

Beyond Piracy on the East African Coast: Interrogating Illicit Trafficking

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Abstract

This paper examines piracy on the East African coast which has not received enough scholarly attention. Significantly, the challenges facing East African maritime security are many, and without viable measures taken to combat growing sea-borne threats, the region is destined to remain in a state of instability and war. With the use of both primary and secondary sources and looking past East Africa's most publicized maritime problem especially in piracy, this paper discusses illicit trafficking of arms, drugs and people into, out of and throughout East African countries - an equally threatening, but less well-known issue, currently inhibiting the stability of the Horn of Africa. The influx of drugs, ammunitions and other illicit goods arms and funds terrorist organizations and militias not only on Africa's Eastern coast but in the rest of the continent as well. Somalia's al Shabaab, Kenya's al-Shabaab affiliate, al Hijra, and the Congolese rebel group M23, are all examples of groups sustained through illegal maritime smuggling. Weapons enter the region not just through the vulnerable Gulf of Aden and the Somali coastline, but also through considerably more stable and peaceful countries like Kenya and Seychelles. Once ashore, illicit materials easily find their way through the hands of corrupt government officials to destabilizing, violent non-state actors. The paper concludes by showing the strong link between this illicit trafficking in weapons and the high incidence recurring conflicts in the region.

Keywords: piracy, illicit, drugs, region, maritime

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Introduction

The illicit movement of weapons, drugs and humans across international borders is a transnational problem that cannot be dealt with through national policies and approaches alone. That said, however, it is not simply a matter of empowering international bodies to address this scourge, but rather synchronizing sanctioned national approaches – implemented with increased resources – to forge a more visible cohesion among various national counter-trafficking strategies. Rising instability, greater technological sophistication, and continued globalization have complicated the 21st century strategic environment. Coping with illicit trafficking has become increasingly complex in an environment ripe for direct, indirect, and deliberate cooperation between trafficking organizations and violent extremist groups.

The Horn of Africa consists of Sudan, Ethiopia, Kenya, Eritrea, Somalia, Djibouti, Uganda, and South Sudan. Eastern Africa is also a conflict prone region, with the threat of emerging new violent conflicts remaining high. The region is home to one of the most insecure countries in the world, Somalia, and it borders various other conflict-torn states, most notably Sudan and the Democratic Republic of Congo. In addition, Kenya experienced internal conflicts in 2008 with the root causes of the violence remaining unaddressed. Border regions between Ethiopia and Eritrea remain volatile, and in the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) in Uganda are still active. As a result of these wars and conflict, refugee camps are prevalent throughout the region and the spread of fear and violence by militias, gangs and armed pastoralists are of ever present concern. There is a persistent threat that Eastern Africa will spiral into a vicious circle of underdevelopment, which is exacerbated by weak governance, weak rule of law structures and high levels of inequality.

Governments in the region attempt to develop policies aimed at fostering sustainable development, but in some cases, their efforts have fallen short due to a lack of good governance and high levels of corruption, creating a situation that bolsters the position of organized crime throughout the region. Combined, these factors diminish the chances for economic,

political and social development and fail to prevent the conflicts and civil wars in the region. Such an environment allows illicit activities to flourish. Although recent evidence suggests that many African countries have been affected by organized criminal groups, little attention has thus far been given to a systematic analysis of the problem in the Eastern region of the continent. Despite the lack of reliable data, the existence of organized crime and transnational trafficking of illicit goods such as firearms, drugs and counterfeit products are not contested. There is much anecdotal evidence to suggest that with the growth of international trade, its geographical location and long coastline, and instability along with weak law enforcement structures, the region is becoming an important transit location for illicit drugs and trafficked persons heading to the Middle East, Europe and elsewhere.

