Contemporary Banditry in the Horn of Africa: Causes, History and Political Implications[*]

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ABSTRACT

Banditry that cannot be categorized as traditional feuding has failed to attract international scholarship despite its pervasiveness and devastation to an already politically fragile Horn of Africa. This article decries the lack of scholarly interest on the subject, which it links to the treatment of the problem as a concern purely for the Third World, and the United Nations ineffectiveness in dealing with subnational tensions. While there is a general academic draught on the subject, some of the existing literature romanticizes the brigand and fails to establish a firm anchor of the phenomenon with geopolitical issues that wrap together poverty, political instability and inexorable lawlessness. Therefore this article briefly addresses this gap in our knowledge of organized banditry whose motive, opportunity, and means though manifested within the State, are actually symptoms of regional problems. It traces the causes, history, and implications of four families of brigands, Kafagne, Faloul, Ngoroko, and the Shifta found in the turbulent Horn of Africa today. In the concluding reflections, several measures are recommended for the regional governments and the international society to eradicate the problem.

INTRODUCTION

If one can advance a general theory on banditry in the area of study, it is that, although social breakdown is a constant stimulus for brigandage within the State, its escalation, and threat to regional security is a factor of the unstable external political environment. In other words, even where authoritarian political elite spark off banditry through the economic insulation of certain ethnic groups, their attitude is an extension of the indifference of the international society to the symmetrical connexion between regional political instability, poverty, and lawlessness. Even so, constructing a generalizable theory on banditry has attendant difficulties due to the conspicuous literary barrenness on the subject, particularly the paucity of academic analysis of its nature and regional implications. Without such an authoritative frame of reference, banditry that cannot be classified as traditional feuding will continue to hinder scholarly attempts to analyse its threat to security, as it will be difficult to explain the extent to which it emanates from, or is restrained by, specific international circumstances. This lacuna may be explained in part by the limitation of empirical investigation due to the insecurity experienced by field researchers that arises from hostility that typifies a bandit's environment, where it is physically dangerous to be a stranger. Yet, desk research has to grapple with the risk of sensationalism that can turn the portrayal of tragedy into catharsis. The problem is aggravated by the

erroneous impression that bandit warfare is purely a problem for the developing countries. Consequently, the phenomenon fails to attract international scholarship, which leads to a conspicuous imbalance in our knowledge of the subject when compared to other forms of violence.

This article is a brief attempt to examine the causes, history and implications of four families of brigands*, Kafagne, Ngoroko, Faloul,* and the *Shifta* that freely roam the Horn of Africa to emphasize that banditry is a symptom of wider political problems in a turbulent geopolitical environment. Furthermore, the United Nations' (UN) lack of plausible mechanism for pro-active resolution of sub-national tensions of this nature justifies this study making the recommendations advanced apply to other parts of the African continent. Sympathy is with the prediction by Creveld (1991: 195-197) that bandits can attain a level of violence that is not easily stoppable by governments as regular armies visibly lose the initiative and monopoly of policing the society. Furthermore, by its nature, banditry in the area of study presents laissez-faire of a kind where individual and community relationships are increasingly built on domination and coercion. Brigands' selfishness, competitiveness, and dependence on the instruments of violence mirror the structure of the contemporary international hegemonic alliances; hence the added relevance of the subject under discussion.

A Kenyan Turkana described banditry in Swahili language as, *"vita hii haina uso wala kisogo"* literally translated to *"this war has no face or nape of the neck"[1]*. His statement may have stemmed from exasperation resulting from incessant raids and counter-raids between his bandits and those of Uganda, Sudan and Ethiopia, but it underpins the mystique and inhuman nature of banditry when compared to other forms of organized violence. Bearing in mind that collective predilection of these pastoral people is still based on lateral bonding through a high degree of linguistic affinity, miscegenation, commensality, barter trade and the common pursuit of pastoral economy, internecine banditry begs an explanation. Second, although the motive for contemporary banditry is the pauperization of people that live in a harsh physical environment, the opportunity and means emanate from existing political turmoil in the region where recent civil wars have made arms bearing a part of their material culture.

The available literature on the Horn of Africa focuses mostly on social banditry in the 19th century whose motive as noted by Crummey (1986: 133-144), was to protest against centralism of authority. Further, traditional banditry has been explored as a vocation where individuals waged war against greedy village chiefs or the political unit on behalf of the local community while living in the forest as hermits until justice was exacted (Crumney 1986: 151-167). In the area of study, Hodson (1927) is among pioneer scholars on the subject. He argues that whereas the motive for traditional banditry was protest and redress, the opportunity was the existence of a bureaucracy that was too rudimentary to control the periphery of the social-political unit[2] such as the pre-nineteenth century Abyssinian (Amharic) Empire (Hodson 1927: 71, 120; Hurd 1965). In a way, this article revisits the reincarnation of this bandit in

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[1]   Authors interview.
[2]   Although not central to thee discussion the theme emerges clearly in Hodson (1927).

