13 Peacebuilding in the context of Ethiopia–IGAD relations

Kassahun Berhanu

Introduction

During the Cold War, intense superpower rivalry hindered peaceful settlement of conflicts intractable on the African continent generally. However, since the end of the Cold War, hope has risen that conflicts in the region would be resolved through forging cooperation and sustained partnership among stakeholders. According to de Waal (2007, 1), extricating the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) region out of a predicament characterised by an absence of peace calls for credible and sustained democratisation, resolution of intra-state conflicts, a stable inter-state order, autonomous and capable institutions, and benevolent engagement in peacebuilding. The end of the protracted conflicts that had ravaged Ethiopia and Somalia and the termination of prolonged armed insurgencies in Eritrea and Sudan from the early to mid-1990s gave the initial impression that the logic of mutual intervention-cum-destabilisation could be done away with through fostering possibilities for a concerted and institutionalised mechanism for conflict management. This was bolstered by IGAD's expanded mandate for dealing with outstanding issues surrounding peaceful settlement of recurrent intra- and inter-state conflicts that rocked the fabric of societal life in several member countries. Emerging new developments, notwithstanding, opportunities that paved the way for developing a common security framework, which was expected to entrench stability and overall normalcy, were not captured and taken advantage of for a variety of reasons. These included the 1998–2000 border conflict between Ethiopia and Eritrea and the persistent absence of peace in Somalia which subsequently entailed Ethiopia's unilateral intervention. As a consequence, the vacuum that resulted from the subsiding superpower rivalry has now spurred competition between state actors who pursued divergent and contradictory aspirations that affected the workings of IGAD. Ethiopia was foremost among those endeavouring to exert their influence on IGAD's mode of executing its conflict resolution mandate.

Conflicts that affect Ethiopia easily assume regional dimensions and often get internationalised. The ongoing conflict in Somalia between the Somali Federal Government (SFG) and Islamist insurgents has implications for Ethiopia's role in peace-making within the purview of IGAD, pitting it against forces such as

disaffected protagonists from the Somali civil war, who suspect Ethiopia's intentions are driven by ulterior motives and self-interest. The prevailing situation in Somalia, underpinned by polarisation among Somali belligerents, entailed Ethiopia's unilateral intervention in 2006. The intervention put Ethiopia at loggerheads with Somali Islamist insurgents and prompted Eritrea to view Ethiopia's stance as doing the bidding of extra-regional powers such as the United States (US), bent on influencing developments in the Horn of Africa to their liking. Eritrea's disposition, in this regard, became highly visible following its 1998–2000 unresolved boundary conflict with Ethiopia. It is to be recalled that the regimes in Ethiopia and Eritrea pursued policies aimed at weakening each other by resorting to mutual and reciprocal subversion and forging alliances presumed to promote their respective goals. This was to be changed.

In April 2018, a change of leadership occurred in Ethiopia sparked by months of resilient youth uprising. The new leadership conducted sweeping political changes in the country. These changes included declaring general amnesty, releasing prisoners, allowing political parties to operate freely, allowing rebel movements that were declared terrorist to return and operate as legal political parties, and easing restrictions on internet, media, gathering, demonstration, etc. These internal changes were reinforced by changes in external relations. The most significant change in external relation occurred in Ethiopia–Eritrea relations. The new leader extended an olive branch to archenemy Eritrea that received positive response from the latter. The Prime Minister announced that his government accepted and would implement the Algiers Agreement entirely and unconditionally and appealed to the Eritrean government to accept his invitation and end the state of war that existed between the countries for the previous 20 years. The positive response from the Eritrean side led to visits by leaders of the two countries and the signing of the Ethiopia–Eritrean rapprochement in July 2018. The agreement's central five points are:

1. The state of war between Ethiopia and Eritrea has come to an end. A new era of peace and friendship has been opened;
2. The two governments will endeavor to forge intimate political, economic, social, cultural and security cooperation that serves and advances the vital interests of their peoples;
3. Transport, trade and communications links between the two countries will resume; diplomatic ties and activities will restart;
4. The decision on the boundary between the two countries will be implemented;
5. Both countries will jointly endeavor to ensure regional peace, development and cooperation.

(Joint Declaration 2018)

The agreement was a game-changer in the region. The Ethiopia–Eritrea conflict was perceived to be the epicentre of conflicts in the Horn of Africa. The veracity of the perception was evidenced in the rapid changes in the inter-state relations in the region. The bilateral Ethiopia–Eritrea agreement was followed by a

trilateral Somalia–Ethiopia–Eritrea agreement. Eritrea and Somalia renewed their diplomatic relation. The president of Djibouti and Eritrea met for the first time in ten years. Generally, it could be said, a reconfiguration of relations took place in the Horn of Africa. Yet, serious challenges remain to be addressed. One of these challenges pertain to the Ethiopia–Eritrea border issue. The flashpoint of the war, the village of Badme, remains under Ethiopian control, casting a dark shadow on the rapprochement. A great hope is placed on the Ethiopia–Eritrea rapprochement that it will revitalise IGAD thereby contributing to security, peace, regional integration, and development in the region.

This chapter examines relations between Ethiopia and IGAD and their ramifications for peacebuilding in the sub-region. Based on a review of relevant secondary sources, an attempt is made to address the following issues that are in line with the theme under study:

- The implications of IGAD's failure to dissuade Ethiopia and some member states from making unilateral interventions in conflict situations in the sub-region in a manner that undermines concerted efforts aimed at entrenching peace and security;
- The impact of Ethiopia's assertive stances and roles in the activities of IGAD on the efficacy and credibility of the organisation; and
- An exploration of the means and ways through which Ethiopia can ensure trust and acceptance as a potentially genuine agent of peace in the sub-region in the eyes of IGAD member states.