Furthermore, the long term impact on biodiversity and environmental resources of the region are adversely impacted, as environmental crimes occur largely unhindered. The health and lives of Africans in this region are put at risk due to the widespread presence of counterfeit medicines. Armed conflicts and violent crimes such as piracy are perpetuated due to the presence and trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons (SALW). The question now is not whether these activities undermine the states in Eastern Africa, but rather to what extent these activities pose a threat to the development of these societies, and what would be the consequence if no further action is taken.

The purpose of this paper is to assess the state of weapon drug, human, and animal trafficking as a security challenge in East Africa. The paper is based on both primary and secondary sources.

Because of the low availability of objective and reliable data, this paper cannot give a detailed account of organized criminal activities across Eastern Africa, but it is intended to provide a basis for further discussion and investigation.

East Africa: A Geographical Setting



Map showing East Africa

Source: www.saylordotorg.github.io/

word-regional-geography-people-places-and-globalization/s10-05-east-africa.html

The term “Eastern Africa” refers to the thirteen countries of Eastern Africa namely; Kenya, Tanzania, Uganda, Burundi, Rwanda, Djibouti, Eritrea, Ethiopia and Somalia, as well as the Indian Ocean Islands off the Eastern African coast Seychelles, Comoros, Mauritius and Madagascar (Map of East Africa 2005). The term Eastern Africa is used in the paper when referring to all of the countries outlined above. This is intended as a referral, as the region is culturally very heterogeneous containing pastoral communities roaming in border areas, diverse ethnic groups living in rural regions, as well as fast growing urban areas.

Literature Review

Out of the existing literature concerning the illicit trafficking in the Horn of Africa is that of United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC 2010) which expresses that between 2004 and 2007, not less than two distinct trans-shipment hubs surfaced in West Africa. For instance, one centred on Guinea and Guinea Bissau, and another one centred in the Bight of Benin spanning from Ghana to Nigeria. With the passage of time, traffickers from Colombia transported cocaine by ‘mother ship’ to the West African coast before offloading to smaller vessels. Thus, some of this cocaine moved onward through sea to Portugal and Spain, but out of it, as payment to West Africans for their assistance, some was left. Thereafter, largely by commercial air couriers West Africans trafficked this cocaine on their behalf. The region therefore, remains a priority area in terms of responding to the drug problem. Be that as it may, UNODC limit their focus on West Africa rather than other parts of Africa.

Cockayne & Williams (2009, p.5) positioned that “drug trafficking will lead to an increase in local drug use, a likely rise in HIV, increase financial volatility and opportunistic corruption”. The extent to which drug trafficking penetrated and devastated existing political, economic, and social structures differs in respective West African country including different regions in between each country. The authors highlighted different parts of West Africa risk profiles. In their argument, the challenges for West Africa interaction concerning growing drug-consumption and drug-trafficking problems on the one side, and preexisting political, economic and social vulnerabilities on the other came up. They express how West Africa is characterized by high levels of poverty, low levels of human development, weak governance, high levels of uncontrolled urbanization, unemployment, corruption as well as latent instability. Just like UNODC, the authors did not extend their focus beyond the drug trade in region of West Africa.

Falode (2020) discusses the role of the arms trade in the growth and spread of transnational crime in Africa as a whole. The work did not focus on the Horn of Africa as it has to do with piracy on the East African coast.

Unarguably, as the author posited, the proliferation and ready availability of Small Arms and Light Weapons (SALW) on the continent is contributing in no small measure to political, economic and social insecurity in Africa.

The Nature of the Problem

For decades, life in the Greater Horn of Africa has been characterized by destruction and extraordinary human suffering from long and interrelated civil and inter-state wars. The numbers of SALW that permeate this region further exacerbate the suffering of the civilian population. The proliferation of SALW stems mainly from struggles against colonialism and the Cold War. More recently, civil wars in Uganda, Ethiopia, Somalia, and Sudan have ushered in a boom in the illegal market, and illicit use of SALW. These weapons are now being used in conflicts over natural resources and cattle rustling, and have contributed to soaring violent crime rates in cities such as Nairobi, Mogadishu, and Kigali.

