

# Challenges to Peace and Security in Eastern Africa: The role of IGAD, EAC and EASF

Camilla Elowson and Adriana Lins de Albuquerque

As host of African Union headquarters, Eastern Africa<sup>1</sup> is the center of continental cooperation and peace and security efforts. Yet, the region itself faces serious challenges for state and human security caused by armed conflict, political crisis, democracy and governance deficits. Due to competing ambitions for hegemony between states in the region, there is no principal organisation for security cooperation. Instead, there are different regional structures with varying mandates that jointly constitute Eastern Africa's contribution to the African Peace and Security Architecture (APSA). This brief analyses the main challenges to peace and security in Eastern Africa in the past five years and how these regional structures have responded to such challenges.

Eastern Africa encompasses several conflict complexes, with major regional dimensions. These include interstate, intrastate and non-state conflicts, alongside one-sided violence against civilians. The region also suffers heavily from humanitarian emergencies, natural disasters, extreme poverty and famine, while struggling with massive refugee flows and the world's largest population of internally displaced people. What complicates the security situation further is the profound climate of mistrust, enmity and rivalry that characterises relations between states in the region.

## Eastern Africa's peace and security structures

Eastern Africa is home to two key regional economic communities (RECs). *The Inter-Governmental Authority on Development (IGAD)* member states are Djibouti, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Kenya, Sudan, South Sudan, Somalia and Uganda. IGAD, established in its present form in 1996, is the most developed organisation in the region in terms of peace and security. It focuses on three areas: Conflict Prevention, Management and Resolution; Political Affairs; and Humanitarian Affairs. IGAD also encompasses 'specialized institutes', including the Conflict Early Warning and Response Mechanism and the Security Sector Programme. The peace and security work conducted within IGAD is guided by the Peace and Security Strategy (2010), which is currently under review.

*The Eastern African Community (EAC)* includes Burundi, Kenya, Rwanda, Tanzania and Uganda. The organisation was reactivated in 1999 and focuses on economic integration, although the EAC also adopted a *Regional Strategy for Peace and Security* in 2006. Moreover, a *Memorandum of Understanding on Cooperation in Defence* has been signed by the member states. Other guiding documents are the *Protocol*



*on an Early Warning and Response Mechanism and a Regional Framework for Conflict Prevention Management and Resolution.*

Because of disagreement on which organisation should administer Eastern Africa's addition to the African Standby Force, the establishment of the Eastern African Standby Force (EASF) is coordinated by a separate structure, the *Eastern African Standby Force Secretariat (EASFSEC)*. EASF actively engages 10 out of 15 Eastern African countries<sup>2</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> Views on which countries constitute Eastern Africa differ, but the region is often ascribed as including the 15 countries indicated in the map.

<sup>2</sup> Tanzania, Madagascar and Mauritius technically participate, but are more aligned with the SADC standby brigade. Eritrea has chosen not to participate, while discussions with South Sudan about joining have not yet resulted in any concrete outcome.

## The regional organisations' responses to main challenges to peace and security

In an effort to analyse the role of regional organisations in addressing challenges to peace and security, the following sections offer an overview of their responses to the main sources of insecurity in Eastern Africa over the past five years.

- **Armed conflict**

The regional conflict complex in the Sudans comprises an interstate conflict between *Sudan* and *South Sudan*, as well as civil wars in the two respective countries. IGAD, mainly through Kenya, played a leading role in ensuring the Sudan peace agreement of 2005, which laid the ground for declaring South Sudan a new state. With regard to the outstanding conflict issues between the countries, negotiations have been under AU lead, but with strong support from Ethiopia, the IGAD Chair. The same arrangement holds for the internal conflict in Sudan, where the AU has a key role as mediator. The Khartoum-based IGAD representative follows the negotiations of these two conflicts and reports back to IGAD, but given its lack of mandate, the organisation has no driving role in managing the conflict.