economically underdeveloped countries of the Horn of Africa. Some discussions on the phenomena have been adulatory and explicated positive aspects to traditional brigandage, as an honourable option that attracted sons of the poor or those that wanted to attach a sense of self-achievement beyond customary inheritance (Greenfield 1965: 73, 254). Markakis (1974) and Hess (1970) have noted that in some traditional African polities the exploits of a bandit were celebrated in the oral narratives of the community (Markakis 1974: 380; see also Hess 1970: 119, 186). Thus, names of individual brigands were immortalized by their community, which in fact sanctioned and preserved the tradition of brigandage. In general, the running theme in the existing literature on the subject is that the rise of the social bandit in the region before the nineteenth century was due to the dissolution of law and order. However, their analysis is short on the attraction of cross-border banditry to people dislocated en mass by civil wars, its domino effect, and the anchor of banditry to regional political instability. Hobsbawn (1969) has been the frame of reference for many scholars for exceptionally assembling inaccessible primary evidence that he collates into a coherent body of theories on the subject. Notwithstanding, he does not suggest concerted methods by the international society of limiting the devastation caused by banditry or its mutation through sons of bandits. He has also avoided discussing banditry as a tradition obtaining among pastoral people, choosing to treat their form of interaction as harmless traditional feuding. This article focuses on Hobsbawn's omission inasmuch as violent banditry among pastoral communities of the Horn cannot be called traditional feuding considering that the motive, means, and opportunity have no bearing on the people's ancestral way of life.

Hobsbawn's (1969: 23) postulation that by virtue of its limited horizons banditry cannot drastically shape the course of history has been overtaken by post-Cold War events. This angle of reasoning is criticized on the premise that today organized bandits challenge the existence of the State that was inherited from colonialism, which, as observed by Hall et al. (1984: 9-27) and Dunleavy and O'leary (1987: 322-348), may be defined by identifying essential features within a specific historical context. A State may be defined by its organization and functions as an operational political entity with legally acquired authority and autonomous institutions for looking after the interests of its subjects within a unified geographical territory and outside it. Key characteristics include the recognition of its sovereignty, a formal government with legitimacy, and organized and recognizable means of policing the society. Thus, statehood implies the existence of one centre of power and unquestionable authority. Arguably, a State ceases to exist after a credible parallel alternative exists that imposes its authority on sizeable portions of the society and denies the constituted State access to the same. Such situations exist during incipient insurgency and are a constant prelude to the disintegration of the State. Siad Barre's Somalia elucidates this point clearly. Outlaws destroyed the legally constituted State in 1991 leading to the balkanization of the territory into three thiefdoms that are today based on hegemonic power base of the dominant clan confederacy. Thus, given that the unification of former British Somaliland and the Italian Trusteeship in 1960 was seen as an historical achievement and a step towards state formation, then, outlaws

reversed this historical process after thirty years of political independence. Arguably, even in Somalia, the outlaw was born of simmering regional instability that was an extension of global political power vacuum following the disintegration of the USSR. At the time of writing, the Somali have survived for almost a decade in a stateless society thus questioning the sanctity attached to sovereignty, or its relevance, as a principle aspect of defining a State[3].The survival of millions of ethnic Somali without the authority, protection, direction or representation of a government is in itself unprecedented in the political-history of post-colonial Africa.

In this discussion, the word 'tribe' and 'ethnic group' are used loosely but conscious that African political units have been referred to as such pejoratively to downplay their political-economic sophistication. Similarly, although nomadism and transhumance can apply to distinct methods of land use, in this article nomadism will be assumed to encompass transhumance. Likewise, this discussion of banditry adopts the position by Hobsbawn (1969) and Crummey (1986) where banditry is discussed as a means that is used by politically disenfranchised or economically neglected communities to defy the predatory state. Using this guideline the article has avoided discussing the situation in Sudan where banditry exists as part of the modus operandi for militia armies of various factions fighting each other or against the government in Khartoum.

1. ENVIRONMENTAL STIMULI

A geographical exploration of the Horn is vital to an understanding of the violence under investigation, which is stimulated partly by the physical environment, and the human conditions of the Horn of Africa. A large portion of the Horn experiences such intense heat that the inhabitants refer to this habitat as *Guban,* meaning scorched earth. Life for the residents is a perpetual conflict with a harsh and difficult environment where healthy soil, pasture and safe water are difficult to find. As a result, there has developed a strong traditional differentiation between pastoralists that dominate the larger part of the Horn and cultivators found in the cool highlands and the riverside areas where water is constant and the soil suitable for agriculture. To some extent this traditional economic distinction, although in itself not a cause of friction, reflects ethnic differences between a broad spectrum of pastoral nomads and the sedentary cultivators (Graves and Last 1974: chapter 9; Ojany and Ogendo 1973: chapter 1; Plothero 1969: chapter 4). Except in the north, landforms are not the limiting factor on economic utilization of land, rather, climatic conditions control the physical element.

Somali and Oromo speakers combined occupy the largest portion of the Horn of Africa. Somalis are of the Hamitic ethnic stock but enjoy homogeneity, characterized by similar physical appearance, language, culture, religion, and the pursuit of a pastoral economy[4].They are divided into two physically indistinguishable cleavages,

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[3]   On the same breadth it is possible to argue for the justification of violating the sovereignty of a State on moral grounds to end organized violence such as banditry.
[4]   For the most detailed study, see Lewis (1961: 36-47) and Lewis (1988: chapter 1).

the Sab and Samaale. The former are cultivators and semi-pastoralists while the latter are pastoralists going by Jacob's (1965) definition as: 'people making their living wholly off their flocks without settling down to plant or people who are chiefly dependent on their herds of domesticated stock for subsistence' (Jacobs 1965: 144-154; Silberman 1959: 560). Nevertheless, in the Horn of Africa survival today entails a flexible lifestyle to conform to erratic demographic and ecological exigencies to the extent that there are problems when attempting to identify a pastoral nomad *par excellence*.

