The Practicalities of Living with Failed States

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Abstract: State security and survival are critical issues in the rough regional environment of the Horn of Africa. Ensuring security for a state and its population is a priority and a raison d'être for any government. The buffer zone has emerged as a key strategy for nations in the Horn of Africa to manage successfully the security challenges of the several failed states in their neighborhood. Buffer zones are established adjacent to the borders of stronger states that oversee the buffer zones' affairs directly or through proxies. This essay explores the practical aspects of power asymmetries between successful and failed states from the perspectives of two officials in successful states who deal directly with this security challenge within the constraints of current norms and practices of sovereignty. The situation in the Horn of Africa provides insights into the effects of failed states on the security of their neighbors and the challenges that failed states present to the wider international community.

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Failed and failing states lack the political will and the capacity to enter into, much less abide by, agreements with other states to ensure mutual security. This situation points to problems that attend the growing asymmetry not only in the capacities, but also in the divergent character of the domestic political orders in the Horn of Africa. This asymmetry, assessed from the perspectives of two officials of a nation adjacent to two failed states, challenges some of the basic tenets of an international system of states, such as government capacity to abide by agreements. These failed states fundamentally lack the capacity to fulfill obligations of sovereignty, such as monitoring and governing their territories to prevent different actors there from launching unauthorized attacks on neighbors or more generally spreading disorder across their borders. These problems remain a primary source of conflict in the Horn of Africa, and have become increasingly pressing for countries that neighbor Libya, Syria, Afghanistan, and other tumultuous and failing states.

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The Horn of Africa hosts an assortment of failed and failing states. Somalia and South Sudan clearly belong to the category of totally failed states. Officials in Sudan and South Sudan have lost a significant portion of their capacities to enforce their authority in large parts of their respective territories; Eritrea's leadership frequently defies basic international norms; and Kenya's recurrent electoral violence raises doubts about whether its government can ensure domestic stability. In addition, states in the subregion face very real threats of terrorist attacks from Al Shabaab, a Somalia-based terrorist group. This regional political environment tempts governments to use armed groups as proxies to influence politics in neighboring countries. Since the 1960s, many countries have participated in tit-for-tat violence to undermine rivals, forcing some to create buffer zones along their borders.

Ethiopia, for example, engaged in this retaliatory violence in the 1980s when its government provided refuge to the Sudan People's Liberation Army as leverage against Khartoum's support for rebel groups inside Ethiopia. In this case, Ethiopia was reciprocating against Sudan and Somalia, which had similarly protected groups hostile to Ethiopia in the 1970s and 1980s. This symmetry of support for proxy-armed groups also meant that the governments routinely agreed to cease this behavior for mutual benefit. The records of these agreements from that time show that these governments possessed the political will and the capacity to abide by these agreements. While Ethiopia's government strives to abide by the principle of respect for the sovereignty of its neighbors, the practicalities of living next to failed and failing states now challenge the country's official commitment to adhere to these principles.

For Ethiopia, managing these problems in Somalia in particular involves complementary strategies: supporting islands of governance and creating buffer zones. With decades of combined experience at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Ethiopia, we note that Ethiopia's strategy is most evident vis-à-vis the "Republic of Somaliland," and to some extent the "Puntland State of Somalia." Both provide basic levels of order and security to their populations locally. Though not diplomatically recognized, close ties to Ethiopia enable their citizens to travel on local documents and help these authorities to organize international trade relations and develop infrastructure, as well as influence developments in Mogadishu and elsewhere.

Ethiopia's support is critical to limit the extent to which other foreign governments are compelled to intervene in the internal affairs of these semiautonomous regions over matters of mutual concern. Ethiopia also assists in the establishment of other regional states in Somalia. All these efforts face challenges from Mogadishu: the strategy is *perceived* to be weakening rather than unifying Somalia because it undermines the monopoly of coercion that the political center should theoretically exercise although it currently lacks the capacity to do so. This situation creates a dilemma whereby Ethiopia is forced to infringe on the sovereign prerogatives of the de jure recognized sovereign authority of Somalia. In fact, the government of Somalia is unable to credibly guarantee to Ethiopia that these territories will not be used to threaten Ethiopia, so Ethiopia often is blamed for interference. This criticism highlights the paradox in which Ethiopia has to infringe on Somalia's sovereignty in territories that Mogadishu is unable to control in order to ensure the fulfillment of basic obligations required of a sovereign state.