Different dynamics are at work in South Sudan, where IGAD has taken a far more active role; some observers claim that this is the first time that IGAD has intervened as an organisation. At the very outset of the civil war, IGAD took immediate action, appointing three special envoys tasked with ensuring mediation. A mediation support structure was also set up at the organisation's Peace and Security Department. Even though IGAD swiftly took the lead, a peace agreement only materialised once the mediation evolved into "IGAD +", with representatives from the AU, EU, UN, US, China, UK and Norway added. IGAD continues to be heavily involved in South Sudan, especially through the Monitoring and Verification Mission that it set up to verify compliance with the peace agreement.

There is no regional peacekeeping mission deployed to the Sudans. Having said that, there are significant troop contributions by the Eastern African states to the UN/UN-AU missions in place<sup>3</sup>.

- **Terrorism**

In Eastern Africa, the major terrorist threat derives from the salafi-jihadist organisation al-Shabaab, which functions primarily out of *Somalia*. Djibouti, Ethiopia, Kenya, Uganda and Burundi have been directly involved in trying to counter the organisation and support transitional governmental structures in Somalia as troop contributing countries to the

<sup>3</sup> UNISFA (Sudan-South Sudan conflict), UNAMID (Sudan conflict), UNMISS (South Sudan conflict).

African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM), which was launched in 2007.

Despite experiencing significant success in pushing back al-Shabaab in the early 2010s, the lack of joint military action between troop contributing countries has likely reduced the mission's effectiveness in countering the group. In 2012, al-Shabaab became an affiliate of al-Qaeda. As a consequence of this and the military set-backs experienced within Somalia, al-Shabaab came to adopt a more regional strategy, involving increased clear-cut terrorist tactics such as attacking civilian targets in neighbouring countries, resulting in it evolving into a major transnational threat.

Despite al-Shabaab being a key threat to many IGAD states in the region, the organisation has taken a more neutral stance towards counter-terrorism by focusing on the phenomena of radicalisation rather than on al-Shabaab itself. IGAD is establishing a research centre in Djibouti, devoted to countering violent extremism and intended to be a hub for information sharing and best practices among member states. IGAD already has an International Capacity Building Program against Terrorism (ICPAT), whose mandate in the last couple of years has expanded to include intelligence and police networking. There are also plans to set up regional security centers in various border regions, focusing on operational collaboration. IGAD has also adopted conventions on joint criminal extradition that will make it easier to extradite criminals between member states, another measure that can be useful for counter-terrorism purposes.

Moreover, IGAD appears to have played a significant role in terms of assisting in strengthening Somalia's local government structures, a crucial avenue by which to ensure that the country does not remain a failed state and breeding ground for terrorist groups. IGAD mediation, in which Ethiopia was a lead country, resulted in a 2013 agreement that analysts say "relaunched the federalist process of Somalia" and having established administrative government structures viewed as key to stabilisation. IGAD continues to take an active role on the ground in Somalia.

- **Political crisis**

Political violence in *Burundi* has steadily escalated during 2015 in response to president Pierre Nkurunziza's resolve to stay in power for a third term. The EAC has been mandated by the AU to act as mediator in the political crisis. The situation in Burundi has been a first test of the organisation's ability to ensure its peace and security mandate, a test that many observers claim it has failed. Internal divisions between EAC member states have prevented the organisation from carrying out mediation in a concerted and determined way. Member

states appear to want to use the EAC framework as a means of keeping control of any action to be taken in the region and of preventing states outside the region from interfering, but have in reality not been eager for the EAC mandate on peace and security to evolve.

The possibility of deploying the EASF in Burundi has been discussed in the region, but it was eventually rejected at the AU level. This would have been a first deployment of the standby force, which was declared as having full operational capability in December 2014. Interviewed military experts consider the EASF ready. The interoperability and military cooperation of some of the major EASF countries is made evident by AMISOM, a mission in which all five troop contributing countries are EASF member states. Meanwhile, key challenges remain for the EASF, especially with regards to logistics. The organisation lacks strategic airlift capability and capacity to provision troops. Other problems relate to funding and a lack of communications equipment, without which there can be no effective command and control. Despite the noticeable political cooperation within EASFSEC, different political positions and differing motives of the member states also continue to block the collaboration. Even if the AU would decide to authorise an EASF intervention (in Burundi or elsewhere), the above mentioned factors would likely prevent EASF deployment, at least in the foreseeable future.

