Exploring strategic interests in the Horn – EU moves in

- **EU moves in**

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Strategic studies seem to be a Western take mostly. A friend wrote on a social media once if Africa ever has gotten strategic analysts. We recall of one African man appearing on *Aljazeera* as a strategic analyst and giving his mumbo-jumbo – pro African Union, Pro Gadafi analysis during the heydays of the Libyan crisis. The few strategic analysts of the Horn of Africa we read were mostly Westerners or Orientals. *De Birhan Media Team* feels that the Horn of Africa/Ethiopia needs strategic analysts who can dissect the strategic issues, plans, and objectives of the region and beyond. The region simply wallows around international strategic interests. Do oppositions forces (Ethiopian) have
strategists? The strategy that we are talking about is of this type as defined by Wikipedia;

Strategic studies is an interdisciplinary academic field devoted to topics concerning the relationship between politics, geography and natural resources, economics, and military power, such as the role of intelligence, diplomacy and threats in the preparation and use of force.

Although ignorant of the study itself but thanks to the cyber world and libraries-, we flipped through. Reading Harry R. Yarger’s 2006 book “STRATEGIC THEORY FOR THE 21st CENTURY: THE LITTLE BOOK ON BIG STRATEGY” offers a general theoretical definition of strategy,

Strategy is the art and science of developing and using the political, economic, social-psychological, and military powers of the state in accordance with policy guidance to create effects that protect or advance national interests relative to other states, actors, or circumstances. Strategy seeks a synergy and symmetry of objectives, concepts, and resources to increase the probability of policy success and the favourable consequences that follow from that success. It is a process that seeks to apply a degree of rationality and linearity to circumstances that may or may not be either. Strategy accomplishes this by expressing its logic in rational, linear terms—ends, ways, and means.

This broad and wide theoretical definition of strategy can be applied to and by states, companies, political parties, opposition forces or any other entity. As articulated in the strategic studies definition part, there is no strategy without the interests of politics, geography, natural resources,
economics, military, and intelligence. In all its scopes, it integrates these variables.

Harry summarizes the following assumptions and premises of Strategy,

- Strategy is proactive and anticipatory but not predictive. Strategy seeks to promote or protect national interests as the future unfolds. In doing this, it must consider change and make assumptions.

- Strategy is subordinate to policy. Political purpose dominates all levels of strategy.

- Strategy is subordinate to the nature of the environment. Strategy must identify an appropriate balance among the objectives sought, the methods to pursue the objectives, and the resources available within the particular strategic environment. Strategy must be consistent with the nature of the strategic environment.

- Strategic analysis highlights the internal and external factors in the strategic environment that help define strategic effect and the specific objectives, concepts, and resources of the strategy.

- Strategy focuses on root purposes and causes. This focus makes strategy inherently adaptable and flexible.

- Risk is inherent to all strategy. Strategy is subordinate to the uncertain nature of the strategic environment. Success is contingent on implementation of an effective strategy—ends, ways, and means that positively interact with the strategic environment. Failure is the inability to achieve one’s objectives, the thwarting of achievement of one’s objectives by other actors or chance, or the creation of
unintended adverse effects of such magnitude as to negate what would otherwise be regarded a strategic success.

The questions of **suitability, feasibility, and acceptability** as expressed above are really questions about the validity of the strategy, not risk. If the answer to any of the three questions is “no,” the strategy is not valid. But strategy is not a black and white world, and the strategist may find that the answer to one or more of these questions is somewhat ambiguous.