A second strategy revolves around creating and maintaining buffer zones. Ethiopia and Kenya sustain buffer zones inside Somalia, effectively denying Al Shabaab

and other extremist groups the capacity to launch attacks inside Ethiopia and Kenya. More recently, Uganda has pursued a similar strategy vis-à-vis South Sudan. Ethiopia's intensive coordination with local authorities inside South Sudan remains necessary to prevent the recurrence of the kind of attacks that occurred in April 2016 in Ethiopia's Gambella Region, where cross-boundary ethnic violence and ancillary cattle rustling and kidnapping have incited tensions among local communities and the two states.

The ways that Ethiopia, Kenya, and Uganda use buffer zones sheds light on how these governments manage their relations in an environment that includes states that exhibit widely varying domestic capacities and organizations of authority and regional susceptibility to involvement in proxy wars and other interference on the part of external actors. While the Horn of Africa exhibits particular features, this disjuncture in the domestic capacities to exercise de facto sovereignty has become more acute in the region as state failure in Somalia and South Sudan persists.

This strategy of the region's more-capable states is based on four core assumptions: 1) a state that establishes a buffer zone beyond its borders must have the capacity to provide and sustain order in its domestic realm and in the buffer zone; 2) the state that maintains a buffer zone requires professionalism of the state security apparatus; 3) the buffer zone's inhabitants must be able to benefit from order and development within the neighboring strong state; and 4) de jure borders remain fixed. In short, a successful buffer zone's inhabitants do not have to like this intervention, but they do have to share in the benefits of security and economic opportunities that the buffer zone provides to the stronger state.

In the Horn of Africa, state failure does not challenge the military-focused and state-centered paradigm of security in the international system.[1] This situation reflects the reality in which state and nonstate actors compete with one another. These actors and this reality of interstate conflict and competition among states with sharply asymmetrical capacities continue to be the basis for analysis.[2] The device of the buffer zone is one of the main reasons why failed states do not challenge this basic structure of the international system in the Horn of Africa, and in fact contributes to its maintenance.

Weak governance shapes interstate relations in other ways. Civil-military relations scholar Herbert Howe has identified three military strategies that African states use to address the threats to their present existence. These strategies include regional intervention forces, private security companies, and Western-sponsored assistance to state militaries. He argues that all these are likely to fail unless African states emphasize indigenous military professionalism.[3] This conventional view misses the buffer zone as a self-help mechanism to maintain regional order, though some states are better than others at mastering this technique.

A buffer zone is "a neutral zone designed to prevent acts of aggression between two hostile nations; and any area serving to mitigate or neutralize potential conflict."[4] Buffer zones can be established in a shared territory or created unilaterally through force and monitored exclusively by one state or through proxies in a nonshared area in (a) relatively weaker state(s), or on the other side of the enemy's territory that harbors a threat to the stronger state. These threats can emerge from rebel groups, religious movements, and other armed groups organized in neighboring states in territories that are outside the control of local state authorities. Conventional tools of international relations, such as pressuring a national government to fulfill the obligations of its sovereignty, do not work when a state lacks a government

with the capacity or political will to exercise even minimal control over its territory and armed forces.

Failure by states to solve these crises and conflicts, and their subsequent inability to provide protection and basic social services to the majority of their peoples, can generate popular support for various nonstate armed groups as communities look beyond the state for protection. Officials in failing states often desperately seek alternative ways to retain their coercive power, which usually has the effect of creating refugee crises amidst massive violations of basic human rights and the large-scale disruptions of livelihoods.

Buffer zones play their paradoxical role while states with stronger domestic capabilities that develop their own broader dimensions of effective internal and external sovereignty, such as Ethiopia, step in to manage the effects of this extreme asymmetry of domestic control. The stronger state then violates the sovereignty of the weaker to provide the basis for the semblance of an orderly state system in the region. This hegemony can appear as domination, but to its architects, it is also the only viable alternative to manage the regional destabilizing effects of state failure and collapse. This is particularly important for states like Ethiopia, which shares a long border with Somalia, a failed state that generates violent illicit activities, cross-border insurgencies, refugee flows, and other disruptions that threaten efforts in Ethiopia to transform its domestic political economy. Disorder in the borderlands is a historical problem for state-builders, but the difference now is that stronger states no longer have the option (or are no longer inclined) to solve this problem through conquest. Instead, they have to maintain order in weak states.

This issue of buffer zones is relevant to the growing asymmetries of state capacities that appear in other regions. Algeria's government has to contend with the appearance of competing militias and countersystemic movements such as violent Islamist organizations across its borders with Mali and Libya. Egypt must manage its affairs with a fragmented Libya, while Sudan has its own problems providing credible sovereign authority along Egypt's southern border, apart from the challenges of border disputes between the neighbors.

