

CMI Horn of Africa Team

NAVIGATING THE STORM:

Towards common security in the Horn of Africa

The Horn of Africa is in real danger of being engulfed by a cascade of conflicts. The threat of civil war in Sudan illustrates the challenges facing the region. To avoid further fragmentation, the Horn of Africa should build a culture of internal negotiation and accommodation, using IGAD as a framework, and international partners should support this.

The struggle to contain the collapse of Sudan into civil war is emblematic of the challenges facing the Horn of Africa. Violence is seen as a means to political ends. The great powers appear relatively indifferent to the situation. Alignments are emerging within the Horn that reflect the struggle for influence over the politics, economy and security of the Red Sea.

Against this backdrop, the region would be best served by getting used to dealing with its own problems, building a culture of accommodation, and finding ways to manage its own security in an era of proliferating and competing global power centres. The first significant, if under-reported, attempt to do this has come from within the region's own organisation, the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD). In recent months, IGAD has appointed Djibouti as its new chair, succeeding Sudan. Eritrea was brought back into the fold after 16 years and is now participating as a full member of IGAD. Driven by Kenya's President William Ruto, the regional bloc has formed a quartet from among its members to resolve the Sudan crisis, chaired by Kenya and including Djibouti, Ethiopia, and South Sudan.

The task facing those in the region who seek peace should not be underestimated. The Horn of Africa is in real danger of being engulfed by a cascade of conflicts that will fragment countries and is already opening the door for opportunistic external intervention. In the worst case, the region could become a battleground for competing proxies backed by un-

scrupulous external patrons. The loss of stability will spread to the Red Sea littoral, migratory flows will increase and the risk of inter-state conflict cannot be underestimated.

Such dangers are already appearing on the horizon. The Pretoria Agreement between the Ethiopian government and the Tigray region has not fully resolved the threat to wider peace in Ethiopia and has failed to improve relations between Ethiopia and Eritrea, leaving a looming threat of war between the two countries. Serial outbreaks of hostilities in different regions of Ethiopia continue unabated, leaving the country vulnerable to external manipulation. Suspicion in the absence of dialogue breeds misinformation and miscalculation. Sudan is effectively divided and may well fragment further, abetted by discontinuous and competing

mediation initiatives. Somalia has not yet prevailed over Al Shabaab, and conflict on the border with Somaliland is creating new tensions within the region's Somali communities. Al Shabaab has not yet been reduced and has adapted by embedding itself in neighbouring countries through local recruitment.

Efforts to enhance the region's ability to deal with its own problems would require an Arabian Peninsula that is equally united in a common vision of how to achieve stability on its western flank – the eastern coast of Africa on the Red Sea and the Gulf of Aden. At present, the issues of the Horn appear to be subordinated to potentially competing visions of national interest among the countries of the Arabian Peninsula, conspicuously played out in Sudan and potentially elsewhere in the region.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- The Horn of Africa risks fragmentation because of internal conflict and divisive external approaches. As an antidote, the region should build a culture of accommodation and collective management of regional security.
- IGAD is stepping up to fill the gap left by the multilateral system. It is crucial for the international community to support IGAD as a framework for local conflict resolution.
- Sudan risks collapse in the absence of unified, transparent mediation. Relations between Ethiopia and Eritrea are tense. Somalia remains marred by insecurity. The region, through IGAD, can play a key role in addressing these issues.

Finally, IGAD now seems willing to try to fill a void created by the inability of the multilateral system to contain the crises of the region. In this context, the international community – meaning everyone outside of the Horn of Africa – can demonstrate that it wants to be part of the solution in the Horn by supporting the region’s efforts to become politically and economically self-reliant. Acknowledging that the region has begun to organise itself, the wider international community would do well to support this as a framework within which local solutions to conflicts within the region might be found.

The IGAD approach to Sudan merits support as part of a unified, transparent and coordinated international mediation process. IGAD brings together three of Sudan’s neighbours and has actively engaged with Egypt and Chad. Eritrea should be encouraged to be more proactively involved in this concerted solution, rather than remaining on the sidelines, and launch its own initiatives. A unified and transparent international process, properly staffed and with a concrete plan, will be needed to avoid forum shopping and fragmentation. Sudanese civilians will also need a level of unity and common purpose matching that needed by the international community. Sudanese-led efforts to unite civilian forces and resume a political process should therefore be supported.

If IGAD succeeds in such an initiative, it will lay a solid foundation for further similar efforts and convey the idea that African solutions can be real, and that external intervention can only come if they genuinely supports local problem-solving.

Ethiopia and Eritrea, as active members of IGAD, now have the opportunity to use the organisation to help chart a way forward in their relationship and agree on mutual security guarantees. Such agreements, while challenging, would be a seismic development for regional peace and economic integration. A stable regional alliance is unlikely to be possible without an agreement between Addis Ababa and Asmara, sanctioned by the regional bloc.

Politically astute management of economic incentives can also help resolve other potential regional crises. Ethiopia is landlocked and seeking diversified outlets to the sea. IGAD, with the energetic support from international partners, can help facilitate an understanding that transforms this issue into an engine of growth rather than a risk of hostility. A solution to the differences between Eritrea and Djibouti could also be found within the framework of dispute settlement to facilitate greater economic integration.

The Somali crisis can only be resolved politically. It is the responsibility of Somalia’s political class to overcome their differences, which have created the space for organisations such as al-Shabaab to thrive. Given that Somalia’s insecurity is also a threat to its neighbours, it is natural that Somalia’s internal problems should also be discussed with these neighbours. This conversation among neighbours should take place under the aegis of IGAD and with the full support of members of the international community. Within this framework, it should be possible to identify and limit harmful forms of foreign support to different political actors within Somalia.

If progress is made on an internationally supported IGAD agenda for regional stability, it may be possible

to envisage a region that is increasingly integrated and less fractured. This would be a region that develops a system of mutual security guarantees to underpin active regional economic integration. It would be a region more capable of standing up for itself and navigating a world that is moving from a single order to multiple poles. It would be a region organised around a new regional security and development architecture, encompassing its geopolitical interests and the aspirations of its growing population. A region that accepts a culture of internal negotiation and accommodation rather than one of provocation and conflict. A region that is able and willing to negotiate long-term strategic partnerships with foreign partners, rather than individual, short-term and tactical transactions.

This paper is based on informal discussions held as part of CMI – Martti Ahtisaari Peace Foundation’s project “Enhancing constructive dialogue and cooperation on peace and security in the Horn of Africa” funded by the European Union. This publication has been funded by the European Union. Its contents are the sole responsibility of CMI and do not necessarily reflect the views of the European Union.



**Funded by
the European Union**

RECOMMENDATIONS

- IGAD and its member states, with the support of the international community, should accelerate and intensify their efforts at regional cooperation.
- International mediation on Sudan must be brought together in a unified, transparent and inclusive process. IGAD’s efforts should be supported and require a clear joint strategy with the AU, neighbours and other willing international partners.
- Rapid steps are needed to de-escalate tensions in Ethiopia and between Ethiopia and Eritrea; and channels of communication should be established.
- IGAD should be supported to actively facilitate a political reconciliation in Somalia.