**The Horn of Africa (HoA)**

The Horn of Africa is mostly defined as the countries belonging to the Inter-Governmental Authority for Development (IGAD) – Djibouti, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Kenya, Somalia, Sudan, South Sudan, and Uganda. Since the end of the cold war specifically after 1991, international strategic, geopolitical interests in the Horn of Africa had died out. The U.S. had enjoyed an unparalleled and sole hegemony over the region. There was no resistance both from the inside and outside. Countries of the Horn, the most poorest and turbulent region in the world also enjoy some of the most despotic regimes and dictators give priority to their funders and spinners than their own polities. They have lost their national sovereignty just like their food sovereignty. Following the paradigms of 2001 on the World Trade Centre and tensions between America and some Muslim countries and terrorist groups that followed and majorly the rise of the Brazil, Russia, India and China (BRIC) economies has changed the strategic and geopolitical interests in the Horn of Africa. China’s economic interests and involvement in the Horn surpasses all other nations with a strategic interest in the region. The oil wealth, strategic location as a passage and contact between
Europe and Asia, its use as a strategic military base, the historical and religious embroidery make the region an important place of international interest. Particularly, the endless and transcending effects of the conflict in Somalia with the rise of radical groups and maritime insecurity in the Indian Ocean heightened the weight and precedence that was given to the region than any other geopolitical region in the world.

**EU Moves in**

Although the European Union has been present in the region in different forms and levels, it has not been until last week that it has appointed a special representative for the region to deal with the strategic concerns of the area. According to the press release from the European Union Council published on 8 December 2011, the Council appointed the Tanzania born Greece national, Mr Alexander Rondos as EU Special Representative to the Horn of Africa.

The press release stated,

> The task of the Special Representative is to actively contribute to regional and international efforts to achieve lasting peace, security and development in the region comprising Djibouti, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Kenya, Somalia, Sudan, South Sudan and Uganda. The Council has asked the Special Representative to initially focus on Somalia and the regional dimensions of the conflict there, as well as on piracy, which has its root causes in the instability of Somalia.

The appointment of the Envoy comes a month after the adoption of EU’s Strategic Framework for the Horn of Africa
on 14 November 2011. The Strategic Framework for the Horn of Africa states that the Strategic Framework to guide the EU’s engagement in the region and states that the EU’s long-term commitment to the Horn of Africa is rooted in the region’s geo-strategic importance, the EU’s desire to support the welfare of the people. The Framework concludes that continued EU engagement will be in support of both regional efforts, including through the Inter-Governmental Authority for Development (IGAD) and the African Union (AU), and national efforts to achieve lasting peace, security, and justice, good governance based on the democratic principles of inclusion, the rule of law and respect for human rights. The Strategic Framework also recognises the need to protect European citizens from the threats that emanate from some parts of the region, including terrorism, piracy and the proliferation of the arms. It also identifies a number of common challenges such as climate change and migration.

The EU in this Strategic Framework commits to pursue a comprehensive approach paying special attention to root causes and drivers of conflict, and to lagging development in dealing with the issues of the Horn. EU believes that the region lacks a regional organisation effective enough to mediate disputes and foster cooperation and advises for the development of the capacities of Secretariat of AU and IGAD. It however, fails short of listing causes for the lack of effective regional organisation.

After the appointment of her special Representative to the Horn of Africa, Catherine Ashton, European Union’s High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy commented: “The recent adoption of the strategic framework for the Horn of Africa shows our determination to do all we can to help achieve lasting peace, security, and
development in the region. This is a priority for the European Union."

In general, the Strategic Framework for the Horn of Africa sets out five priorities for EU action: building robust and accountable political structures; contributing to conflict resolution and prevention; mitigating security threats emanating from the region; promoting economic growth, and supporting regional economic cooperation (16858/11). With this old but updated and framed strategy, EU has joined the race for the Horn of Africa. Although much of the content of the Strategy sounds to have been designed with the aim of protecting EU’s interest from piracy and other threats, it is eminently a strategy of hegemony. Like its counterparts, the EU joined the race with an official strategy and representative whose mission is protecting the strategic interests of the EU.