- **Democracy and governance deficits**

The level of democracy among states in Eastern Africa is abysmal, with only one state, Mauritius, being classified as “free” by *Freedom House*. With regard to governance, Eritrea, Sudan, South Sudan and Somalia rank within the bottom five on the continent according to the *Ibrahim Index of African Governance*. Given that the IGAD Peace and Security Strategy states that “virtually all major conflicts in the region... emanate from factors associated with gaps in democratic governance, poverty, and low levels of development, a political culture of (in) tolerance and lack of respect for the rule of law”, one would expect IGAD to view democratisation and governance as high priorities for conflict prevention. The recent drafting of documents such as the *IGAD Protocol on Democracy, Governance, and Elections*, the *IGAD Election Code of Conduct*, and *IGAD Guidelines for Election Observers* suggests that the institution is increasingly seeking to counter the democracy and governance deficits among member states. However, because these initiatives have been promoted by the IGAD Secretariat rather than by member states – the majority of which are authoritarian and thus have little interest in democratisation – little substantive progress has yet been made in this field.

### **IGAD, EAC and EASF as peace and security actors**

When taking stock of the regional organisations’ engagement in peace and security in the last five years, quite a few developments can be noted.

The *EASF* project has come a long way and the standby force is essentially operational. However, alongside logistical, financial and political challenges, the mandating procedure for EASF leaves room for interpretation. The hierarchy between the AU, the regional organisations and the EASF is unclear as to what organisation has the right to deploy the standby force. Technically, the AU hosts the decision making apparatus related to the African Standby Force. Nevertheless, the final decision on whether troops can be deployed is up to the troop contributing countries from which these forces are drawn. This problem is linked to that of EASF troop pledges; while all ten EASF member states have issued pledges, it remains uncertain whether these commitments will be upheld once an actual peace support operation is launched.

The *EAC* has a limited track record in peace and security. While some of its institutions persevere in ensuring the organisation’s functioning, there is still little evidence that peace and security efforts have taken off on any great scale. Political leaders in the sub-region have thus far often sought to avoid the EAC’s involvement in political affairs, resorting to settling conflictual issues amongst themselves, thereby making the efforts of EAC technocrats redundant. Meanwhile, several signs of division can be discerned among the member states. Kenya, Rwanda and Uganda are economically integrated, thus creating a rupture between them versus Tanzania and Burundi. There is also a growing rift between Uganda and Rwanda, partly due to different leadership styles. Another dividing line concerns regime type, where Kenya and Tanzania are far more democratic than others. As these differences grow, leaders in the region may find it more difficult to settle conflicts on a bilateral as well as on an EAC level. Given that EAC cannot influence member state politics, these divisions are likely to paralyze the ability for EAC to act decisively on issues related to peace and security. The EAC’s inability to act in Burundi is a case in point.

*IGAD* has stepped up its activities in peace and security over the last few years. The IGAD initiative for South Sudan is the foremost indication of new ambitions within the organisation. Furthermore, since 2012, the IGAD early warning system (CEWARN), has an expanded mandate in terms of geographical scope and type of conflict matters to be covered. A pilot phase to test the new system will be launched in 2016. At the same time, efforts are underway to finalise a new IGAD peace and security strategy, adding post-conflict reconstruction and development to the organisation’s list of strategic objectives<sup>4</sup>. Work is about to begin in setting up



structures corresponding to the objectives, such as a mediation support unit. New focus areas, such as maritime security and transnational crime, have also been added to the Security Sector Programme, while counter-terrorism has been given a broader mandate. New governance policies are also in the making.