Why does a state construct and sustain an expensive buffer zone to ensure security? What are the implications of buffer zones as a mechanism for protecting sovereignty under the increasingly globalized international construct? Variation in the origins and aims of managing buffer zones points to the importance of symmetries/asymmetries of domestic capabilities of the states involved in their administration and sustainability, and the impact of their creation on international norms, such as sovereignty and territorial integrity.

The concept of the buffer zone is at the heart of the paradox of asymmetries of domestic capabilities; it is an effort to preserve the sovereignty of the state creating it while deliberately attenuating the sovereignty of others, however dressed up such action may be by the apparent acceptance of the affected party. States that border failed states and states with limited capacity to control their own territories inevitably face a number of challenges. These include various types of security threats: refugee crises, illegal immigration, drug trafficking, cattle rustling, trafficking in and proliferation of small arms and light weapons, terrorism and extremism, and the spread of communicable diseases, all of which are discussed in a series of essays in the previous issue of *Dædalus*. A failed or failing state either no longer has the necessary institutions to address such problems or is incapable of dealing with them, either immediately or in the longer term within its own territories.[5]

William Reno, for example, has shown the "connection between terrorism and the failure of central governments in some states to control their national territory and monitor their populations."[6] Powerful states, Reno asserts, collaborate even with groups struggling for secession. These groups control their local turf and their ability to provide access to outsiders, like the more powerful state next door, and to deny refuge to terrorists or other rebel groups, which is critical in this calculation and reinforces the tenets of the U.S. counterinsurgency doctrine.

The pursuit of security through creating and maintaining buffer zones might appear to weaken international norms constructed and recognized by various regional and international organizations. The unilateral creation of buffer zones, whether to encourage the potentiality for the creation of a failed state, speed up the creation of new states, or create areas that larger and more powerful states annex, certainly may threaten stability in the longer term. In reality, however, the creation of a buffer zone does not weaken shared international norms and can succeed in contributing to the security of the intervening state, since stronger states are employing buffer zones because of practical threats against which international norms do not provide protection.

This development may mean either that the whole "failed" state can become a buffer zone, or that the unilateral creation of a buffer zone undermines the sovereignty of the targeted state to the extent that it may actually lead to failure of that state. Costs and intensity of effort, the extent and delineation of the formal and informal borders of the states involved, the relative control exerted by the actors, and factors that determine the level of impermeability of the zones to protect against attacks – the main objective of establishing buffer zones – are taken into consideration.

Buffer zones in other contexts have been constructed to deal with threats, but most were designed to manage contentious relations between states of roughly symmetrical capabilities. For example, United Nations–monitored zones between Israeli and Syrian forces in the Golan Heights and between forces in Cyprus have endured for decades. These are maintained by third parties and have a recognized place in the maintenance of order in the international system of states. The problem for Ethiopia and others who have to build their own buffer zones, however, is that there is no realistic and viable international community response to the problem of disorder in failed states and the threats that emerge from them. The U.S. and UN interventions in Somalia in the early 1990s did little to nothing to help Ethiopia with these security problems, and made clear that no superpower will lead the region to stability. The Americans could fail and then decide that it was time to go home, but Ethiopia and other countries in the region do not have this option. In subsequent years, Ethiopians, Kenyans, and others have had to deal with the proliferation of unconventional threats that comes from living next to failed states, for which they have had to devise their own responses.

Ethiopia constructs buffer zones to protect its citizens from threats coming from the adjacent areas. This absence of any real capacity of a neighboring state to fulfill basic obligations to control threats on its own territory is a big problem for other states too, such as Algeria. For now, Algeria has not established a visible buffer zone across its border with Mali, even though Mali fulfills the necessary conditions, including the existence of terrorist groups bent on destabilizing the region and the lack of capacity to control its territories and maintain a monopoly on violence in its territories in the peripheries. Algeria, however, has yet to securitize the threat, since those destabi-

lizing elements have not constituted a critical challenge to the survival of the Algerian state or directly threatened the people of Algeria. Like Ethiopia in the 1990s, Algeria stands by as an international intervention force attempts to restore order. But that intervention force is discovering that there is not much of a Malian state to which they can pass off this task. Algeria has to watch its border with Mali and accept the prospect that the foreign force will leave once it becomes frustrated with its own shortcomings. Meanwhile, Algeria's engagement is very careful and well managed. The recent build up of a huge arms cache along the border might force policy changes, and certainly the poor record of foreign-led, large-scale state-building projects in the midst of conflict do not inspire much confidence. The American failure in Iraq casts a very long shadow over the calculations of governments that benefit peripherally from large-scale foreign intervention but are fated to manage the problems associated with failed states on their borders.