Iran

*The Cutting Edge* on December 8, 2008 reported that Iranian ships and submarines had deployed an undisclosed number of Iranian troops and weapons at the Eritrean port town of Assab, according to opposition groups, foreign diplomats, and NGOs in the area. It also had reported that Iran had sent soldiers and a large number of long-range and ballistic missiles. “Using protection of the Eritrean refinery as a pretext, Iran has set up its military operation there, and has been patrolling with unmanned surveillance drones.” it said. According to *Cutting Edge*, opposition groups in Eritrea had been reporting that President Isayas, with the cooperation of some Somali Islamist groups, was going beyond mere bilateral oil supplies, and colluding to control the Bab El Mandeb Straights in case of escalation of conflict with the United States and Israel.
Trumpet.com reported on November 23, 2011 that Iran’s interest of Islamising the whole region, particularly, Ethiopia. “Now that both Egypt and Libya are moving into the Islamist camp, expect Iranian-backed radicals to make a move for control of Ethiopia. Iran seeks to control the southern entrance to the Red Sea. To do this, the regime in Tehran needs sympathetic Islamic governments installed in Eritrea, Djibouti, and Ethiopia. This is what makes the Islamists plotting against the current Ethiopian government so significant!”

Similarly, the Trumpet Weekly, on this week issue (Dec.4-10, 2011) carried an article by Brad Macdonald entitled “Ethiopia in the crosshairs”. Brad starts by saying “here’s a blockbuster headline soon to come out of Ethiopia: Islamists gain control of Ethiopia, Eritrea.” The writer fears that due to Ethiopia’s strategic location and mainly Iranian influence, “Ethiopia is under extreme pressure to come under the influence of radical Islam!”.

Like the EU and other international powers, the interest of Iran in the Horn of Africa is hegemony. It does not have a publicised strategic framework out yet, however Iran has intensified its linkages and penetration in the Region. Although most of the reports have stated that Iran had formed a deeper linkage with most countries of the Region, its relationship has been intentionally publicised as one of adversity by various opinion media. The radicalising attempts have been unproven while some Ethiopian Muslims complain of being forced to accept a different version of Islam by the Ethiopian regime. The relations between the Ethiopian government and Tehran remain cordial. Since the February 2009 meeting between the then Iranian foreign minister, Manouchehr Mottaki and Prime Minister Zenawi,
and other Ethiopian ranking officials in order to promote Iranian economic and political ties with Ethiopia and the region, “Ethiopian government and Iran have been recently discussing on how to strengthen their bilateral relationship”. The regime of Meles Zenawi while giving strategic bases, accepting aid and investments to/with America and China, it is equally intensifying its symbiosis with Iran, according sources close to De Birhan Media.

Jason Warner on his October 12th, 2011 piece entitled Iran's troubled foray into Africa said, “Tehran has more recently been targeting improved relations with other African states in the Horn of Africa – notably Ethiopia, Eritrea, Djibouti and Somalia – whose proximities to the Gulf of Aden make them attractive to an Iran ever preoccupied with an adversarial Israel.”

And Arabs

The other grouping that has now come with an intention of strategic linkage in the Horn has been the Arab world. In the past few months, a group of Arab policy makers and scholars have been discussing on how they could strengthen their strategic interests and role in the Region.

A conference organized by the Institute of Arab Centre for Research and Policy Studies (ACRPS) themed, "The Arabs and the Horn of Africa: the dialectic of proximity and identity" and hosted by the Doha Institute from November 27 to 30, 2011, Arab experts stated that “The Horn of Africa is of paramount importance to the Arab world, and special effort should be made to revitalize relations”.

It was also reported that, the speakers stressed the scale of benefits that could be achieved by both Arab and Horn of Africa states by rectifying the deformities afflicting their relationships
due to the legacy of historical and political factors, including the interference of great Western powers in the region. The conference discussed the political, economic, strategic, and security facets of the relationship between the Arabs and the Horn of Africa, in addition to the intellectual, cultural, and social axis. The speakers also expressed their views on the rising ties between Kenya and Israel and its impact on the Arab world.