More so, due to porous and expansive borders, weak governments, and ineffectual national security systems, SALW are difficult to control or account for as they move within the region from one conflict to another. They filter far beyond armies and police forces to criminal organizations, private security forces, vigilante squads, and individual citizens. For example, among cross-border pastoralist communities, arms are acquired overtly for security purposes but become facilitating instruments in traditional practices of livestock raiding. The use of such modern weapons has turned such traditional practices into lethal warfare. Also, as pastoral areas get saturated with arms, pastoralists themselves become suppliers of arms to non-pastoral rural areas and urban centers. Inadequate policing makes it easy for these illegal arms to circulate without being detected by law enforcement authorities. As a consequence, armed criminality in urban-rural and border areas is on the increase.

Although the total number of SALW circulating around the globe is not known, estimates in The Small Arms Survey (2001) put the figure at close to 100 million in Africa alone (Griffiths-Fulton, 2002). Given that the Greater Horn of Africa region is one of the most politically volatile in

Africa, it may be safe to assume that the bulk of that number has found its way there. These existing weapons, plus those that are produced through local cottage industries, could fuel conflicts in the region for decades to come. All these factors complicate efforts to alleviate human suffering and bring security to the people in this region.

Asides weapon trafficking, human trafficking is another major challenge. Despite significant efforts by governments, international agencies and NGOs to eliminate trafficking in persons and migrant smuggling, it is still a major concern in East Africa. Due to the large migration flows resulting from formal economic unions and expansive, open borders, the trafficking and smuggling of people are not easily detected. The prospect of better living conditions elsewhere is most frequently the motivating factor for trafficking in persons and migrant smuggling, as many people desire to move closer to areas that present them with increased opportunities. An uneven regulatory framework, poor international cooperation, lack of awareness among both the police and the population has made trafficking difficult. As trafficking networks become more organized and ruthless, so the problem becomes increasingly more prominent.

While Eastern Africa is not particularly threatened as a destination for drug trafficking, most countries in the region are used as transit points to other destinations. Cannabis is the most cultivated, smuggled and consumed drug in the region, followed by heroin and to a much lesser extent, cocaine. Low seizure figures reported by the government are more likely an indicator of weak border controls and insufficient resources to drug control activities, rather than a sign that drug trafficking is not taking place. West Africa has recently received considerable attention as a drug route, and as mechanisms are strengthened there, the Eastern Africa region will come under threat as traffickers seek new routes across the continent.

What are the Causes of Illicit Trafficking in East Africa?

Organized crime and corruption have the power to hold East African countries in a vicious circle of under-development. Illicit trafficking and

the associated problem of organized crime adversely affects the society, threatens human security, hampers development, obstructs investment and corrupts state institutions. Some of the main factors that facilitate these processes are described below:

1. Several Eastern African countries are affected by weak governments and instability. Absence of strong democracies, checks and balances, division of power, adequate legislation, oversight systems, effective and humane law enforcement, and lack of public services are common in most states, hindering development and undermining the trust of the people in the state and its institutions. Combined with the frequent eruption of conflicts, these weak states foster instability. Located either within, or on the borders of the region are three conflict zones: Southern Sudan, the East of the Democratic Republic of Congo and all over Somalia. The conflict in Somalia has encouraged the trafficking of firearms in the region and is a cause of the high influx of refugees, causing long term detrimental consequences in the region. In addition, conflicts have spill-over effects such as the disruption of the local economy, human rights violations and the disappearance of vital state functions – effects that are evident in the neighbouring countries in the region.

Furthermore, a primary concern at the moment is that the conflicts taking place in border regions, such as the one in Ethiopia, is not diminishing significantly, thus posing a long term threat to the stability of the region. Armed conflict weakens the power and legitimacy of state institutions and undermines democracy and development. These conditions facilitate the emergence of organized crime and provide ample opportunities for criminals to exploit the situation in the region, accumulate illegal profits and amplify their influence. In such circumstances, criminal networks are able to take advantage of the absence or weakness of criminal justice systems, and may often collude with local warlords, control the provision of public goods and services, hamper humanitarian assistance, or corrupt and distort the provision of state institutions and services.