Nevertheless, IGAD remains a small organisation<sup>5</sup>, with around 50 staff associated with peace and security matters. A risk is that ambition is growing more rapidly than the organisation's capacity and that there is a disproportionate focus on fundraising for the new activities, rather than ensuring effective implementation of the activities in place. The growth of IGAD has also been evolving in an *ad hoc* manner, rather than reflecting a conscious intention of the member states to make the organisation develop. The political will among member states to engage in real collaboration through IGAD is questionable; progress on certain aspects is blocked, as no regular Council of Ministers or Heads of State meetings have been organised in several years.

The role of Ethiopia is crucial when seeking to understand IGAD. Several observers consider IGAD ambitions equal to those of its current chair, Ethiopia. Ethiopia has chosen to act through IGAD to ensure regional stability, as an indirect means to address its internal security concerns. Certain observers argue that Ethiopia is seeking to control IGAD's peace and security endeavours by postponing high-level IGAD meetings, thereby keeping the chairmanship, and by having the IGAD peace and security division based in Addis Ababa. The proactive approach of Ethiopia can also be witnessed in the very high number of troops it dedicates to UN and AU missions in the region. Despite Ethiopia's use of IGAD for its own political purposes and its clear ambitions for regional leadership, Ethiopia makes conscious efforts to get other IGAD members on board. Lessons were learnt from Ethiopia's intervention in Somalia in 2007-2008, where its unilateral approach failed to achieve its political goals. The rationale, thus, is to seek a regional approach and wider credibility for its political visions. Ethiopia has managed to get support for its strong chairmanship, including from Kenya. Kenya, which is another potential regional hegemon, has in recent years demonstrated less vision, as its political moves have instead been guided by its reactions to threats from al-Shabaab.

A question which must be asked is whether the swift intervention in South Sudan by IGAD has set a precedent for future regional crises, where IGAD will be the mandatory organisation to intervene. There is little support for this

<sup>4</sup> The other areas are early warning, preventive diplomacy/mediation, transnational security threats and governance, human rights and democracy.

<sup>5</sup> The total number of IGAD employees is 222.

assumption. Even if IGAD has learned much from the South Sudanese experience, this does not necessarily mean that it is the most suitable stakeholder to intervene in the future. The timing of the South Sudan crisis presented IGAD with an opportunity to seize the initiative, ahead of the AU, as the AU at the time was tied up with negotiations in the other Sudanese conflicts. Furthermore, the rapid IGAD action was to a great extent motivated by the member states' political and economic interests. Ethiopia could not afford escalation in South Sudan, owing to concerns that unrest would spread across the border. The need for stability was shared by Kenya, because of business interests; Uganda, because of security concerns; and Sudan, because of concerns about oil profits. For Ethiopia, it was also suitable to use IGAD, as the regional level was easier to mobilise and manage than the continental level. Hence, the presence of the member states' strong own political interests is likely to be the decisive factor as to whether IGAD will intervene in a future regional crisis.

Not disregarding the driving role of Ethiopia, it is clear that IGAD's intervention in South Sudan has been a stronger collective effort than what the organisation is known for. IGAD has gained much visibility and goodwill from its actions in South Sudan. As a result, significant EU funding has been committed to build on the recent IGAD experience. The aim is to rationalise its peace and security structures, such as restructuring the IGAD temporary office for South Sudan into a permanent mediation structure. With this in mind, it should be recalled that IGAD's response to regional crises has been reactive, and improvised, in the past five years. It is too early to tell whether the organisation will manage to transform into a more predictable stakeholder.

Insight into the changing security dynamics and common security threats in the region has a certain potential for bringing the Eastern African countries closer together. It is clear, however, that regional power politics will not disappear even if IGAD, EAC or EASF adopt a more substantial role in peace and security. The climate of mistrust is deeply entrenched in the region, and even if moving towards the same agenda, it remains to be seen whether the Eastern African countries are ready to engage in far-reaching joint solutions.

This analysis is the fifth one in a series of studies. In five briefings, the FOI studies in African Security Programme analyses the regional organisations' role in countering challenges to peace and security in North West, East, Central and Southern Africa. For further reading, see FOI's previous publications on the African Peace and Security