Proceedings of the 3rd International Conference on Global Politics and Socio-Humanities
DOI: 10.54254/2753-7048/2025.23821

The Impact of China's Participation in Security Governance in the Horn of Africa on International Relations and Geopolitics

Yuqiao He

Harbin Normal University, Harbin, China
veronicaYQHE@163.com

Abstract: The Horn of Africa is a peninsula located in the northeastern part of Africa. Its geographical location means that it plays an important role in contemporary geopolitics. The Horn of Africa faces numerous security challenges. China, guided by the Global Security Initiative, actively participates in the region's security construction through peaceful cooperation. China not only provides support in both traditional and non-traditional security fields but also helps with infrastructure development, strengthens economic cooperation to enhance security and stability. This paper employs a research methodology that combines literature review and case analysis, focusing on China's involvement in the security governance of the Horn of Africa, the achievements made, and their impacts. The conclusion of this study explores the implications of China's participation for international relations and geopolitics, aiming to deepen China-Africa cooperation and advance the practice of global security governance.

Keywords: Horn of Africa, security cooperation, geopolitics, international relations

1. Introduction

The "Horn of Africa", located in north-eastern Africa, is a peninsula in East Africa located on the southern shore of the Gulf of Aden and is the easternmost region of the continent. Its narrow geographic scope includes Djibouti, Ethiopia, Eritrea and Somalia, while its broader geographic scope also includes Sudan, South Sudan, Uganda and Kenya.

The region is of unique strategic significance, not only as a geographical concept but also as a geopolitical one. The "Horn of Africa" connects Europe, Asia and Africa, and is therefore of great shipping value and strategic significance, playing an important role in modern geopolitics.

The region is one of the most turbulent regions in the world and faces many traditional and non-traditional security challenges. The uneven distribution of resources has led to the intensification of conflicts between countries in the region, while at the same time, it faces the threat of terrorism and pirate attacks. External forces such as the United States and Russia have also intervened in the region through military and economic assistance, making it a focus of geopolitical games.

China-Africa traditional friendship has a long history, and China has long been involved in security governance in Africa, and has been actively participating in peacekeeping operations in Africa through the United Nations.

© 2026 The Authors. This is an open access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License 4.0 (https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/).

DOI: 10.54254/2753-7048/2025.23821

The specific object of this thesis is to analyze the specific security measures taken by China in the Horn of Africa region. Furthermore, the paper will also examine how China's actions in security governance in the Horn of Africa compare to those of other major powers (e.g., the United States and Europe) and analyze their impact on international relations between the major powers.

The purpose of this thesis is to study whether and how China's security governance practices in the Horn of Africa have played a role. As the political and economic ties between China and Africa grow closer, China's security governance practices in the Horn of Africa provide a new direction for deepening cooperation between China and Africa.

2. Literature review

2.1. Description of the theoretical framework

The theoretical framework of extant scholarship is dominated by realist theory, liberalism theory, and constructivism theory.

Realist theory considers the international system to be in a state of anarchy, in which states are the key actors, and emphasizes the competing power and security needs of states. Although China's security governance in the Horn of Africa does not seek hegemony, interpreted by the theory as a "non-traditional realist" practice, it also safeguards its own economic interests and the security of its shipping lanes [1].

Liberalism theory is concerned with the importance of international cooperation, multilateral mechanisms and systems, and attaches importance to the role played by international organizations and international mechanisms in the settlement of disputes. The theory explains China's active participation in multilateral cooperation, mainly with the United Nations, which promotes the concept of multilateral dialogue and cooperation to achieve common security [2].

Constructivism theory explores the influence of national identity, concepts and culture on international behavior. The constructivist perspective explains that China advocates the concept of "peace and cooperation", respect national sovereignty. It also helps African countries improve their autonomous governance capacity through cultural exchanges and capacity building [3].

2.2. Current status of academic research and future research directions

The current academic research on security issues in the Horn of Africa is multidimensional, focusing not only on a single security issue, but also taking into account the role of economic security, ecological security and diplomatic security in regional peace.

Secondly, many of the research directions in this study take the Chinese perspective as their starting point, and Chinese scholars tend to promote research on African security governance while safeguarding China's interests in Africa; at the same time, scholars also affirm the positive significance of the security products that China has provided (e.g., the Global Security Initiative).