The construction of buffer zones takes place with the attention of powerful actors such as the United States, the European Union, and international organizations. It also attracts occasional attention from conventional news media and from social media. Even in failed states, inhabitants commonly have access to 3G or even 4G connectivity. This means that constructing buffer zones comes with the strategic need to minimize the degrees of violence involved and to pay careful attention to how the buffer zones are viewed by local inhabitants. Navigating this environment places significant demands on Ethiopia's own capabilities. Indeed, Americans and others might have much to learn about promoting order over the long term in difficult environments through patient and nuanced techniques that have been adapted to the specific political and social environments of failed states.

The spread of Somalis across borders since the collapse of an effective central government in Somalia in 1990 has occurred against the backdrop of previous irredentist ambitions of elites to build Greater Somalia in the Horn. Cold War politics and subsequent government policies created animosities between peoples that led – paradoxically – to one of Africa's most vicious interstate wars in 1977 – 1978, the Ogaden War between Somalia and Ethiopia. As mentioned above, even after Somalia's defeat, its government in the 1980s supported anti-government rebels in Ethiopia, against a strategy Ethiopia employed in retaliation. Ethiopia and Somalia reached agreements to manage these contentious relations, and records show that both governments possessed the political will and the capacity to abide by these agreements before their collapse in 1991.

Due to the wars of the 1960s and 1970s, the Ethiopian-Somali region remained a backyard, and a military zone for the administrations in Addis Ababa until the fall of Ethiopia's Derg regime in 1991. Subsequent Ethiopian regimes handled the Somali region of Ethiopia in different ways, but historically the region has served the country as a buffer zone. That reality changed in 1991 after Ethiopia institutionalized a federal arrangement that helped to manage its internal insurgencies, such as those involving al-Itihaad al-Islamiya (AIAI) and the Ogaden National Liberation Front (ONLF), and began to protect its border areas by stationing troops there.[7] However, dealing with internal actors with cross-border links via a troop presence at the borders was not sustainable so long as the insurgents had rear bases in adjacent territories of Somalia that were not under the control of any central government. Building a "big, beautiful wall" was not an option. The border areas were simply too porous and too long, and it was difficult to control movements fully.

Establishing a buffer zone involved a long and intensive process of learning and considerable patience. In 1995, Ethiopia took, for the first time, a unilateral measure to remove the Islamic insurgents AIAI, who still run an active insurgency along the Somali border. Ethiopia launched a second military intervention in 1998, following Eritrea's effort – in collaboration with a Baidoa-based Somali warlord and former U.S. Marine veteran of Operation Desert Storm, Hussein Aideed, and involving the Oromo Liberation Front and the ONLF – to open a second front against it. Ethiopia's biggest intervention came in 2006, when it fended off an imminent threat from the Islamic Courts Union (ICU) and supported the fragile Somali Federal Government's occupation of Mogadishu. Ethiopian forces routed the ICU fighters in a series of conventional and counterinsurgency battles, forcing the ICU collapse, after which Ethiopia created and reinforced proxies to keep local threats at bay, thereby putting in place real buffer zones. The buffer zones' sizes shifted depending on the threats at hand. Ethiopia institutionalized the buffer zones and supported these areas, successfully warding off threats coming through the territories that remained relatively peaceful and unifying proxies in blocking infiltrations through the years.

Whenever Somalia's regional administrations have faced challenges from local forces or factions supported by extra-regional actors undermining Ethiopia's security, immediate Ethiopian engagement has been needed to avert a crisis. Ethiopia thus contributes to an ad hoc stability inside Somalia, despite criticism from some Somali and international actors. This building-block approach stresses the maintenance of local order, which was first advocated by the United Nations but then abandoned. Ethiopia picked up this strategy amidst criticism, but since 2014, this approach has become the cornerstone of the wider international community's response for peace-building in Somalia.

The central government in Mogadishu appears to be at the forefront in the implementation of the federal arrangement in Somalia. But, there is no guarantee that this policy will continue. Reversal is a possibility; and recently the federal government has been accused of meddling in the business of local governments. The recent Gulf crisis is also affecting the relationship between the center and the periphery. In the meantime, a number of regional states have been established, and Ethiopia, through the IGAD (the Djibouti-based regional Intergovernmental Authority on Development) and the African Union, has assisted in the realization of the federal arrangement. Prior to these, Ethiopia either created proxies or supported existing ones to reinforce its buffer zone. Following the 2006 incursions, Ethiopia tried to prop up the Somali government for two years until its troops withdrew in January 2009. Following the withdrawal, Ethiopia reinforced groups that collaborated in the fight against Al Shabaab along its border.