2. Low resources and low allocation of resources to the criminal justice systems. Most East African countries depend partially on financial

support and have low tax revenues. In most countries, not enough resources are set aside to build up an adequate police and justice system. To effectively deter future offenders, incapacitate offenders, or rehabilitate past offenders, there must be a certain level of resources available so that the criminal justice system can function properly. Currently, many African countries do not possess adequate resources in this field. This is evidenced by the fact that the region possesses the lowest police force to public ration, as well as fewer judges per capita than in any other region of the world (United Nations Office on Drug and Crime, 2005).

3. Corruption remains a critical problem. In 2002, the African Union (AU) reported that Africa was losing an estimated \$150 billion per year to corruption (*Frinjuah, J.P & Appiah-Nyamekye J*, 2018). Corruption can range from bribery of law enforcement officials to the infiltration of state institutions. For example, there are severe allegations of officials in some countries colluding with organized criminals in cases of drug, arms and human trafficking. Due to the large direct benefits derived from these criminal activities, government officials have no intention to reduce or contain them. Corruption in Eastern Africa undermines business performance and reduces incentives for trade and investment. The economic and political costs imposed by corruption drastically impact Eastern African countries and are difficult to eradicate if corruption becomes a part of the political culture. A large number of citizens is denied access to basic public services and suffers from the non-enforcement of the rule of law, such as ineffective public safety standards or environmental protection policies. Corruption also directly contributes to the lack of public infrastructure, investment, education opportunities, and employment which harms the most vulnerable most acutely, and sustains the cycle of poverty and inequality.

4. Transparency, accountability, voice and awareness are low in most countries. Low levels of education and the prevalence of authoritarian political systems have fostered a low level of awareness among citizens. If people do not know what to expect from a government and state institutions, they cannot react accordingly. The lack of accountability and

transparency provided by individuals within government, parliament, state institutions and regional offices leaves the citizenry in a vulnerable position. Unawareness or the lack of information creates opportunities for individuals to be exploited, succumbing to the tragedy of human trafficking or the risks associated with counterfeit medicine. Even in countries where people are more aware of their rights, and use their voice to demand better services and just treatment from their governments, responsiveness from the government often remains low. Increased knowledge and information throughout the region will strengthen social structures and political involvement, which is crucial for addressing illicit criminal activities.

5. Poverty and inequality: Even after the economic growth of recent years, poverty and inequality remain rampant. Slums and slum populations are on the rise. Inequality, especially in urban areas has increased. In more rural areas, as the smaller towns around Lake Victoria in Kenya, Uganda and Tanzania, inequality is also rising as the population in these towns increase and public services and infrastructure remain insufficient for the growing number of people (United Nations Habitat, 2009). People lack jobs, social security and education and many are unable to escape from the poverty trap on their own. Young people are especially hard hit as they increasingly have access to information about opportunities elsewhere in the world, but remain without a job and a proper education to improve their lives. In addition, weak or biased property rights worsen the problem and revenues of economic growth end up in the pockets of the higher or middle class.

6. Demographic trends: Africa hosts the world's youngest population – 43% of the population of the continent is under the age of 15. According to many conducted studies, crime is most likely committed by people between the ages of 12 and 30. In Eastern African countries, the median age is 16 to 19 years, meaning that a greater part of the society is vulnerable to becoming involved in criminal activity, if not given alternative methods of legitimate employment and livelihood generation (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, 2005).

7. Geographical location: Eastern African countries have become an ideal transit point for illegal goods. Due to the region's long coastline, its remote islands and porous borders presents an easy entry point to the whole continent. Furthermore, being located south of the world's major heroin producing regions, it can be used as a transit point from east to west, or up to the north. In addition, the geographical features of Eastern Africa are exacerbated by high levels of corruption, which further ease the transfer of goods through the region by permitting access via official border crossings.