The riverside area and the better-watered coastal region in the south-east attract a heavy population density, particularly among the sedentary agricultural communities. Throughout the Horn, rainfall is extremely scarce and low, ranging from 1 inch to a maximum of 20 inches per annum and when it does fall, it is brief, erratic, variable, unreliable, and limited in time and space. Its effectiveness is further reduced by rapid run off where there is no colonization due to scorching heat that generates high evaporation and transpiration. In most places the result is overgrazing and severe environmental degradation, that increases the likelihood of desertification. With stock and domestic water supply being inadequate constant mobility is therefore not just for the pastoral nomads but it includes impoverished cultivators. Drought is a recurrent feature in the Horn, but at times there is excessive precipitation that disrupts and damages the normal cycle of farming and grazing. Generally, people of the Horn inhabit an extremely harsh physical environment and in order to survive the traditional social structure is still characterized by social competition and conflict between descent groups over scarce water and pasture. The difficult terrain has in part prevented any of the regional governments from effectively communicating and establishing legitimacy in the periphery of the State. Equally, adverse environmental conditions have led pastoral nomads to dominate a large area where there are no exclusive rights to pasturage and water except during conditions of extreme draught. This mode of existence has also militated against the development of centralized authority. Furthermore, the habitat is conducive for the existence of pastoral nomads whose nationality remains eccentric because the link to specific land is intermittent to correspond with ecological requirements. All this being so, the natural environment of the pastoral nomad accentuates the need for survival and self-preservation which is an essential precursor to banditry.

2. REGIONAL DIMENSION OF BANDITRY

Past and modern African history establishes a firm anchor between banditry and international politics. An example is of *Shifta* bandits during the British Military Administration of Eritrea (1941-1952) whose violence was specifically directed on foreigners, British and Italians, and groups with opposing political views on the future of Eritrea (FO 371/90320, FO 1015/146, FO 1015/524). Although internal socio-economic problems provided the motive for banditry within Eritrea, the uncertainty of the imperialists over the future of the territory allowed banditry to crystallize into formidable nationalist guerrilla movements. In the Ogaden, ethnic Somalis fighting to

secede from Ethiopia are called bandits or freedom fighters depending on whether one sympathizes with the 'Greater Ethiopia' or 'Greater Somalia' version of irredentism. Hence, although internal problems allow lawlessness to thrive among pauperized Ogadenis, it is the failure to resolve the Somali-Ethiopian boundary that gives legitimacy and sustenance to banditry in the area. Here is a case where the arbitrary colonial boundary dissected the Somali community to serve imperial interests in total disregard of the disruption to their rhythm of life. Ironically, they resulted in ethnic reinforcements where a Somali of the Ogaden retains bonding with his separated siblings, and traditional socio-economic and political units that are in Somalia. Somalia symbolizes its primary selfhood and mechanism for controlling behaviour, and conversely, Ethiopia is the land of plunder. Banditry that thrives here is not a strictly cultural facet but a commercial venture facilitated by the use of firearms and the need to make quick money. Ethiopian political-economic insulation of the Ogaden Somali has promoted libertarianism and allowed authority and the management of violence to shift from recognized institutions to disaffected individuals. In this respect, resolving the Somali-Ethiopia dispute over the Ogaden is a step towards the eradication of organized lawlessness.

Although economic deprivation and political disenfranchisement of nomadic tribes of the periphery of the State is an essential motive to social banditry, this requires the complement of modern means of waging violence to seriously stretch and undermine the State's policing capability and traditional legitimacy. To elucidate this point, we take the example of the expansive region occupied by the Maasai tribe of Kenya and Tanzania. While their dry habitat experiences economic underdevelopment due to the lack of road communication, lack of basic facilities and industries that can generate employment or modern infrastructure that can bolster trade, the area does not report alarming cases of banditry. Yet, if martial qualities were a precondition for brigandage, the Maasai possess indomitable martial traits that are instilled in young men through a rigorous initiation process that includes painful circumcision and the killing of a lion while armed with only a spear and shield (Berntsen 1979). Furthermore, to raise livestock they have to physically fight off many predators that are natural in their habitat. Yet, the community cannot be described as militant or hooked to the inglorious art of killing typical of bandits in the region.

Two reasons may be advanced for not treating feudal cross-border raids by the Maasai as a serious threat to the rule of law. First, for them cattle rustling is the cultural thing it has always been with the same altruistic motive (sentimental satisfaction in animal wealth), opportunity (seasonal necessity) and means (spear and shield).Their raids are motivated by a need to establish supremacy on their victims through the possession of animal wealth they believe is rightfully theirs. Devastation remains carefully controlled by the social institution because of the warrior's strong links with his tribal gerontocracy where the authority of clan elder is functional. Consequently, social conscience and not individualism underpins livestock rustling on the rationale that 'relocating and redistributing' domestic animals is necessary to replace own stock that has been unfairly taken by *Ngai* (God), disease and drought. He does not live in a laissez-faire society, but in an orderly traditional polity whose

authority supercedes that of the predatory state. Second, the Maasai enjoy relative peace on both sides of the international border because of the existence of the rule of law in this part of Kenya and Tanzania. Consequently, despite having the motive, the lack of opportunity and firearms limits the devastation caused by cattle thieving among the Maasai, and their threat to regional peace and security is circumscribed. For this reason, despite economic isolation and political disenfranchisement of the Maasai, stability of the porous Tanzania-Kenya border ensures that dangerous firearms do not pass to the warriors in significant numbers that can escalate the devastation of cross-border cattle thieving by the tribe. A few examples of some of the renowned freewheeling bandit families will highlight the devastation and pervasiveness of the problem and elucidate that political instability is the root cause of criminality in the Horn of Africa.