This was not a smooth and easy endeavor. Ethiopia sometimes failed to recognize actors that could be proxies outright. When Ahlu Sunna Wal Jama'a (ASWJ) formed, a religious paramilitary force created to defend clans threatened by Al Shabaab's onslaught, particularly the Ayr subclan of the Hawiye, Ethiopia simply considered it an Islamist group. When in 2007 the Ministry of Foreign Affairs was requested to consider ASWJ as an actor to fill the buffer zone between Beledweyne and Galkayo in the Central Regions of Somalia, the Ministry declined and responded to the embassy in Mogadishu:

> ASWJ's engagement is a very interesting phenomenon, including the timing of the fighting between the two [with Al Shabaab]. But, of course, you have not yet gotten into what kind of animal the new group is – their

> clan composition, most particularly at the leadership level; if they are close to some that are known to us, whom they might be the closest with; their source of support, both military and financial; and their background and where they have been until now. How come we failed to know about their existence until now, and if we knew how did we fail to see them as an asset for the fight against al-Shabaab?[8]

But ASWJ proved itself an important actor after killing hundreds of Al Shabaab fighters in the Central Regions in subsequent fighting. ASWJ is now a major player in this part of Somalia, fully supported by Ethiopia's security institutions as well as counterterrorism elements from the United States, and has carried out many successful operations against Al Shabaab. ASWJ has also created an administration that is contested by Galmudug State, an autonomous regional authority in Central Somalia. In order to maintain the integrity of the buffer zone, Ethiopian forces often engage Al Shabaab directly in these areas, depending on the level of threat the enemy poses.[9] Ethiopia also ensures that ASWJ and Galmudug do not engage in a fight that would create a space for Al Shabaab to manipulate. This is not always successful, since ASWJ and Galmudug, supported by the government in Mogadishu, have at times engaged militarily, forcing Ethiopia to intervene to stop the conflict. Overall, Ethiopia has established a functional collaboration, with ASWJ filling the gap in the buffer zone.

The buffer zone continues west of Galmudug to what was an autonomous regional administration created adjacent to the Puntland State of Somalia. Representing the Suleiban subclan under the name of Himam iyo Heeb, this administration merged with Galmudug in 2015. Then there is the administrative framework for the Hawaadle clan in the Hiiraan and Middle Shebelle regions, formed in October 2016 as Hirshabelle State. After joining the African Union Mission for Somalia (AMISOM), funded by the international community, Ethiopian forces are currently based in: Bay and Bakool, which together with Lower Shebelle now make up South West State, largely inhabited by the Rahanweyn clan; Central Regions State; Galmudug; the Hiran Region; the Gedo Region, the home of the Marehan clan; and in parts of the Jubaland Interim State administration. Clearly, understanding the information-intensive details of local contexts and the crosscurrents of micropolitics in the buffer zone is critical to Ethiopian efforts. As in all failed states, local politics in Somalia is especially intense because there is no central government to impose a regularized order; thus, the situation on the ground becomes even more complex.

Ethiopia's influence in Bay and Bakool, deep inside Somalia, followed the creation of the Rahanweyn Resistance Army (RRA) in the second half of the 1990s.[10] Managing the RRA was critical, as a proxy, to fend off threats posed by Eritrea-backed Ethiopian rebel groups, hosted by a group led by Hussein Aideed and by Al Shabaab, respectively, in 1998 and 2012. However, the buffer zone in Bay and Bakool remained unstable: the existing Somali government in Mogadishu worked to exert its influence in the area, and the politicians of the region regularly changed their survival strategies in relation to handouts coming from Mogadishu. Ethiopia's actions also affected the region, for example, by temporarily withdrawing its forces from Hudur in 2013 and from parts of Hiiraan in October 2016, influencing the local politics in the buffer zone.[11]

In the Gedo Region, Ethiopia continued to assist the Somali National Front after its defeat of AIAI in 1995 and 1996, although the leadership failed to establish a functional administration. Ethiopia provides training and logistics to the Marehan clan militia and, in collaboration with Kenya, has involved troops directly in the area de-

pending on the threat level. Although people inside Somalia closely monitor Ethiopia's Somali-language media and developments in the Ethiopian-Somali region, which has impacted developments in Somalia, Ethiopia's government – provided a monopoly over its foreign policy by its constitution – has prevented the Somali National Regional State from having a political role in developments in Somalia for the last decade. This has helped the Ethiopian government follow a logical policy concerning the internal affairs of its neighbor without the interference of the ethnic Somalis in its own regional state.

As noted above, the final element in these concentric circles of buffer zones, a buffer zone that covers the regions of Gedo, Middle Juba, and Lower Juba, has been established along the Kenya-Somalia border. Even though this is essentially a Kenyan buffer zone, reinforced through the regional framework of IGAD and AMISOM, Ethiopia continues to ensure that no element bent on undermining its security will establish a presence in the Jubaland administration, as well as the entire Gedo Region. The Gedo Region buffer zone serves both Ethiopia and Kenya.