8. Source area for commodities: Eastern Africa is rich in natural resources such as timber and wildlife products, and also borders regions are abundant in them as well. For example, ivory and timber are smuggled in large quantities from the region to a number of destination countries in both the West and Asia.

9. Destination markets for illegal commodities: East African States have become a market for counterfeit goods, meaning that the region is no longer mainly a departure or transit location for illicit goods. Counterfeit medicines, drugs, firearms and victims of human trafficking are widely available, and their availability will continue to spread if proper and coherent action is not taken to stem the flow of illegal activities and products.

Weapons Trafficking

Data measuring the global illicit arms trade is restricted by the blurred relationship between the legal and illegal sale of small arms, light weapons, and conventional weaponry. Nonetheless, the illegal trade of small arms and light weapons alone is now estimated to represent a \$1 billion-a-year global business. In 2004, the number of small arms projected to be in circulation surpassed 600 million (Stohl, 2004). These weapons have resulted in 60–90% of conflict deaths worldwide (Schroeder & Guy, 2006).

Weapons trafficking have a significant history as an international challenge. As early as 1993, the United Nations noted the growing technical sophistication of conventional weapons, a continued increase

in their destructive capacity, and the subsequent amplification of the “destabilizing effects” of weapons trafficking (United Nations, 1995). Further UN reporting in the 1990s also revealed the relationship between the destabilizing impact of illicit weapons and terrorism, mercenary activity, subversion, drug trafficking, and organized crime.

Most countries in the region are heavily affected by the circulation and misuse of illicit firearms which are often the direct cause of death of many civilians. The flow of firearms is fuelled by persistent instability in the region and recurring outbreaks of conflicts within the Horn of Africa, the Great Lakes Region and to neighbouring countries. Firearms trafficking and organized crime are inextricably linked, yet little information is available about the networks and organizations involved in the East Africa region. Firearms trafficking have also a clear link to terrorism, armed conflicts, and it is closely related to urban violence and gang criminality. The availability of firearms and firearms trafficking are widespread in the region, but the proliferation of firearms is generally believed to have a certain pattern and could be effectively controlled if the channels of supply were identified and tackled.

Reducing the amount of SALW could clearly contribute positively towards ending the vicious circle of violence. Although most states in the region have weak governance structures and are struggling to provide security within their borders, they have attention for the arms problem. In practice, they face multiple challenges in addressing the issues around SALW. Porous borders create a difficult situation to track trade in the commodity and are heaven on earth for illicit activities. The poor condition of state security forces causes the impossibility to provide security country wide and so inhabitants choose to arrange for their own safety and possess weapons. Furthermore, widespread corruption in some countries and institutions cannot rule out governmental involvement or allowing of illicit trade.

Drug Trafficking

Available data on the illegal drug market suggests that the trade is stabilizing – as opposed to noticeably increasing or decreasing. The global illicit drug market is now valued at roughly \$322 billion per year, representing a negligible increase from \$320 billion in 2003 (United Nations 2012). UNODC data suggests, though, that the number of illicit drug users worldwide rose by a much more significant 18% between 2008 and 2013 (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, 2013). But this does not necessarily imply that the market is set to expand in the coming years, as there is a divergence between the trends in users and cultivation and production. Production of cocaine is starting to fall correspondingly. Despite a 5% increase in cocaine production from 1998 to 2008, when isolating 2007 to 2008 there was a 16% decline (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, 2010). Opium cultivation is following a similar path, experiencing a 23% decrease from 2008 to 2010 (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, 2010). This has resulted in potential global heroin production falling 100 megatons from 2007 to 2009 (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, 2010).