3. FALOUL – BANDITS OF SUDAN'S BORDER WITH ERITREA AND ETHIOPIA

One conspicuous feature of the Post-Cold War era is the abrupt depreciation in the geo-strategic value of some regions of the Third World and by extension the indifference to organized violence that started during the Cold War. In the Horn of Africa contemporary bandits are the fallout of the proxy wars and political destabilisation that characterized the East-West confrontation during the Cold War. In his heyday, Mengistu of Ethiopia took advantage of the prevailing Cold War standoff to arm Ethiopia extravagantly with sophisticated hardware from the former USSR. He became Africa's most heavily armed USSR protégé as much to consolidate 'Greater Ethiopia' irredentism by suppressing various liberation movements, as to contain the quest for 'Greater Somalia' by the republic of Somalia that used arms from the Chinese, USSR, and the West. Some of the existing *Faloul* are remnant of factions that were armed by Mengistu's Ethiopia to fight in Eritrea. Others were disillusioned Eritrean fighters that could not cope with hard discipline and self-sacrifice, which was the hallmark of Eritrea's liberation struggle. For example, in 1977 a splinter faction of the Eritrean Liberation Front (ELF) formed the Eritrean Democratic Movement. This group was forcibly driven into Sudan by the combined force of ELF and Tigray Liberation Front (TPLF).Having displaced into an area that is not effectively administered by Ethiopia or Sudan, and lacking a corporate political impulse, this group turned to plunder. It was augmented by disaffected soldiers of the Sudanese Defence Force, and a mishmash of Sudanese tribal bandits that were not embraced by the SPLA or other splinter factions fighting the government in Khartoum. In this group was a new generation of bandits that were organized on military lines, with maps, combat radio communication, and modern weapons. What distinguished them from the Eritrean and Sudanese guerrillas was their lack of a political motive. So, the *Faloul* are a product of war that pushed them to the periphery of national life where survival for individuals and organized groups is possible due to ineffective policing by any regional country.

Traditionally, names of outlaws referred to distinct groups but this identity is now lost as the *Faloul* merge a coterie of disgruntled roving bands (Bennet 1991: chapter

6). *Faloul* are sustained by the protracted war in southern Sudan that has led to collateral damage of the country's infrastructure. It has also destroyed a customary norm where cultivators and pastoralists were traditionally held together by a symbiotic bond of mutual assistance in times of need. One residue of the war has been its vast dislocation of the population, and the introduction of impersonal relationships and mutual distrust. The inexhaustible supply of firearms from the protagonists in Sudan and the remnant of the wars in Eritrea and Ethiopia has created the environment that enables these bandits to consistently prey on vulnerable border communities for livestock. They also attack convoys and isolated shops. What is worrisome is their soaring numbers as persistent drought in the Sudan compounded by the government's continued lack of legitimacy in Africa's largest country makes banditry congenial to most able bodied persons. Moreover, when there is a protracted lull in the fighting, soldiers of rag-tag armies easily become bandits themselves. From Khartoum's point of view the *Faloul's* threat to Sudan's integrity is insignificant compared to the war waged by the Sudanese Peoples Liberation Army (SPLA) and other better organized liberation movements. The ominous implication is that the end of the *Faloul* is not in sight until the Sudan enjoys respectable governance that re-institutes the rule of law.

4. KAFAGNE – BANDITS OF THE ETHIOPIA-SUDAN AND ETHIOPIA-ERITREA BORDER

The second bandit family is the *Kafagne,* which in Amharic translates into a discontented person. Recent research indicates that these are former peasants of the pre-revolution Ethiopia. After the 1974 revolution their feudal lords were forced into exile by Mengistu's military Junta (Dergue) from where they started fighting the Ethiopian government (Bennet 1991). From 1988, Mengistu's army suffered systematic defeats at the hands of the Eritreans and Tigrayans culminating to the successful liberation of Eritrea by the EPLF in May 1991 (Markakis 1987). Invariably, all liberation campaigns had started in the countryside where economic neglect of the Dergue, prohibition of trade, and repressive communist serfdom had driven Amhara, Oromo, and Tigray peasants. The transition government of Ethiopia had as a priority to extend its legitimacy to the outlying areas by fighting bandit groups in the south, west and east of the country. Some of these were opportunists whose numbers were increased by the renegade soldiers of Mengistu's army. National liberation movements were so used to bandit warfare that they had little respect for the law of armed conflict to the extent that Mosques were desecrated and Churches turned into temporary barracks (Buckoke 1988: 13).

   Due to the absence of a corporate motive and lacking in political stimulus, the heavily armed *Kafagne* have degenerated into bandits for hire, a mercenary force living in no-man-land along Ethiopia's border with Eritrea and the Sudan. The opportunity to continue with brigandage is created by the absence of respectable form of authority along the Sudan-Eritrea-Ethiopian border and the Ethiopia-Eritrean border. What this suggests is that their continued survival in the region is guaranteed