Kenya's buffer zone in Somalia demonstrates the difficulties that this organizationally intense strategy imposes on a less capable implementing state. Kenya created a buffer zone following its intervention in 2012 and the subsequent establishment of the Jubaland administration. Kenya did not consider the establishment of the buffer zone a critical measure since Al Shabaab had not disrupted Kenya's peace and security before 2012. But bombings in Nairobi and elsewhere forced Kenya to revise its policy. Ethiopia's intervention in 2006 not only removed the ICU from Southern Somalia, but also the threat the extremist group posed to the region. When Al Shabaab's threat to Kenya's security grew, Ethiopian forces were already on the ground and forced Al Shabaab to engage with Ethiopia. In this way, Kenya got a free ride until Al Shabaab changed its tactics. Now, whenever Al Shabaab sustained heavy losses from engagement with Ethiopia or its partners, it retaliated against Kenya. Kenya's defense and intelligence institutions began competing to address the challenge. The intelligence apparatus first attempted to establish Azania State in exile, based in Nairobi, and then import it to the adjacent areas of Jubaland, creating a buffer zone that could be managed through proxies. Ethiopia expressed reservations about Azania, suspecting an invisible role from the ONLF, with long-term implications for Ethiopia's security.

The engagement of the Kenyan defense minister in reconciling the ONLF and Ethiopia diminished Ethiopia's concerns about Azania. More important, the Kenyan Defense Forces spearheaded an invasion of Somalia, and chose a different faction as a proxy, rather than Azania. Contrary to Ethiopia's approach, the Kenyan policy on Somalia is spearheaded by Kenyan Somalis, bringing into the equation all sorts of baggage. Kenyan (Somali) officials are much involved in the decision-making, whereby Kenyan (Somali) elites can manipulate the indigenous clan balances, favoring the Ogaden clans to have a visible role in Kismayu, since most Kenyan Somalis are linked to the Ogaden clan. But Kismayu is not an all-Ogaden clan territory. Marehan and some Hawiye clans close to the Marehan (especially the Ayr) continue to be involved in the politics of Lower Juba, forcing Marehans to cooperate with Al Shabaab and attack Kenyan peacekeepers, and allowing infiltrations into Kenya. The Kenyan government's weak institutions and the high-level corruption within Kenya impact its buffer zones: constitutionally, Kenya's military involvement in Somalia does not undergo serious scrutiny, and military spending is not audited. Some

fear that Kenya's military engagement has opened opportunities for grand corruption schemes, since there is no inquiry and auditing on spending. This matter emerged as an issue in the recent contested election in the country.

Sustaining buffer zones demands extraordinary effort: it is expensive, tedious, and information-intensive, as the dizzying array of local situations, sub-subclan politics, and other ever-changing elements of Somali politics referenced here suggest. Meanwhile, Mogadishu-based Somali leaders consistently miscalculate political developments in Somalia. This approach inevitably destabilizes relatively peaceful areas, as the resources available in Mogadishu create a scramble for power that disrupts the stability in otherwise relatively peaceful areas. Ethiopia would instead prefer that Mogadishu provide a government with sufficient capacity to manage Somalia's territories, whereby a simple framework of cooperation to address the problems would spare Ethiopia much trouble. Somali leaders have repeatedly embarked on political adventures to appear as national leaders, but politics in Somalia is complex, with deep divisions at both the elite level and within the society based on clan and subclan divisions; it takes a lot of effort, and resources, to unite rival interests and govern all the territories effectively from the center. Time and again since 1991, Somali leaders have tried to forge a common objective on the basis of nationalism or using the Islamic Ummah, but the result has been turmoil that threatens all of its neighbors.

Given these realities, the work of any leader in Somalia is an uphill struggle. To be considered a Somali leader in the eyes of all Somalis, those who come to power are forced to try to exaggerate indigenous nationalism, pursue irredentist foreign policy, or put forward messages of religious universalism in a way that antagonizes customary interstate relations in the Horn of Africa. Rather than taking risks and telling Somalis what the reality is on the basis of rules governing interstate relations, leaders in Somalia tend to concentrate on issues that have provoked regional actors to intervene in self-defense or create buffer zones to fend off threats emanating from both within Somalia's territories or from proxies outside its borders. Somali leaders are also engaged in other activities that do not help their country. Based on Stephen Stedman's analysis of spoiler problems in peace processes,[12] political scientist Ken Menkhaus has identified Somalia's leaders as spoilers who "have successfully undermined peace accords to perpetuate armed conflict" and "acted only to undercut local efforts to improve law and order and reduce criminality," while "still others support peace-building and the reduction of crime, but block efforts to revive an effective central government."[13]

