

Summary on the Theme

8th Tana Forum | 4-5 May 2019 | Bahir Dar, Ethiopia

Political Dynamics in the Horn of Africa: Nurturing the Emerging Peace Trends

National and regional stability in the Horn of Africa serve as vital components of the sustainable development objectives across the region. Faced with myriad challenges relating to weak governance and state institutions, porous and contested national boundaries, slowing economic growth, and an increasingly tense scramble for resources by major powers, the political and security fault-lines in the Horn of Africa have become both a barrier to nation-building, as well as a source of acute security apprehensions. These issues are also affecting political trajectories in the region and dimming the prospects for robust regional integration.

In line with recent political developments in the Horn of Africa, especially the surprising rapprochement between Ethiopia and Eritrea following almost two decades of violent conflict. This year's Tana Forum will deliberate on:

- Inter-state engagements in the Horn and efforts to establish peace and cooperation;
- The role of state and non-state external actors in reshaping national and regional security;
- The alternative futures for the region in light of the events currently unfolding in the region.

The Horn of Africa: A paradigm shift?

The unexpected cessation of hostilities between Eritrea and Ethiopia, and the subsequent signing of the Joint Declaration on Peace and Friendship on 9 July 2018, quickly generated worldwide praise. Despite few concerns, there is generally a great deal of enthusiasm that the rapprochement will deliver on "peace, cooperation and development" far beyond improved relations between the two states (Ylönen, 2019). Significantly, the dialogue that brought this new development is a pointer to how much the mobilization of political will, in the face of centrifugal pressures pulling in different directions, could go towards achieving positive and durable peace.

The peace deal itself, combined with the ongoing reforms in Ethiopia, the regional powerhouse of the Horn of Africa, will potentially have a multiplier effect across the region. Apart from the deal encouraging the United Nations (UN) to unanimously lift its longstanding sanctions on Eritrea, one tangible result is Eritrea's recent overtures to normalize relations with Djibouti and Somalia which, if successful, will erase long-drawn suspicions and reset trade and economic cooperation in the Horn. With Eritrea now emerging from decades of international isolation, Asmara is expected to play an active role in both the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) and the African Union (AU).

Another important development in the Horn is the signing of the Revitalized Agreement on the Resolution of the Conflict in South Sudan (RARCSS) in September 2018, five years after conflict broke out in the newly independent state. The noticeable role that Sudan played in brokering the agreement could potentially lay the foundation for the restoration of long-strained bilateral relations between the two states. The Agreement will not only improve bilateral relations but also allow the two countries to resolve outstanding issues following their separation in 2011, particularly on the status of the Abyei

region, oil production and the right of passage of oil pipelines, and halting support to each other's rebel groups.

Despite these positive developments, the Horn also faces myriad challenges to security in the form of internal fragility and displacement, a dearth of inclusive governance, and the emergence of ethnicity as a "political tool" (Galadima & Ogbonnaya, 2018). The extent to which political governance is an inclusive process in both social and geographic aspects, as well as the nature and quality of power-sharing arrangements in place in several countries, are crucial factors that could potentially continue to stoke violent conflicts, within countries and between them. It is noteworthy to remember that political governance not only includes the way a regime wins state power and how they manage and maintain it, but also how it expands and/or consolidates its legitimacy during its term. As such, accountable and transparent transitions of power and political governance have the potential to mitigate conflict and promote peace on a regional dimension in the Horn of Africa (Johnston, 2012).

Challenges in achieving inclusive forms of governance continue to act as major triggers of conflict in the Horn. When substantial groups are excluded from access to political spaces or a share of economic resources, these frustrations erupt as social tensions or increased criminal activities such as terrorism and trafficking of people and arms. Inclusivity – through dialogue, fair elections, and a respect for human rights – enables better utilization of resources and results in economic opportunities for youth to be absorbed into society. Efforts channelled towards improving access to socio-economic opportunities and promoting dialogue between and among different actors and constituencies have the potential to lessen tensions in the Horn.

The competition for political and economic influence

In addition to the governance domain, the Horn continues to grapple with myriad geostrategic issues. By virtue of its proximity to the Red Sea, the Horn occupies a vital position not only for the continent but also for the Middle East, Asia and Europe, with thousands of ships passing through the sea annually. It is also a strategic point-of-interest for various international powers (especially Russia, the European Union states, the US and China), several Arab Gulf states and Turkey, all of who have vested military, economic and infrastructure projects in the region (Huliaras & Kalantzakos, 2017).