for as long as the Sudan remains politically fragmented and the boundary between Eritrea and Ethiopia remains unsolved, an area that marks their safe haven. Unfortunately for them, the *Kafagne* have at one time or other fought for and against the Ethiopian government and the Eritrean nationalists while their lack of ethnic ties denies them permanent safe havens in the Sudan. For this reason they hop like hyenas of the battlefield from one country to the next because they cannot be rehabilitated by any due to their past sins and lack of corporate discipline or political philosophy. At present the government in Ethiopian or Eritrea may not feel intimidated by these bandits because they are geographically too far to threaten the political center of power. In any event, just like they were useful to each country in the past for attacking the other (Bennet 1991), they may be employed in similar vein as expendable dogs of war to substitute regular troops given the recent Eritrea-Ethiopia limited border war and on-going violations of each other's sovereignty. A most worrying development is that traditionally young adults practised banditry but contemporary *Kafagne* outlaws include minors aged 12 to 14 years (Bennet 1991). This is a remarkable shift in the character of banditry which, can be traced to protracted wars that have wasted a high percentage of the adult male population. Children have learned to toy with loaded automatic rifles in the refugee camps. Also disheartening is the dislocation of man as the traditional breadwinner, leaving a woman as the sole head of the family. In such situations, banditry has become a patrimonial vocation where young boys whose fathers are bandits easily follow in their footsteps. Lack of education or any form of recreation, and the collapse of the family as the basic social unit has increased the attraction of banditry and given these children a false sense of camaraderie.

5. NGOROKO – BANDITS OF THE ILEMI TRIANGLE, AND KENYA'S TURKANA AND POKOT DISTRICTS

Although banditry in the northwestern Kenya is not a byproduct of colonialism, Britain's preferential policy of recruiting from the 'Martial Races' reinforced the existing tradition of arms bearing among the Turkana. For example, at the beginning of World War 2, the build-up of British troops for attacking the Italians in Abyssinia was conducted in Lokitaung (Turkana district) where the 25th (East African) Brigade was garrisoned. The Brigade, which was composed of two infantry battalions, trained, armed and deployed 550 Turkana men who formed the bulk of its combatants. In recognition of their military ethos and courage, the Turkana formed the vanguard and flank scouts for upsetting any ambushes organized by regular Italian troops and Italian-armed Merille and Donyiro tribes of Ethiopia. The legacy inherited from colonialism was an area that had disproportionately high numbers of veterans of colonial wars whose sons and daughters had been accustomed to seeing a loaded rifle in the homestead and listening to gripping narratives of war. During colonialism, the area's potential in agriculture and livestock development was under-exploited while Turkana and Pokot ethnic communities were socially isolated from the mainstream Kenyan society except when used to perform traditional dances for entertaining

tourists and visiting government officials (KNA K.333.38). So right from the advent of colonial rule the Turkana and Pokot tribes retained devastating means of conducting organized violence while economic and political isolation of their geographical region during colonialism and after provided them with the motive and opportunity.

Currently there is infectious violence along Kenya's border with Uganda, and Sudan where sporadic bandit activities epitomize the level of political disaffection and insecurity brewing across the international frontier. This periphery of Kenya and Sudan is not only neglected administratively but it is so unimportant that the precise delineation of the Kenya-Sudan-Ethiopia trijunctional point known as the Ilemi Triangle is still pending (Ngatia 1984). Consequently, the area extending from the Ilemi Triangle due south into Kenya's Turkana and Pokot districts has become a battleground for nomadic tribes of no specific nationality. Due to the lack of governmental control, each tribe has its own armies of heavily armed bandits known as the *Ngoroko* that compete for the latest technology in small arms, particularly cheap ones from the former communist countries. Arms have percolated there from the north and north-eastern regions of Uganda from resistance movements that have taken up arms against the governments of Milton Obote I, General Idi Amin Dada, Milton Obote II, and the current President of Uganda, Yoweri Kaguta Museveni.

Basically a rifle and bandoleer full of ammunition make life livable. That *Ngoroko* bandits are responsive to global political changes may be adduced from the local price of a Kalashnikov rifle that is usually traded in American dollars. A new AK 47 rifle that sold for US $25 before the end of the Cold War is today exchanged with only ten kilograms of maize flour or a medium-size goat[5]. For any *Ngoroko,* a new AK 47 rifle is a better proposition that is a means of living, security, and a symbol of neo-machismo. Thus, *Ngoroko* banditry thrives in endemic poverty that springs from neglect by the existing state structure of Uganda, Kenya, Sudan, and Ethiopia, where geographical distance from each country's capital literally translates into distance from consideration of the people's economic advancement and security[6]. Given the harsh physical terrain that induces these nomads to compete over scarce resources of water and pasture, and the absence of authority, violence becomes an inexorable culture. Although it is primarily an aspect of survival as man and beast compete for subsistence, its escalation and devastation is only possible on account of small arms that percolate into the area. Brigandage has not only robbed people off material possessions, but their national identity as well to the extent that whenever a Kenyan Turkana is walking to his district headquarters, he says he is 'visiting Kenya' as in a foreign country (Mburu 1999). Peace will remain a chimera until regional governments work out collective security arrangements that includes disarming the nomads and extending economic development to the Kenya-Uganda border, Kenya-Sudan border, and Sudan-Uganda border where bandits currently operate. Nothing stops Kenya and Uganda from working out joint security steps to secure the rule of

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[5]   Author's interview, see Mburu (1999: 18).

[6]   This theme of the centre neglecting the periphery is discussed in Fukui and Turton (1979).

law and limit the freedom enjoyed by the *Ngoroko*. However, bandits may simply walk across the border into Sudan where, due to the on-going civil war in the south, the government in Khartoum may be unwilling and incapable of giving a hand in establishing collective security. Also, spasmodic relationships between Uganda and Sudan over accusations of military support for each other's dissident, and Kenya-Sudan dispute over the Ilemi Triangle make participation in collective security by the current regime in Sudan only remotely plausible.