This paper argues that most of the current research is mainly qualitative, and its conclusions lack data support. Moreover, most of the current research focuses on the Chinese perspective, with fewer comparisons between Chinese programs and the security governance programs provided by other great powers in the Horn of Africa, and fewer African perspectives on the impact of such security assistance.

The direction of future research is to actively conduct field research on this topic, collect data, and quantitatively analyze the results of China's participation in security governance in the Horn of Africa. At the same time, China's coordination and competition with other major powers will be analyzed in depth, taking into account geopolitical variables such as the African Union and great power competition.

DOI: 10.54254/2753-7048/2025.23821

3. China's policy on security governance in the Horn of Africa

3.1. Specific measures taken by China

Through literature analysis, it can be seen that China's approach to security governance in the Horn of Africa is based on multilateral and bilateral mechanisms led by the United Nations. The multilateral mechanisms include actively participating in UN peacekeeping operations in Africa, focusing on cooperation with the AU and other regional organizations, promoting the Horn of Africa Peace Conference, among others. Bilateral mechanisms provided by China include the Belt and Road Initiative for economic development, humanitarian assistance to mitigate crises caused by conflicts and natural disasters, and cooperation in the areas of counter-terrorism and counter-piracy.

In the course of its participation, China has adhered to the concept of common, comprehensive, cooperative and sustainable security, the principle of non-interference in internal affairs, the provision of assistance without any political conditions, and the promotion of "African solutions to African problems in an African way".

Within the framework of the United Nations, China has actively participated in peacekeeping operations in South Sudan and other places, and its share of the United Nations peacekeeping budget has been increasing; it has also actively set up issues in United Nations conferences and meetings, calling on the international community to pay attention to the security issues in the Horn of Africa. At the same time, China provide financial support to the AU, and actively support the implementation of Agenda 2063, and explicitly express its willingness to strengthen cooperation with African countries in the priority areas of the second 10-year plan for implementation of Agenda 2063. [4].

In April 2022, the Chinese Government put forward for the first time the Global Security Initiative (GSI), a public security product launched by China in the international community, injecting a new kind of wisdom into global security governance. The Global Security Initiative emphasizes "six adherences".

With the Global Security Initiative (GSI) as its basic framework, China fully respects the sovereignty of African countries, to strengthen cooperation between China and African countries in many fields, including politics, economy and culture. Meanwhile, in the area of healthcare, China will support Africa in accelerating the construction of the Drug Administration and implementing the "Shennong's Project of Tasting a Hundred Herbs". In the area of security and governance cooperation, China supports African countries in upgrading their autonomous security capacity and promoting cooperation in anti-corruption governance.

The convening of the Horn of Africa Peace Conference was facilitated by China's "Concept for Peaceful Development in the Horn of Africa", which was put forward in 2022. The first Horn of Africa Peace Conference was held in 2022 and reached the following consensus: upholding a common, comprehensive, cooperative and sustainable concept of security; respecting sovereignty and territorial integrity; strengthening regional cooperation; addressing non-traditional security challenges; and supporting regional peace initiatives [5].

The above mechanisms have supported countries in the Horn of Africa region in building their peace and security structures, helping them to enhance their capacity to deal with traditional and non-traditional security challenges, and in terms of economic development, the synergy between the Belt and Road Initiative and the Global Security Initiative, it has effectively promoted economic transformation and sustainable development in Africa [6]. At the same time, we have implemented the "China-Africa Talent Training Cooperation Program" and the "China-Africa Universities and Colleges Hundred Schools Cooperation Program", and have strengthened cooperation in green energy, clean energy and other green areas, thereby consolidating the economic foundation of security governance in Africa [7].

DOI: 10.54254/2753-7048/2025.23821

3.2. Geopolitical impact of Chinese measures on the Horn of Africa region

The theory of international public goods provides an analytical framework for China's active promotion of multilateral cooperation within the framework of the United Nations and its support for "African solutions to African problems" in the context of security governance in the Horn of Africa. The theory emphasizes the non-exclusive and non-competitive nature of public goods, the provision of which often requires multilateral cooperation. This multilateral cooperation mechanism is conducive to preventing unilateral intervention by external forces and weakening the geopolitical game of the Western powers in the region [8].

In the course of China's participation in governance, it has actively promoted the construction of China-Africa cooperation mechanisms, promoting institutionalized cooperation and dialogue among countries in the region in order to achieve common security, which is in line with liberal theories and conducive to the optimization of the geopolitical environment in the Horn of Africa.