Most countries in the Eastern Africa region are used as transit points to other destinations. Cannabis is the most cultivated, smuggled and consumed drug in the region, followed – among the internationally controlled substances – by heroin and to a much lesser extent cocaine. Although seizure figures are low, they indicate more than likely that few resources are being allocated to drug control and weak border controls rather than low levels of illicit drugs being trafficked through the region. An intra-regional drug trafficking pattern has also emerged recently, involving Kenya, Tanzania, Madagascar, Mauritius, Seychelles and the Comoros.

In East Africa, the amount of heroin seized has risen by 500% since 2009 (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, 2013). West African criminal networks are also heavily involved in the sale of cocaine, having earned between \$1.8 and \$2.8 billion in 2009 (Lawson & Phyllis, 2013). Additionally, roughly 27% of cocaine consumed in Europe is now

transited through East Africa alone (Johansen, 2008). The sheer amount of money flowing into East Africa has the potential to destabilize, but when considering its source, this capability is magnified. Despite efforts to reform its image, Guinea-Bissau remains the central hub of narcotics trafficking in East Africa. Cited by the UN Office of Drug Control Policy as perhaps the world's only true narco-state, the poorly governed country is a transit point for cocaine produced in South America for the European market. In addition to weak governance, a lack of transparency permeates its systems and poverty is rampant. These factors foster instability and increase its vulnerability to trafficker exploitation.

Human Trafficking

Data indicates that human trafficking is the fastest growing international criminal industry (<http://www.stopthetraffik.org/the-scale-of-human-traffiking/#>). The International Labour Organization (ILO) estimates that approximately 20 million people worldwide are either forced into labor or are victims of sexual exploitation, a sharp increase from 12.3 million in 2005 (The Economist, 2013). This equates to an industry value of \$32 billion (The United Nations, 2012). The number of children being exploited globally also rose by 27% from 2007 to 2010. Of all victims reported in 2012, 27% were trafficked in the same country where they were exploited and roughly half were trafficked within the same region (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, 2012). In short, human trafficking does not require movement across international borders. Local efforts therefore need to prioritize meeting internationally recognized standards as much, if not more so, than attacking transit lanes where international cooperation is critical. Yet, should local approaches become more robust, more progress will need to be made in the area of convictions. Of the countries studied in the latest UN report on trafficking in persons, 16% failed to convict even a single individual from 2007 to 2010 (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, 2012).

Trafficking in persons is potentially the most complex of these illicit industries given that the challenge is not simply the transportation of

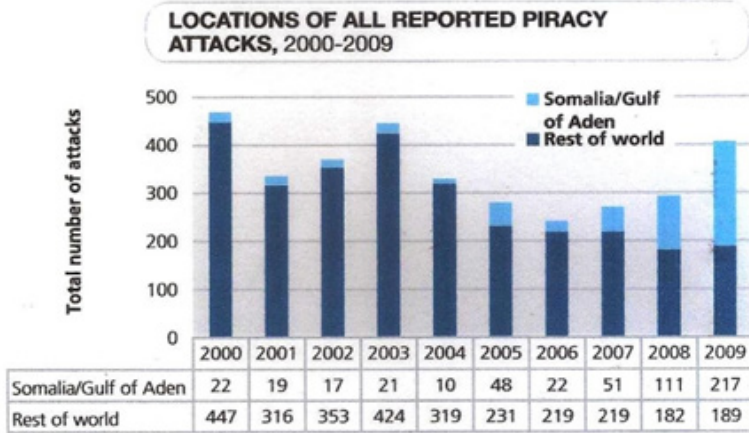
persons but the recruiting, harboring, and potentially enslavement of an individual for compelled labor or commercial sex acts through the use of force, fraud, or coercion.