6. SHIFTA – BANDITS OF THE KENYA-ETHIOPIA-SOMALIA BORDER

Contemporary banditry along Kenya's border with Ethiopia and Somalia is a consequence of a failed rehabilitation of former veterans of the four-year secessionist conflict that was supported by the Republic of Somalia. Known as the *Shifta* war, the attempted secession of Kenyan Somalis was due to sixty years of administrative isolation and political disenfranchisement of their region that made the frontier (NFD) a closed district through draconian legislation of 1926 and 1934. Movement to and out of the district was by the use of a 'pass' similar to the ones used in South Africa during apartheid. In the early phase of the *Shifta* war the Kenyan government confiscated domestic animals and for reasons of military expediency, pulled down huts that had been constructed outside government *Manyatta* (protected villages). Nomads that were victims of circumstance had reason to expect adequate compensation but this did not happen (KNA: DC/ISO/4/7/4). Before the Shifta secessionist war, a large herd of livestock, particularly healthy milch camels, was, as a general rule, the nomads' measure of a man's substance in the community. After the abortive secessionist war, an economic divergence that included trade and businesses replaced livestock as a basis of prestige. After having lost all their animal wealth to diseases, environmental degradation and through confiscation by the Kenyan government, some displaced pastoralists were unable to return to their nomadic occupation. Naturally, they found themselves gravitating to urban life where they were joined by shattered families, widows, and displaced children. Also dislocated were the Warta, the small gypsy community of the Boran that had for centuries lived as hunters and gatherers. This people found the laws of the state unreasonably harsh on poaching and wild animals too few due to human settlements that sprung up in the former wilderness[7].

By losing camels and donkeys, the rhythm of transhumance in search of pasture and water was disrupted forcing the previously ever moving nomads to adopt a sedentary lifestyle (Gudrun 1979: 51-54, 200-204). However, these pastoral nomads did not know how to grow crops despite having rich agricultural soil in their community territories. During the conflict, the Kenyan government introduced farming as the easiest and safest economic base only because guerrillas rarely raided farmlands for raw food for it is cumbersome, unmanly and outside a nomad's menu of

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[7] Author's interviews reveal that the Warta are almost extinct having been subsumed by the Boran.

meat and milk. Pastoral economy was further disrupted when water pans were abandoned for security reasons (Dixey 1943). Besides there was suspicion that the Kenyan government may have covertly carried out its threat of poisoning wells and other sources of water in remote areas of the region as a desperate measure of forcing nomads into protected villages[8].

After 1968, banditry escalated in the NFD because some disgraced former Shifta guerrillas returned home to their clans and inevitably continued the traditional inter-clan feuds and rustling in livestock. This time, however, banditry had transmuted from the 'innocuous tribal sport' into terrorism unleashed by hardened former guerrillas, that were used to killing and having little respect for the elders, or any symbol of formal authority. Furthermore, the Kenyan government destroyed a vital mechanism for checking behaviour when Sultans that were charismatic Somali leaders through several dynasties were replaced with chiefs that are low ranking civil servants (Mburu 1999). After the conflict ended in 1968, there has been no attempt to integrate former fighters into the mainstream of the Kenyan society. Thus, while loss of the principle means of livelihood by former supporters of Somali nationalism in the NFD provided a motive, their continued social-political isolation in the arid frontier provides the opportunity. The long-term implication to Kenya is that failure to disarm the pastoral nomads will entrench criminality and stagnate economic development in the NFD region thereby increasing Kenya's military spending to contain banditry. For the present, Somalia may ignore bandits operating along its border with Kenya and concentrate on the difficult task of waxing together antagonistic clan confederacies and instituting a formal mechanism for looking after the interests of its people. Somalia's State-formation may be a long and treacherous road of healing and reconstruction where organized banditry could later pose a more formidable obstacle than is currently apparent.

Banditry that followed the fragmentation of Somalia into clan dominated regions can be explained. With a total destruction of the economy, the only employment left for young men is banditry as a fleeting opportunity or under the ambit of the militia of one fiefdom or the other. Somalia's experience has also shown how banditry can be exported to another country through refugees that include former regular soldiers that hide sophisticated firearms in the bush for use to rob or execute rivals. Banditry in this frontier has also escalated because Somali Warlords that were denied freedom of action in Somalia by Operations Restore Hope found in Kenya inviolable hide-out within their clans (Petterson 1993a: 18; Petterson 1993b: 13). By shooting down a Kenyan army helicopter gunship in December 1996, they showed the ruthless sophistication that makes the distinction of modern bandits from regular soldiers academic (**The Economist**, 18-24th January 1997: 59, 62). It was the ultimate challenge to the authority of policing the society that is a central pillar of any state. This sophistication is no secret as the USA realized in Somalia where friendly bandits were used against the really bad ones prompting cynics to criticize the plan as

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[8]   See Britain's protest to this inhuman strategy in (FO 371-178534).

tantamount to appointing Al Capone Governor of a bank in USA (Kiley and Fletcher 1992: 9).