Under the influence of constructivism, China has always adhered to the principle of "non-interference in internal affairs" in its participation in security governance in Africa, and has put forward the concept of "promoting peace through development", which is quite different from the traditional geopolitical competition model, and has reshaped the original concept of "security for development" to "security through development" for countries in the region.

The Horn of Africa Concept for Peaceful Development advocated by China not only focuses on traditional security issues, but also emphasizes the realization of sustainable peace through economic development, infrastructure construction and regional cooperation. China's "One Belt, One Road" initiative and the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC) and other platforms had promoted infrastructure development and economic cooperation in the Horn of Africa, such as the Monnet Railway and the Ajawi Railway, which had not only facilitated inter-regional connectivity, but had also created economic development opportunities for the region.

Through the practice of the concept of "development for peace", China has shaped a new security and development narrative for the Horn of Africa region, emphasizing cooperation rather than confrontation and promoting win-win rather than zero-sum. The dissemination and practice of this philosophy has enabled the countries of the Horn of Africa to gradually break away from traditional geopolitical competition and achieve regional stability through regional cooperation and common development.

3.3. Impact of China's participation in African security governance on the international community

From a realist theoretical perspective, the theory emphasizes that state behavior is driven by power politics and geostrategic interests, and that competition and cooperation in international relations revolve around the relative power and geopolitical goals of states.

In terms of security governance in the Horn of Africa, China promotes regional economic cooperation and sustainable development, mainly through the Belt and Road Initiative and the Horn of Africa Peace Conference and other mechanisms. On the other hand, the traditional geostrategy of the United States in the Horn of Africa is mainly focused on counter-terrorism, maritime security, and the maintenance of its military presence in the Red Sea region. China's "development for peace" model of cooperation contrasts with the U.S. military-led strategy, reduces the root causes of regional conflict, and avoids geopolitical rivalry with the U.S., providing an example of cooperation rather than confrontation in U.S.-China relations.

The interests of European powers in the Horn of Africa are mainly focused on the security of trade routes and anti-piracy cooperation. By promoting regional development and stability, China indirectly guarantees the security of trade routes between Europe and China, which coincides with

DOI: 10.54254/2753-7048/2025.23821

Europe's geostrategic goals. This mode of cooperation helps China and Europe form strategic complementarities in the Horn of Africa and reduce geopolitical frictions [9].

In its security governance in the Horn of Africa, China has insisted on promoting regional peace and development through multilateral mechanisms and regional cooperation. This model not only optimizes the geopolitical landscape of the Horn of Africa, but also provides new space for cooperation between China and the United States, and China and Europe.

4. Case studies

4.1. Data presentation

The following two sets of data show that China's participation in United Nations peacekeeping operations in Africa has effectively improved the security situation in the region, while China's active local infrastructure investment in Africa, such as in transportation and energy, has obviously led to economic growth in the region.

The data of the United Nations peacekeeping report, taking the data of 2010, 2015, 2020 and 2024 as an example, details the changes in the number of United Nations participation in peacekeeping deployments in the African region, as well as the obvious downward trend of armed conflicts in the African region after the conduct of peacekeeping operations. China is the largest contributor to peacekeeping missions in Africa among the permanent members of the UN Security Council.

Table 1: Data on United Nations peacekeeping operations in the Africa region (2010-2024)

Year	United Nations peacekeeping deployments in the Africa region	Trends in the number of armed conflicts
2010	Over 70,000 military and police personnel	The number of armed conflicts is at a high level, but the scale of peacekeeping deployments has increased significantly and conflict control is beginning to bear fruit
2015	Number of peacekeepers reached approximately 111,400	The number of armed conflicts declined and peacekeeping operations achieved milestones in several areas
2020	Number of peacekeepers approximately 85,112	Further reduction in the number of armed conflicts, although complex situations remain in some areas
2024	Number of peacekeepers approximately 75,000	The number of armed conflicts continues to decline and peacekeeping operations play an important role in stabilising the situation

4.1.1. Economic cooperation

Based on the World Bank report, timeline as above, and using economic growth indicators as metrics (e.g., GDP growth rate), the chart below illustrates how China's local rollout of infrastructure projects in Africa has boosted economic growth in the region.