An exact number of human trafficking and migrant smuggling cases is difficult to estimate due to the lack of statistical evidence that results from a number of factors. For example, in many cases individuals willingly begin the migration process and to some extent, a number of parents are directly involved in the trafficking of their own children, thus making it difficult to obtain reliable data on human trafficking. Such situations make it difficult to gauge the full extent by which society is affected by human trafficking and migrant smuggling. However, it does not mean that these two phenomena do not have a profound impact upon the countries of East Africa and their societies. This is evidenced by the amount of attention given to these issues in recent years. While Djibouti, Ethiopia, Eritrea, Rwanda and Tanzania have enacted specific anti-trafficking in persons legislation, Burundi, Kenya, Mauritius and Uganda are in the process of adopting anti-trafficking legislation, either having already presented draft laws to the legislative bodies or being in an advanced stage of the drafting process. In addition, in most countries, there are laws in place for trafficking related offences that enable criminal justice professionals to take action. In spite of these efforts though, the vast majority of people remain vulnerable to the actions of traffickers due to a lack of awareness on the part of the public and the absence of investigative and prosecution capacity on the part of law enforcement officials, as well as to a weak overall legal framework and long, porous borders that benefit organized criminal and trafficking networks. In summary, human trafficking includes migrant smuggling, trafficking in persons and international trafficking.

Piracy

While piracy worldwide is diminishing, in Eastern Africa it is on the rise, predominantly due to Somali pirates attacking ships in the Gulf of Aden. Pirates from Somalia began seizing ships in late 2005. Since then incidents

of maritime piracy in the East African region have soared along the coast of Somalia during the past year, as the chart below demonstrates.



Note: Adapted from IMB-ICC Annual reports, 2003-2009. "Piracy Attacks 2009", Maritime Piracy PDF, p. 9. Copyright UNODC (2009).

Originally carried out in order to stop toxic dumping and the plundering of coastal fishing stocks by foreigners (Socialist Worker, 2008), piracy operations today are more and more organized and have turned into a multi-million dollar industry, generating between 18-30 million US Dollars alone in 2008. The frequency, scope and sophistication of recent piracy operations indicate it can be seen as a serious organized crime problem. In 2008, over 80 actual and attempted pirate attacks have been recorded, amongst them the hijacking of the French luxury yacht "Le Ponant", the Ukrainian cargo MV Faina (transporting about 35 T72 military tanks and an assortment of other weapons) and a Saudi-owned ship carrying crude oil worth up to \$100 million. In addition, pirates have been targeting ships carrying humanitarian aid, delaying the delivery of humanitarian supplies and significantly impacting human security throughout the region, since many people in Somalia depend on these items for survival (The Institute of Security Studies, 2008).

There also appears to be an intersection between piracy and other criminal activities such as arms trafficking and human trafficking. In both cases, small vessels are used to move arms and people across the Gulf of Aden, from Eritrea or Yemen to Somalia and back. In at least the case of one group, the same boats used for piracy are used for migrant smuggling from Somalia to Yemen, bringing arms and ammunition on their return journey (Report of the Monitoring Group, 2008). According to the monitoring group for Somalia, the expansion of piracy is in part driven by the non-enforcement of the arms embargo, and as such the maritime militias have benefited from their ready access to arms and ammunition. Combined with the huge ransom payments the pirates receive, the militias have enough funds to upgrade their weapon arsenals, and in doing so become more efficient and effective in continuing to destabilize the region.

Tackling the Threat

Response mechanisms should be woven into national security strategies and employ all available domestic tools—law enforcement, the military, finance, information—while tapping into the mechanisms available through cross-border cooperation and international allies. These approaches should address not only the supply of and demand for illicit goods, but also the infrastructure, methods, means and motives of transnational criminals and their collaborators. Military, intelligence and law enforcement actions against violent extremist groups offer short-term wins.