Today, Southern Ethiopia probably provides the apocalyptic paradigm of the evolution of banditry. Accepting that it was a product of anarchy, banditry should have given in to the rule of law after the disintegration of Mengistu's government in Ethiopia. However, post-war political instability creates the opportunity for heavily armed Ethiopian and Kenyan border tribes to continue engaging in organized cross-border plundering for livestock. For instance, in the last week of March 1997, an "organized army of bandits" (**Kenya Times** March 29th 1997: 15) composed of Ethiopian Shangilla raided Kenya shooting dead more than 100 people that included at least 19 Kenyan security officers (Mulee 1997: 1-2). In the week-long skirmishes with regular troops, they prevented the military from reaching the wounded or recovering the dead, virtually cut off road link to the Kenyan-Ethiopia border towns, and kidnapped government troops to be used as human shield. Again, on 24 October 1998, Ethiopian bandits teamed up with Kenyan Boran and struck with impunity killing 200 Kenyans of the Degodia clan of the Somalis living along the Kenyan-Ethiopia border (Consult 1999: 28-30). Furthermore, in May 1999 banditry entered a new phase when they used land mines along the Ethiopia-Kenyan border (**Sunday Nation** 23rd May 1999: 6). Whereas conventional forces recognize the indiscriminate devastation caused by land mines it must be remembered that bandits are not signatory to the Ottawa Agreement proscribing their use nor would bandits mark their location and inform the 'enemy' as a convention of war. From the author's experience in counter-bandit military operations bandits of the region presently lack the knowledge of manufacturing land mines. Whereas some mines are from previous and on-going civil wars, it is also possible that mine warfare by bandits is in response to global attempts to proscribe their use that may have enabled certain nations to get rid of their old stock in a very obscene manner. Appreciably, this development has prompted Kenya-USA joint military exercises in bandit-prone areas of northern Kenya where there has been unveiled plea to the local populace to expose known bandits (**Daily Nation** 30th April 1999: 20).

7. WHAT CAN BE DONE?

Having highlighted that banditry in each country is part of a wider regional political instability, the inevitable focus is on what can be done. It is tempting to assume that a simple way of combatting banditry is to absorb militarized tribes en masse into the regular security forces of the region. However, conscript armies have become unpopular and unfordable due to a change in the international political environment that begun with the end of the Cold War. Furthermore, the line between soldiery and banditry has become blurred due to characteristic unprofessional behaviour by praetorians that in the past propped up authoritarian regimes by turning their guns on their own people. Consequently, the glamour and elitist image that characterized apolitical soldiery has been lost. In addition, modernization of the militaries in the region has rejected brawn in preference of brain as the key quality of the soldier of

the future. Unfortunately, due to neglect in developing infrastructure in the outlying parts of the state most nomadic youth cannot meet the educational or medical criteria required in the selection process for service in the country's armed forces. Besides, prescriptions from the International Monetary Fund, World Bank and other agencies are tied to, among other things, a reduction in military spending. While there is logic in the post-Cold War condition, the armed forces are no longer the mass employer they used to be while stringent selection of recruits is unfair to nomads from disadvantaged regions. Moreover, a soldier's ethnicity is important in portraying an apolitical image through a system of distributing military appointments that disregards individual professional merits in order to achieve what has euphemistically been labelled 'tribal mathematics'. In the event, the colonial legacy of ethno-military identity has become obscure and no longer secures jobs in the armed services for martial tribes thus making banditry a parallel institution to the military. For people with a long tradition of carrying weapons and with unlimited access to modern ones, brigandage is lucrative, protective to its members and definitely utilitarian.

At the regional level eradication of banditry could start with a dedicated study of the problem incorporating indigenous residents of the Horn as much as possible. Physical and weather constraints have been contributive factors to banditry, a situation that is exacerbated by inexplicable epidemics which pastoral nomads of the area resignedly blame on God (Mburu 1999). Lawlessness can be alleviated if the governments in the region embark on serious economic development particularly in the livestock industry. Due to demographic and ecological pressure, pastoral nomadism has become inconsistent thereby increasing the propensity for resource conflicts over water and good pasture. Cultural institutions that regulated community behaviour and economic development have crumbled. Inhabitants of the Horn that were interviewed feel that from within, banditry can be constrained if clan elders are recognized and supported by each government so that they play the role of inter-tribal Ombudsman. Currently, apart from former Somalia, low level civil servants that are devoid of any traditional *locus standi* exercise authority on a people that do not recognize their traditional legitimacy. In other words, victims of banditry feel that the re-institution of pre-colonial mechanism for controlling social behaviour is a possible solution to banditry. Clan home guards are deemed to be more effective in stepping out localized inter-clan banditry through proactive dialogue within the community as opposed to employing coercive methods using regular troops that are usually seen as intruders.

Whereas regional governments readjust their social-economic and political orientation to meet the north-south predicaments of the post-Cold War World, banditry will continue its devastating dislocation of populations, and destabilisation of each country from within and across the borders[9]. Yet, acquiescence over banditry cannot be allowed under the pretext of respecting the inviolability of the sovereignty of any state provided by paragraph 7 of United Nations (UN) Article 2 that prevents interference on 'matters which are essentially within the domestic jurisdiction of any

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[9]   For the origin of the term 'Third World' consult Harris (1987: 18).

state'. In view of the domino effect of banditry, especially where the international boundaries are still in dispute, the meaninglessness of this clause is evident but outside the current inquiry. Nevertheless, it accentuates the point that there lacks a collective mechanism for resolving existing violence from within states and in the region.

Something must be done at the international level given the UN's success rate of only 15 percent for all post-Cold War peacemaking operations (Goulding 1999: 155-166). It is inexcusable that the UN was structured to deal with functioning governments and lacks the knowledge, interest, or mechanism of dealing with fluid nondescript scenarios that form the world of a bandit. The UN's silence over many insurgencies raging in the world indicates a need to critically assess the organization's capability and to re-evaluate its intervention jurisdiction to situations of violence other than conventional war. The UN requires impartiality and transparency in decision-making, and specialization on the type of violence arrogantly referred to in military manuals of the developed countries as 'Small Wars' or 'Military Operations Other Than War'. For that reason, contemporary banditry in the Horn of Africa calls for more specificity than is contained in the current UN Secretary General's 'Agenda for Peace' (Boutros 1992).

