has similarly promoted regional dialogue on security coordination, intelligence-sharing, and border management.

At the global level, the **United Nations Security Council** has imposed arms embargoes, sanctions, and monitoring mechanisms targeting terrorist groups and illicit arms flows, particularly in Somalia. UN agencies support member states through capacity-building programs, maritime security assistance, and legal frameworks to combat trafficking. However, enforcement challenges persist due to limited resources, political tensions among regional states, and uneven institutional capacity.

Despite existing cooperation frameworks, coordination remains inconsistent. Information-sharing is often limited, joint operations are irregular, and mutual distrust continues to constrain deeper integration. As a result, current strategies are widely viewed as insufficient to disrupt entrenched terrorist and smuggling networks in the region.

Most affected states/areas

Somalia remains the most severely affected state, serving as the primary operational base for Al-Shabaab and a major hub for arms trafficking. **Kenya** faces persistent cross-border terrorist attacks and arms inflows, particularly in its northeastern regions and coastal areas. **Ethiopia** and **Sudan**, both experiencing internal conflicts, are increasingly vulnerable to weapons proliferation and militant spillover across their borders.

Maritime zones in the **Gulf of Aden** and the **Red Sea** are critical hotspots due to limited surveillance and high volumes of commercial shipping. Remote border regions between Somalia, Ethiopia, Kenya, and South Sudan are also heavily affected, as weak border control allows the movement of fighters, weapons, and illicit goods. Urban centers, refugee camps, and trade corridors are frequently targeted for recruitment, logistics, and financing by terrorist networks.

Involved actors

Key regional actors include national governments and security forces of Horn of Africa states, responsible for counterterrorism operations, border control, and law enforcement. Regional organizations such as the **African Union (AU)** and **IGAD** play coordinating roles by facilitating peace operations, security frameworks, and policy dialogue.

International actors include the **United Nations**, particularly the UN Security Council, the UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), and the UN Development Programme (UNDP), which support sanctions enforcement, capacity-building, and legal reform. External partners, including the **European Union** and individual donor states, provide financial assistance, training, and technical support. Civil society organizations and local communities also contribute through counter-radicalization initiatives, early warning mechanisms, and efforts to strengthen social resilience.

Sources:

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