DOI: 10.54254/2753-7048/2025.23821

Table 2: Regional economic growth data following China's participation in Africa's infrastructure (2010-2024)

Year	Economic growth indicators (GDP growth rate)	Relationship between infrastructure development and economic growth
2010	3.0%	China increases infrastructure development in transport and energy in the African region, with significant subsequent economic growth
2015	4.1%	China's infrastructure investment in Africa is growing at an average annual rate of 16%, boosting Africa's infrastructure development and economic growth
2020	-4.0%	Epidemic shock leads to economic downturn in Africa
2024	3.6%	GDP growth in East Africa expected to reach 4.9% as infrastructure development continues to drive economic development

4.2. China's peacekeeping in South Sudan

Taking China's peacekeeping mission in South Sudan as an example, in December 2023, China dispatched a peacekeeping force of more than 300 officers and soldiers who arrived in the Wau region of South Sudan to carry out a one-year peacekeeping mission [10].

During the current peacekeeping mission, the Chinese side has carried out infrastructure construction in South Sudan, including the repair of the airport runway and the construction of boarding houses, to ensure the smooth flow of local transportation and logistics. Moreover, the peacekeeping medical detachment also provided medical services to the local people, receiving more than 1,200 patients.

China's peacekeeping operations in South Sudan have effectively eased tensions in the "Horn of Africa" region and maintained local security, stability and economic development, and in the course of peacekeeping, it has always adhered to the principle of "non-interference in internal affairs" and supported African countries to play a leading role in regional security issues, in contrast to the excessive intervention of Western powers in the "Horn of Africa" region.

China's active participation in the United Nations peacekeeping operation in South Sudan reflects the responsibility of great power, promotes the practice of multilateralism in the African region, provides the international community with a new way of thinking to resolve disputes, and undoubtedly consolidates the friendship between China and Africa, contributing to the building of a peaceful and stable environment.

5. Conclusion

This paper examines the impact of China's security governance in the Horn of Africa on international relations and geopolitics, describes the strategic interactions and cooperative rivalries between the United States and China, and how China's participation in security governance in the Horn of Africa has weakened geopolitical rivalries, promoted regional cooperation and development, and increased the autonomy of Central African countries.

DOI: 10.54254/2753-7048/2025.23821

However, there are obvious shortcomings in this study, such as the lack of fieldwork and the opportunity to conduct in-depth interviews with local African officials and businessmen, which will be improved upon in the future.

Through China's security governance practices in the Horn of Africa, internal and external security threats in the region have been significantly reduced, and the regional autonomy of the countries in the Horn of Africa has been significantly improved, thus setting a model for international cooperation for peace and stability and promoting the international community's attention to security affairs in Africa.

References

[1] *Waltz, Kenneth N. Theory of International Politics. Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley, 1979.*

[2] *Doyle, Michael W. "Liberalism and World Politics." American Political Science Review 80 (4): 1151-1169, 1986.*

[3] *Wendt, Alexander. Social Theory of International Politics. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999.*

[4] *Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China. Beijing Declaration on Building an All-weather China-Africa Community of Destiny in the New Era (Full text). 2024-09-05. [Online]. Available: https://www.mfa.gov.cn/zyxw/202409/t20240905_11485966.shtml*

[5] *Guangming Daily. The First China-Horn of Africa Peace Conference: Innovating the Model of Cooperation between Extraterritorial Powers and African Countries. 2022-06-27. [Online]. Available: https://news.gmw.cn/2022-06/27/content_35838175.htm*

[6] *Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China. Global Security Initiative and China-Africa Security Cooperation. 2024-09-23. [Online]. Available: http://cn.chinadiplomacy.org.cn/2024-09/23/content_117443840.shtml*

[7] *Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China. China-Africa Talent Cultivation Cooperation Program. 2023-08-25. [Online]. Available: http://www.focac.org.cn/zfgx/zzjw/202308/t20230825_11132909.htm*

[8] *Zhang Chun. An Exploration of the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation and the Supply of International Public Goods with Chinese Characteristics. 2019-12-31. [Online]. Available: https://www.igcu.pku.edu.cn/info/1248/3423.htm*

[9] *European Parliament. The Horn of Africa. 2022-09-28. [Online]. Available: https://www.europarl.europa.eu/thinktank/en/document/EPRS_ATA(2022)733621*

[10] *People's Daily Online. Flag-raising ceremony for the 14th batch of Chinese peacekeeping troops to South Sudan (Wau). 2023-12. [Online]. Available: http://world.people.com.cn/n1/2024/1002/c1002-40332585.html*