Until effective response mechanisms are established and implemented, Africa will remain vulnerable to transnational organized crime and the threats it poses to security and stability. Five main considerations should go into the development of these mechanisms:

1. Interagency cooperation and whole-of-government coordination;
2. Mapping of transnational networks and leveraging of local knowledge and insights into the behavior of criminals and their collaborators;

3. Application of new and emerging technologies to keep pace with the growing sophistication of transnational criminals;
4. Sound analytical capabilities that can inform national security responses;
5. Strong national and cross-border legal architectures that preserve individual liberties.
6. Maintenance of a coordinated response on sea in order to deter piracy and protect vessels and crews, as well as the ongoing interdiction of firearms trafficking across the Gulf of Aden;
7. Focus on preventive action by strengthening law enforcement on the ground in Somalia and increasing coordinated action to support development on a wide range of issues in Somalia;
8. Provision of capacity building and support for the operations of the Somali Coast Guard forces, notably Somaliland and Punt land, as well as the navies and coast guards of other states in the region such as Kenya, Yemen and Djibouti;
9. Improvement of the adoption and implementation of national legislation aimed at addressing piracy in the region (as is currently supported by the International Maritime Organization and UNODC);
10. Improvement of prison and prison systems and ensure international human rights principles are upheld during the process of prosecution and detention in the region;
11. Undertake targeted action against key pirate leaders and their possible sponsors in the Puntland Administration; and
12. Undertake immediate and coordinated action against illegal fishing and the illegal dumping of toxic waste in Somali territorial waters by foreign companies.

Conclusion

To a large extent, without peace and security, sustainable growth and development will remain elusive. Illicit activities that loom at the cover of the street in every society are always going to be hard to address. This preliminary discussion paper only provides an indication of the extent and seriousness of organized crime and illicit trafficking in Eastern Africa. While the quantifiable data and exact amounts might be hard to predict, whenever researchers take a closer look at the issue of criminal activities and behavior in the region, the evidence points clearly towards a serious and growing threat. The very few studies that have been conducted over a longer period and on the ground show trafficking and related crimes are occurring in a substantial way, and the opportunism and organization of the groups involved constantly increasing.

Two things clearly underlie this organized criminal activity, whether it is trafficking in humans or firearms, piracy in the Gulf of Aden, or importing and trading counterfeited goods in the region. First is the weak state of the police and justice systems in all countries. The low police-inhabitant ratio, the state of the police force, the available training, the back log in the judiciary and the state of the prisons are all a contributing factor to ongoing crime and violence; which, when coupled with the lack of standardized and comprehensive legislation for the region, ensure that it is possible to get away with most illegal activity somewhere in the region. And most criminal areas examined in this paper are not isolated, but are deeply interconnected. For example, poaching of wildlife and trading in animal parts are connected to money laundering, corruption, organized crime networks, tax evasion and transnational trafficking. As one issue becomes more prevalent, so the entire cycle increases in dynamism and damage.

The second issue which underpins the growing crime and violence, and makes the need for a targeted intervention by the international community absolutely critical is the connection between crime and corruption. The weak states, lack of resources, low level of economic

opportunity and lack of political will to address crime makes the Eastern Africa region a breeding ground for corruption.

Whether illicit trafficking and organized crime are already on the rise or not, sooner or later, they will be a serious threat to the people and societies in Eastern Africa. Just as increased economic development is needed, increasing the level of proper law enforcement and justice must be an urgent priority for the countries in the region. Governments of all the Eastern Africa countries have a role to play and need to focus on this area. A government is the only actor which can, on a legitimate basis, address state security, organize the protection of civilians and uphold laws. Taking action to ensure overall peace and security is first and foremost the responsibility of the government.

Further afield, it is important for countries worldwide to address transnational crime and trafficking in a holistic global approach. Leaving some regions unaddressed is an invitation for criminal groups and individuals to move their activities there. Even if East Africa is not yet an acute problem, it is vulnerable enough that it is only a matter of time before activities roll over from another part of the world.

In fighting organized crime and trafficking, it is crucial for countries to work together, both in the region and in the wider world. The nature of these problems is quintessentially cross border issues, and as such require that the countries of the Eastern Africa region work together to address them. A key goal would be to find effective ways to pursue development and security together, as it has increasingly been demonstrated that security and the rule of law are central to effective development.

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