The US

The US has been the longstanding power with bases and established interest and involvement in the Region. The United States Africa Command, also known as U.S. AFRICOM, one of nine Unified Combatant Commands of the U.S. Department of Defense (DoD), has an office in Addis Abeba. Combined Joint Task Force – Horn of Africa currently, CJTF-HOA has been assigned a Combined Joint Operating Area (CJOA) that consists of Djibouti, Ethiopia, Eritrea, Kenya, Seychelles, Somalia, and Sudan. In addition, the task force has an assigned Area of Interest (AOI) that consists of Burundi, Chad, Comoros, DemocraticRep.Congo, Madagascar, Mauritius, Mozambique, Rwanda, Tanzania, Uganda, and Yemen. It conducts operations in the Combined Joint Operations Area to enhance partner nation capacity, promote regional stability, dissuade conflict, and protect US and coalition interests.

The Washington Post also reported on October 27, 2011 that the Obama administration is building a constellation of secret drone bases in the Arabian Peninsula and the Horn of Africa, including one site in Ethiopia. The Paper stated that the Air Force confirmed that drone operations are underway at the Arba Minch airport. Master Sgt. James Fisher, a spokesman for the 17th Air Force, which oversees operations in Africa, said that an unspecified number of Air Force personnel are working at the Ethiopian airfield “to provide operation and technical support
for our security assistance programs.”

The US has economic, aid, security, and historical interests in the Region. Its strategic interest has been there since the WWII. Its alliance shifted with the governments of the region and external rival powers. As the rivalry for the strategic control of the region ensues, the US has now to grapple with more powers that are intensifying their penetration in the region such as BRIC countries, Iran and the EU.

China

The Centre for Chinese Studies at Stellenbosch University in South Africa published in November 2011 a paper titled “Competing for Development? The European Union and China in Ethiopia.” It summarises that the EU has an aid recipient relationship with strings attached while for China, Ethiopia is an important economic and political ally in its Africa policy and China has emerged as an alternative partner to the Ethiopian government, providing a different development strategy and an alternative approach to economic and political reform. The interparty relationships between the ruling Ethiopian EPRDF party and the Chinese Communist Party of China (CPC) has reached its all time high. As the Ethiopian regimes attempts to be an ally of both the West and Iran at the same time, it is also attracting Chinese involvement in Ethiopian and regional strategic matters - triple standard.

Ambassador David H. Shinn in his paper entitled “China and the Horn of Africa”, December 2011, concluded that China’s recent engagement in the Horn has had both positive and negative consequences from an American perspective. It has played pro West peaceful resolution, peacekeeping and containing extremists influence and piracy in Sudan and Somalia, positively. On the negative side, China provided arms to Sudan,
Ethiopia, and Eritrea during their respective wars, and unwillingness of governments in the region to pursue democratization, better human rights practices, and efforts to rein in corruption. China and India have huge economic interest and concrete investments in the regions oil, land, construction, education, and politico-military relations. The more their wealth and resources are intricate with the Horn, the more strategic interest these countries would have.

**Conclusion**

The cold war is back again in the Horn of Africa. There is no proof than the above cases to put in plain words the intensifying scamper of major economies to scramble the region and declare their dominance. Although the conflict in Somalia, sanction of Eritrea and maritime insecurity were being stated as the pretexts for the crowding of strategic powers in the region, the main reason lies in the geopolitical importance of the location and growing hostility between Iran and BRIC versus the West.

**All failures**

Diagnosing the aforementioned cases and strategies against Harry’s theories of strategy informs that all the regional strategies designed and interests are bound to failure. Majorly, being their inability to include the peace and democracy loving citizens of the region and their representative organisations into the strategic objectives or plans and consideration. Even though, strategies are mainly about the national interests of the strategising or executing nations, it is initially designed with objectives and plans that produce the intended effect. In this case, most of the international actors
that have strategic interest in the Horn of Africa have in
general missed the important unit in their strategy: the larger
public and their representatives. No strategy of the above
mentioned international actors mentions opposition groups or
people of the region as partners or parts of the objectives and
plans.