Unless states in the region take deep cognisance of how the presence of external actors might affect them, they will potentially face economic and political challenges in the future. The rivalries in the Middle East, for example, could potentially have multiplier effects in the Horn as the recent turn of events in Yemen have shown. The competition for global domination between the US and China to secure resources to feed their growing economies, on the other hand, should be carefully considered in the foreign policy and economic agendas of the Horn states. While regional integration as a policy instrument contributes to economic growth and improved welfare through the enhancement of trade, Kabandula and Shaw (2018) argue that rising powers with internal and regional transnational tensions could impact human security for the foreseeable future. In the face of the above impulses, there is keen interest to promote a regional approach to investment and security by member states to act as a safeguard against excessive outside influences. Apart from reducing internal frictions between and among countries in the region, a more regional outlook could help to address global issues collectively rather than individually, and allow individual states to withstand external manipulation.

Harnessing the role of multilateral cooperation and engagement

IGAD is primarily a regional mechanism for the prevention and resolution of conflicts among eight member states, namely Djibouti, Ethiopia, Eritrea, Kenya, Somalia, Sudan, South Sudan and Uganda. The Ethiopia-Eritrea peace deal offers an opportunity for IGAD to support the strengthening of relations between other member states. Apart from its security mandate, IGAD as a Regional Economic Community (REC) is responsible for pursuing economic integration and development as a major tool of conflict prevention and a foundation for long lasting peace. It is significant to add that with its peculiarity of its location as an arid region, countries in the Horn of Africa have had to contend with contentious issues over water use, pastoralism and access to grazing land, to name a few.

There is considerable overlap between the memberships of IGAD and the East African Community (EAC), which comprises six countries: Kenya, Uganda, Tanzania, Rwanda, Burundi and South Sudan. The EAC is miles ahead in terms of achieving economic integration among its member states. This creates an attractive and potentially beneficial opportunity for countries in the Horn to access its larger market. The region can also learn lessons from its neighbour in achieving economic and political integration beyond peace and security-related issues.

The withdrawal of AMISOM is due to be completed by December 2020. In its years of existence, the mission has played a major role in stabilizing Somalia even if it frequently experienced setbacks in the fight against Al-Shabaab. There are genuine concerns that the winding down may not be smooth sailing, but it should still offer countries in the Horn of Africa an opportunity to carefully manage the aftermath if potential threats to security are to be eliminated or significantly reduced. Along with IGAD member states, the AU and UN would have to ensure that the withdrawal process is not rushed and that Somalia is not left worse off than before. If not quickly occupied and managed by legitimate and robust state institutions, a poorly managed withdrawal could create an even more dangerous gap. Without imposing their own whims, multilateral partners must work with troop contributing countries within and outside the region to manage this process and its outcomes.

Guiding questions for the Tana Forum

The 8th Tana Forum will examine the current challenges imposed by the changing political dynamics in the Horn as well as discuss alternative prospects for the region. It aims to interrogate ways in which emerging peace and security trends can be effectively nurtured to produce the desirable positive effects necessary for the achievement of a prosperous Africa. The Forum will attract high-level participants, drawn from diverse spheres and sectors, to examine the changing roles and functions of member states and external actors in the pursuit of peace and stability in the continent. This year's discussions will feature the following issues and themes:

- What are the issues, challenges and prospects of the current political dynamics in the Horn of Africa?
- What are the implications of the Ethiopia-Eritrea peace deal as well as the renewed collaboration between Ethiopia, Eritrea, Somalia and Djibouti for regional integration in the Horn?

- What are the economic, political and security implications of the proximity of the Horn to the Arab Gulf region?
- What should be the priorities of the AU in the Horn, in general, and in specific countries in the region?
- What roles are expected of multilateral actors such as the UN and the EU in the Horn, especially towards revitalizing IGAD to play a more proactive role in fostering peace and regional integration in the Horn?
- What are the implications of the current militarization of the Red Sea by major external powers for the Horn, in particular, and for Africa, in general?

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