Rethinking IGAD's Role in Addressing Emerging Regional Security Threats[*]

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Introduction

From a security perspective, the Horn of Africa (HoA) is cited as a region engulfed by struggles over economic and political power, famine, droughts, poverty and starvation, and civil conflicts and inter-state wars. It is also cited as a region of politicized historical fault lines, state interference in each other's domestic affairs, and prolonged violent conflicts, with a prevalence of armed resistance groups.[1]

The Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD), a regional organization, has legal norms and institutional arrangements that give it a mandate to address these complicated economic and security problems in the region. In this regard, Olika Tafesse stated that, in 1996, "cognizant of the danger of violent local conflicts with regional spillover effect, IGAD the member states restructured the organization and gave it[an] expanded mandate thereby making political, security, humanitarian, and economic affairs its priority areas."[2]

The vision of IGAD said that it should be "the premier Regional Economic Community (REC) for achieving peace and sustainable development in the region."[3] However, the reversal in the pattern of regional intrastate and interstate conflicts questioned optimism about the organization's ability to enhance security and stability. Many believe that the region still lacks the most rudimentary regional security framework.

Historically, IGAD has been criticized for being incapable of addressing security problems in the HoA. These include the civil war in Darfur; protracted state collapse in Somalia; deep hostility and a stalled peace process between Ethiopia and Eritrea; a fragile peace agreement between North and South Sudan; a border dispute between Eritrea and Djibouti; and violent conflict in northern Uganda.[4] This proved that IGAD was a fragile regional organization, as relations among states were marked by mistrust, suspicion, and uncertainty, and there is no single country in the HoA that has not been a ected by violent conflict.[5]

IGAD, however, has achieved certain successes in mediating the peace processes of South Sudan and Somalia. The two agreements are important achievements in the era of IGAD's expanded mandate and o er a good example of mediation for other sub-regional organizations in other parts of the African continent.

This paper examines various challenges to IGAD's role in addressing long-standing and emerging regional security threats in the HoA. It begins with a brief account of IGAD's mandate to address regional security threats. It then examines emerging security threats in the IGAD region and IGAD's responses. The next section considers the overall structural impediments to the performance of IGAD. Finally, the paper puts forward some policy options and recommendations.

IGAD's Mandate to Addresses Regional Security Threats

IGAD is one of the Regional Economic Communities (RECs) recognized by the African Union. It has eight member states: Djibouti, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Kenya, Somalia, South Sudan, Sudan, and Uganda.[6] IGAD was founded in 1996 to supersede the Inter-Governmental Authority against Drought and Desertification (IGADD)that was created in 1986. When IGADD evolved into IGAD, a great emphasis was placed on the peaceful settlement of regional conflicts and the maintenance of regional peace, stability, and security.[7] In its constitutive act, IGAD was mandated to prevent, manage, and resolve inter- and intra-state conflicts,

Emerging Security Threats in the IGAD Region and IGAD's Responses

The Conflict in Ethiopia's Tigray Region

Political di erences between the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF)[12] and the Prosperity Party[13] resulted in an armed conflict. Even though there were earlier signs of war, it o icially began on November 4, 2020. The Ethiopian Prime Minister, Abiy Ahmed Ali, declared war after accusing the TPLF of attacking the Ethiopian defense force's northern command base.[14] The war was started under the rubric of a "law enforcement operation" that targeted the TPLF's leadership.[15] However, it was conducted through the use of heavy artillery and military drones.[16] On November 28, the government of Ethiopia claimed the capture of the Tigrayan capital of Mekelle and declared the end of the war.[17] However, in June 2021 and after eight months of intense fighting, the TPLF forces have regained Mekelle. At the time of writing, the war has extended to Amhara and Afar regional states and heavy military fighting is still ongoing.[18]

The war has resulted in a dire humanitarian situation. More than sixty thousand refugees have fled to Sudan, more than two million people have been internally displaced, and more than 4.5 million people are currently in a dire humanitarian situation.[19] Mass extrajudicial killings of civilians, sexual violence, looting of civilian properties, and attacks on Eritrean refugees have all been documented.[20] Apart from acts of ethnic cleansing in western Tigray,[21] there are also allegations against the government of Ethiopia of forced starvation and sexual violence by its soldiers.[22]

The war has become more complicated due to the involvement of external actors. Evidence shows the deep involvement of Eritrea in the Tigray conflict.[23] Voices are also starting to be heard about the involvement of Somalia's army and the United Arab Emirates' drones in the conflict.[24] The war began as a domestic conflict but has grown into a regional security crisis.

The war in Tigray has intrastate and interstate elements. IGAD, as a first resort for regional security issues, has a primary mandate to address the conflict. However, IGAD has not taken any concrete action. It has also failed to follow in the footsteps of the United States and European Union in publicly denouncing perpetrators' actions.

Border Tension and Conflict between Ethiopia and Sudan

The Tension between Kenya and Somalia

Somalia scheduled an election to be held in 2021. However, tensions are escalating between the federal government, based in Mogadishu, and Somalia's semi-autonomous regional states. There is a political divide between the federal government of Somalia and the Jubaland administration. In March 2020, President Mohammed Abdullahi Farmajo tried unsuccessfully to intervene to prevent the re-election of Ahmed Madobe, a key political opponent who serves as president of Jubaland.[33] However, this sparked violent clashes between federal troops and Jubaland's forces.[34] This incident put Kenya and Ethiopia on opposite sides. While the government of Ethiopia supported Farmajo's administration, Kenya continued to support the Jubaland administration.[35]

The government of Somalia accused Kenya of interfering in the internal a airs of Somalia by arming Jubaland militants.[36] However, Kenya strongly denies the accusation.[37] Besides, Ethiopia has ordered a withdrawal of some Ethiopian peacekeepers from Somalia and redeployed them to fight against TPLF.[38] The U.S. government has also ordered the withdrawal of its troops from Somalia.[39] These developments all provide a ripe terrain for the terrorist group Al-Shabaab to regain its power and complicate the peace and security of the region.

As compared to others, IGAD has taken initiatives to address the tension between Kenya and Somalia. It has established a fact-finding committee and released a report. In its report, IGAD stated that the allegation of the Somali government is unfounded. However, the Somali government rejected IGAD's report, claiming that it was unrealistic and biased,[40] and threatened to withdraw from IGAD.[41]

Structural Impediments to IAGD's Role in the Region

Although IGAD has the mandate to address intra- and inter-state violent conflicts, its actions fell short. Several underlying factors could account for the weakness of IGAD in dealing with both long-standing and emerging regional security threats. The concentration of power in the Assembly of Heads of States and Government and the current political deadlock between Ethiopia and Sudan, and between Kenya and Somalia, makes IGAD dysfunctional. Moreover, the involvement of non-IGAD actors in the region's conflicts, such as the United Arab Emirates (UAE)[42] and Egypt,[43] is making the work of IGAD more complicated.

IGAD's excessive dependence on external funding is another structural obstacle to its success. IGAD is funded by IGAD Partners Forum and others outside of the forum including the UK, United States, EU, Turkey, and the UAE.

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