A major problem for the contemporary global hegemony is how to control the flow of weapons to the Horn of Africa or similar regions where abject poverty and state of anarchy increase sub-national tensions. In a uni-polar World that is increasingly intervention-shy due to over-politicization of war, and prohibitive cost in finance and human lives, what is the possibility of an international effort to contain contemporary banditry? Unpredictable forms of organized violence such as banditry cry for the creation of an institution that is less bureaucratic than the United Nations that will be accessible to antagonistic groups and less symbolic of the realpolitik of one power. This could be a firm reason for the formation, equipping, training, and deploying of specialized regional Task Forces while inter-state wars remain the concern of the United Nations Organization. The Organization of African Unity (OAU) or the recently re-activated East African Community may borrow a leaf from ECOWAS but specialize more on counter-banditry that is endemic in the region and be less pursuant of politically motivated interventions. Currently the existing organization is built on the premise that regional integration is more feasible in the economic field, which is a delusion unless security and political stability can be given equal measure of importance. Before then, a passive approach through economic aid and training of counter-bandit troops may be the best that the international system can immediately offer regional governments.

It may sound paradoxical recommending a role for the United States' hegemony in alleviating this problem given the general perception that, as seen in Somalia, success in irregular wars is outside America's tactical menu. Notwithstanding, having shown that banditry has regional security implications, enabling technical assistance from Western governments can reduce the symmetry between poverty and lawlessness that leaves politically unstable nations of the Horn reminiscing the days of the Cold War. It is the opinion that night fighting capability, firepower, and close quarter combat

radios can help regular soldiers achieve technological edge over the bandits. Ironically, these are unfordable and not a priority over the basic needs of shelter, education, water and medicine to cope with a horde of diseases such as AIDS and Malaria.

To mount successful counter-banditry operations requires one to identify and win the co-operation of the victims of banditry who then provide vital human intelligence. It requires time and patience to inculcate trust among the victims and to convince them of the government's unconditional commitment to their security and sustainable development. As experienced by American troops in Somalia, this factor makes foreign intervention unsuitable to contain banditry. Junior American commanders lacked the time to consolidate and exploit any counter-bandit successes due to political interests that changed the mission at the strategic level turning the soldier from a benevolent friend at the beginning of the mission into a bitter enemy towards the end of UNOSOM II. From personal experience, bandit warfare involves recurrent close-quarter skirmishes where superior training, and technology, are combat multipliers that can change the outcome of firefights. Regional governments can elicit this technology given that American involvement in extensive counter-banditry operations in Colombia between 1959 to 1965 brought out many lessons that Third World countries can benefit from (Rempe 1995: 304-327). Britain's experience in Northern Ireland and many other policing operations abroad can provide suitable lessons too. Maximum prudence would have to be employed since national resources of countries of the Horn may not afford the firepower and lavish technology employed by the developed Western countries. Having said that, it must be emphasized that banditry is only the symptom of a wider intra-state problem that cannot be eradicated through recourse to purely coercive methods. Rather, collective effort must address the national and international social, economic and political factors that are the root causes of banditry. In the long term, peace in this part of the world will remain elusive as long as the international community continues to ignore the plight of southern Sudan, disputed boundaries, the continued fragmentation of former Somalia into clan fiefdoms, and the political instability permeating each government in the region.

8. CONCLUSION

This article started by suggesting that, although banditry can be ignited by economic and political instability within the State, it is the epitome of a wider phenomenon where there is a symmetrical connexion between poverty, political instability, and infectious lawlessness. Four bandit families have been identified that exist along the border regions of each state of the Horn whose motive, means and opportunity for lawlessness have been traced to proxy wars and civil strife that started during the Cold War. Ecological factors have been identified as having a debilitating effect on pastoral economy making lawlessness an alternative means of livelihood. Notwithstanding, banditry is sustained by weapons that are steadily percolating into the area and the continued insulation of certain regions from within by their states and

without by the international community. In the immediate term, appropriate training and materiel support by the developed world can help security forces of the region achieve an edge over the bandits to secure life and property. Also recommended is a resolution of territorial disputes which will immediately deny bandits safe havens and provide each regional government with the mandate to police its borders. In the long term, it is recommended that social-economic and political instability be addressed which are the root causes of banditry, as well as the formation of regional and international mechanisms for pro-active resolution of sub-national tensions currently assumed to be within domestic matters of independent states. The sooner this is done the better given that covert transfer of technology makes the production of weapons of mass destruction no longer the monopoly of the developed World, hence banditry in the second millennium may be more sophisticated, widespread, and costly to put down.

*   N/B. This article is original work by Nene Mburu that has not been published but contains excerpts from the author's Ph.D. thesis on the Shifta. The author is currently preparing to defend Ph.D. dissertation in War Studies at the University of London. He is a retired Kenyan Army officer, trained in Kenya, USA and UK. He is a member of the Royal African Society and a member of the War Studies Society. He holds a BA in Political Science and MA in War Studies (University of London). His book on Oral Literature is due in October 1999. The author's address: Nene Mburu, 5 Rowan Court, 66 Burnt Ash Hill, London, SE12 OHS. Telephone / Fax 0181-8512616. Mobile phone 07957940704.

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