Somalia's neighbors have also failed to recognize the challenges and all too often continue to pursue aggressive and contradictory policies toward Somalia. The events of 2006 vividly demonstrate this point: The ICU fought and defeated Somalia's U.S.-supported warlords, organized under the clever banner of "the Alliance for the Restoration of Peace and Counter-Terrorism," and took control of Mogadishu and the surrounding areas. That much is accepted as fact. But there are conflicting views of what then unfolded. Ethiopia, for example, had no problem with ICU's defeat of the warlords in 2006, since they had created obstacles to the relocation of the Transitional Federal Government (TFG) from Nairobi to Mogadishu. At the outset, Ethiopia took ICU's rise to power as an opportunity, although the ICU's policies would subsequently become unacceptable and unhelpful.[14]

With the international community's failure to appreciate the looming danger, Ethiopia approached the problems of Somalia

using a two-pronged approach, engaging with the ICU to peacefully resolve the conflicts while continuing to assist the TFG's institutions to consolidate peace. Ethiopia held eight negotiations with the ICU in various capitals, including Nairobi, Khartoum, London, Djibouti, Sana'a, and Dubai. Ethiopia could live with an Islamic government in Somalia provided that ICU leaders accepted international law governing interstate relations and that the ICU did not allow elements undermining Ethiopia's national security to operate in areas it controlled. But the ICU interpreted this as weakness, declared jihad against Ethiopia, and subsequently boasted that its forces would be praying in Addis Ababa in a month. Bent on opening a second front against Ethiopia, Eritrea's leaders also manipulated ICU leaders, pitting one against the other and causing an internal split.

The underlying challenge for Ethiopia was the possible destruction of the buffer zone it had painstakingly constructed and the security threat the ICU posed to relatively peaceful areas in Somalia. But the war with the ICU was over in a matter of days. Given the numerous allegations that have been made about Ethiopia carrying out the United States' "war on terror," it is important to note that the United States in fact strongly advised Ethiopia not to get militarily involved. U.S. officials pointed toward the difficulties in Iraq and expressed concern about another such failure in Somalia. Certainly, after Ethiopia had won the war, the United States provided critical support in the United Nations Security Council to ensure that international condemnation would not arise. And the international community was muted, proffering neither support nor condemnation. The international media, on the other hand, claimed that U.S. Special Forces were embedded with Ethiopian forces on the ground, assisting with the operation – an allegation that was far from the truth. In fact, the United States was surprised by the swift conclusion of the war and was interested in learning how Ethiopia succeeded.[15] The ICU's defeat helped Ethiopia to ensure its buffer zone's sustainability. This exemplifies how states can defy advice from bigger partners on matters of their own security and respond directly to threats undermining their established buffer zones.

Failed states are destabilizing. This fact ultimately forced Ethiopia to set up buffer zones in Somalia. An asymmetry of capabilities means that the failed state can nonetheless continue war through other means via actors used as proxies. The case of the Ethiopia-Somalia buffer zones clearly illustrates how strong states may see it as imperative to fend off threats through unilateral intervention, or to carefully marshal international support in the name of peacekeeping. So long as strong states carefully manage the ungoverned spaces, without getting involved in activities that attract a huge media outcry, the international community actually supports the strategy. The Kenya-Somalia buffer zones are similar in this regard, although the Kenyan military has not fully succeeded in warding off threats. Kenya has the benefit of material support from the international community, however, which will also usually turn a blind eye to state actions taken in self-defense, even if they undermine international norms, provided that they do not threaten the interests of great powers or spark a media uproar.

Moreover, outside countries may often, if surreptitiously, encourage and pay for such actions, through a peacekeeping mission or through an arrangement that is not publicly disclosed. That is why the creation of the buffer zone does not weaken formulated international norms and succeeds in contributing to the security of the intervening state. Moreover, it is evident that the unilateral creation of buffer zones – whether

to encourage the potentiality for creating a failed state, speed up the creation of new states, or create areas ready to be annexed for inclusion in a larger and more powerful state – might threaten stability in the longer term.