Harry says Strategy is subordinate to the nature of the
environment. Strategy must identify an appropriate balance
among the objectives sought, the methods to pursue the
objectives, and the resources available within the particular
strategic environment. Strategy must be consistent with the
nature of the strategic environment. It is dependent upon
chaos and complex theories. As it is proactive and
anticipatory, these strategists must have been able to
understand the regional complexities and chaos. The nature of
environment in strategies of the HoA even if unpredictable
like many other regions, can be anticipated—therefore, the
strategy should include the strong though fragmented
opposition parties, civil societies, and groups that represent
the mass.

Harry also states that success is contingent on implementation
of an effective strategy—ends, ways, and means that
positively interact with the strategic environment. Failure is
the inability to achieve one’s objectives, the thwarting of
achievement of one’s objectives by other actors or chance, or
the creation of unintended adverse effects of such magnitude
as to negate what would otherwise be regarded a strategic
success. The strategic objectives set by these international
actors are prone to failure for reasons that have not been
treated in the original design of the strategies.
The second reason for the failure of the strategies of these
main actors is the fact that they are dealing with unelected,
dictatorial and gunner governments. Dealing with undemocratic regimes leads and produces unceremonial outcomes to both all actors; “effective strategy—ends, ways, and means that positively interact with the strategic environment”. However, in the case of the HoA, the ends, ways, and means do not positively interact with the strategic environment.

The third and possibly dangerous factor the dooms the failure of the strategies of the international actors in the HoA region is the double alignment/standard of the governments of the Horn. These nations and governments are in a deficit and negative position to deal with these actors thus cannot play a partnership game but can only be submissive, agent and servant to the powerful. Puppet regimes are thus ineffective. In addition to being puppets, selling their sovereignty and status, the governments of the HoA are aligning and being loyal to many international powers at the same time. A good example is the Ethiopian regime that has formed and offered strategic alliance with America, China, Iran, and the EU at the same time. During the cold war period nations have stood with one of the two blocks, none stood with two or more at the same time. Today, countries of the Horn of Africa have aligned themselves with all international actors, receiving, strategic, and financial assistance and blessing, protection to remain in power. Aware of these fact, international actors strategically interested in the region have continued their alliance with the weak and unreliable regimes of the Horn that want to step on three trees with two legs. This trend poses a huge threat to the strategies set and could even affect their long-term interests in the region- at the end, this brings the collision and thwarting objectives the actors in play.
As read in the EU Strategic Framework, there is no envisaged strategy of working with opposition forces and the larger public. If strategy focuses on root causes, purposes, and learning from experience and is sufficiently broad in its construction to adapt to unfolding events, the strategy of EU and other international actors should proactively learn and anticipate the apparent causes HoA’s problems and the solutions. If, as the strategies of these actors says, their strategic interests doubled due to the rise of extremists in Somalia, piracy and protecting and promoting stability in the region, one basic strategy to have been included is finding comprehensive strategic solution to the strategic problems of the region. Peace, security, conflict prevention, and resolution are some of the strategic approaches these international actors use to deal with the challenges they face in the region. They do this by crippling opposition forces, organising negotiations between the regimes and opposition forces that mostly served the interests of the incumbents and at times infiltrating the privacies of opposition forces in the region, blocking their media. As the result of this double standard of both the international actors and governments in the region, no regime change occurred in the past 20 to 30 years. The presence and entrance of new international actors into the region and the continuation of “aligning with all/loyal to all” strategy of governments of HoA countries democratic transition or entrenchment and regime change may protract to be wishes for decades to come. The strategies have been in general ill researched and of short vision. International actors with strategic interests in the HoA should revamp their existing pro-incumbent and selfish strategies; consult with independent elites of the HoA and produce balanced, fair, and long-term strategies.
“Suitability, feasibility, and acceptability” should yes be cores of their new strategy.