In light of this, how might the international community use buffer zones to further peace and stability, building local governance structures with a capacity for fighting terrorist groups and to facilitate the return of refugees to their homeland? Buffer zones create a framework for local administrations to establish governance structures on the basis of strong local political alliances and informal clan networks with institutions governing the behaviors of key actors in the area. This interweaving of informal clan networks and institutions can create a defense mechanism that can keep groups like Al Shabaab at bay, or fight them militarily when necessary. In Somalia, a national defense force cannot address the threat of Al Shabaab; government forces have no mechanism to protect soldiers from Al Shabaab's selective revenge actions.[16] But Puntland forces have recently found success against Al Shabaab and supporters of the Islamic State because tightly knit clan institutions protect Puntland soldiers and have given guarantees that those involved in killing Al Shabaab will be protected, although the administration's failure to pay salaries affects the work of the security forces.

The international community needs a paradigm shift from a highly centralized approach to one more closely aligned with Somalia's new federal structure, and it needs to concretely support Somalia's islands of peace.[17] Using the buffer zone to expand areas of peace and security may be critical, both in terms of fighting terrorism and providing a favorable situation for returning refugees to their places of origin, once a structured administrative capacity that will defend Somalis from terrorist groups is created locally. Moreover, administrations in buffer zones might lead to better representation and enforce better elite bargaining, making the outcomes of state-building sustainable over the long term. These suggestions are tailored for Somalia; other contexts demand equally information-intensive and locally engaged strategies designed to address their particular contexts. Those of us who live next to failed states have few other options. And we might have much to teach to others who are geographically better off and perhaps a bit less patient.

ENDNOTES

[1] Stefano Guzzini and Dietrich Jung, eds., *Contemporary Security Analysis and Copenhagen Peace Research* (Abingdon, United Kingdom: Routledge, 2004).

[2] Barry Buzan and Ole Wæver, *Regions and Powers: The Structure of International Security* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

[3] Herbert M. Howe, *Ambiguous Order: Military Forces in African States* (Boulder, Colo.: Lynne Rienner, 2001).

[4] This is a definition for *buffer zone* offered by the Random House Kernerman Webster's College Dictionary.

[5] For a further discussion on areas of limited statehood, see Thomas Risse and Eric Stollenwerk, "Limited Statehood Does Not Equal Civil War," *Dædalus* 147 (1) (Winter 2018).

[6] William Reno, "Redefining Statehood in the Global Periphery," in *Government of the Shadows: Parapolitics and Criminal Sovereignty*, ed. Eric Wilson and Tim Lindsey (London: Pluto Press, 2009).

[7] The Ethiopian constitution provides for an ethnic-based federal arrangement, guaranteeing Ethiopian Somalis the right to govern themselves.

[8] The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Ethiopia responded to the embassy in Mogadishu on January 5, 2009, with options to accommodate the ASWJ to strengthen Ethiopia's buffer zone.

[9] Apart from providing capacity-building support to strengthen ASWJ administrations, Ethiopia solicits support from other partners in terms of security, humanitarian assistance, and rehabilitation efforts.

[10] The Digil and Merifle clans, commonly known as the Rahanweyn, are sedentary clans that live in the most fertile areas of the Bay, Bakool, and Lower Shebelle regions. These are the Somali clans most subjugated by the other aggressive pastoralist clans.

[11] "Explaining Ethiopia's Curious Strategy in Somalia," Somalia Newsroom, April 1, 2013, https://somalianewsroom.com/2013/04/01/explaining-ethiopias-curious-strategy-in-somalia/.

[12] Stephen John Stedman, "The Spoiler Problem in Peace Processes," *International Security* 22 (2) (1997): 5 – 53.

[13] Ken Menkhaus, "Governance without Government in Somalia: Spoilers, State Building and the Politics of Coping," *International Security* 31 (3) (Winter 2006/2007): 74 – 106.

[14] As the *chef de cabinet* of the foreign minister of Ethiopia, one of the authors had the opportunity to lead an Ethiopian delegation to the negotiations to open the first dialogue with the ICU representatives in Nairobi. The negotiations were conducted for two days without a breakthrough. Thinking that they had defeated warlords organized and supported by the U.S. government, ICU leaders were emboldened and threatened to take both political and military action against Ethiopia. Ultimately, faced with ICU threats and requests from the TFG leadership for support, Ethiopia was forced into a war of the ICU's making in December 2006.

[15] Both authors traveled to the United States in April 2007 and met with the then-secretary of state and national security advisor of the Bush administration. The U.S. officials were open in their appreciation and wanted to learn what exactly happened, and they expressed the U.S. government's commitment to assisting Ethiopia going forward. See also Menkhaus, "Governance without Government in Somalia."

[16] Stathis Kalyvas, *The Logic of Violence in Civil Wars* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

[17] Ilya Gridneff and Brian O'Sullivan, "A New Path Emerges for Troubled Somali Security," IPI Global Observatory, November 8, 2016, https://theglobalobservatory.org/2016/11/somalia-al-shabaab-amisom-ethiopia/.