Major trajectories of Ethiopia–IGAD relations in peacebuilding

IGAD has embarked on several peacebuilding initiatives in recent years to resolve conflicts between countries that include Eritrea and Ethiopia, and within member states such as Somalia, Sudan, and South Sudan. Nevertheless, the complexity of conflicts in the sub-region and disagreements over a range of issues among the mainstream actors in IGAD have tended to undermine the organisation's potential capacity in terms of promoting an agenda for comprehensive peace (El-Affendi, 2001). The failed Somali reconciliation process sponsored by Djibouti in 2001, flaws that underpin the mediation process in Sudan and South Sudan, and the stalemate between Eritrea and Ethiopia over the contested boundary issue, all of which IGAD is involved in to varying degrees, are cases in point in this regard.

Taking note of the aforementioned and other similar factors militating against conflict resolution efforts, Samatar and Manchaka (2006, 51) argue that the quality of leadership and system of governance prevalent in each member country are important elements in dealing effectively with lack of peace at local, national, and regional levels. This is stated on the presumption that peacebuilding efforts in the geographic area where the IGAD region is located could be advanced only through stewardship of effective and legitimate political regimes that are ready to act in concert to attain shared goals pertaining to peacebuilding. Hence, peacebuilding endeavours are believed to materialise by according primacy to the wellbeing and

legitimate interests of societies that are adversely affected by the outcomes of conflict episodes. The question then is whether political regimes in the IGAD sub-region, including Ethiopia, qualify as ones that are endowed with such attributes that could enable them to meaningfully contribute to peacebuilding efforts either by themselves or working in tandem with IGAD as a collective entity. For example, in spite of the potential strength that the Ethiopian government commands, a number of evolving developments¹ have tended to make achieving the wellbeing and legitimate interests of societies unrealistic, and labelling the peacebuilding efforts effective and acceptable impossible.

If the core area of the Horn of Africa is limited to constituting IGAD member countries such as Ethiopia, Somalia, Eritrea, and Djibouti, Ethiopia's significance would be considerable when viewed in terms of territorial and population size, and military prowess. Theoretically, the country's endowments in these terms could present it as a potentially dominant actor that could influence developments in the region. In practice, however, this may not be easy to attain given a plethora of factors that militate against stabilisation efforts taking place in the Horn of Africa. Notably, the IGAD region comprises states whose borders are often contested and intra- and inter-state conflicts persist. According to Kłosowicz (2015), Ethiopia stands as a formidable actor in the Horn of Africa, in general, and the IGAD sub-region, in particular, due to the aforementioned factors. This is buttressed by the wide recognition it enjoys resulting from its proactive engagement in regional and continental peacekeeping² and the fast economic growth that it has registered during the past decade. It is also worth noting that Ethiopia is viewed as one of the most important international actors in the region, particularly following the arrival on the scene of an urge to combat terrorism and Islamist extremism. As a result, it enjoys the backing of Western powers, notably the European Union and the US, as allies in the fight against forces labelled as extremists, whose drivers are taken as inimical to the overriding interests of powerful actors in the international system.

Nonetheless, Ethiopia has not qualified yet to emerge as a regional hegemon in the same fashion as others, such as Nigeria and South Africa, which are influencing peacebuilding initiatives in their own sub-regional organisations, like the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and the Southern African Development Community (SADC), respectively. Nevertheless, apart from its role as one of those who facilitated IGAD's formation, Ethiopia plays significant roles in the organisation's major activities in the area of conflict resolution and peacebuilding. This is propelled by a number of factors that are also driven by self-interest: the country's sharing of boundaries with all IGAD member countries (except Uganda); the perpetual simmering of intra- and inter-state conflicts in a number of IGAD countries, with the potential of spilling over across common borders; contested security issues shaping Ethiopia's relations with member countries such as Somalia and Eritrea; and ongoing domestic conflicts between the government and a plethora of insurgent groups of varying persuasions. Hence Ethiopia–IGAD relations need to be examined taking all the above-mentioned factors into account.

Ethiopia's role in peacebuilding and inter-state relations within IGAD

As mentioned, conflict dynamics in the Horn of Africa have often posed challenges in the quest for potential candidates to assume a hegemonic position in the IGAD region. Conflicts in the sub-region are often interlinked, as a result of which security interdependence is viewed as an overriding imperative. In the context of the prevalent complex conflict system that characterises the state of affairs in the IGAD sub-region, smaller state actors often attempt to forge alliances and counter-alliances by supporting proxies opposed to the regime in Ethiopia, with a view to challenging its aspiration to qualify as a dominant player (Dehez, 2008, 10). In this connection, Ethiopia's relations with a number of member countries following the revitalisation of IGADD in 1996 are worth considering in arriving at an understanding of its role in peacebuilding in the region.

It is to be recalled that Ethiopia fought two full-scale wars against the irredentist moves of neighbouring Somalia (in 1963–1964 and in 1977–1978) and Eritrea (in 1998–2000). In December 2006, Ethiopia deployed armed contingents in Somalia to defend the beleaguered TFG from impending threats from the UIC, which culminated in the emergence of the radical Islamist insurgent group Al-Shabaab. At the same time, Ethiopia has been active in working towards resolution of the post-1991 conflict in Somalia, as signified by its hosting of successive peace conferences bringing together different parties to the conflict. Despite security threats from insurgent groups in Somalia, Ethiopia has persistently endeavoured to ensure stability in that country in anticipation that a friendly group could assume power and spearhead the process of reinstituting a responsible government. It is to be recalled that following Ethiopia's unilateral intervention in Somalia in December 2006, the security situation in Mogadishu deteriorated sharply as Islamist insurgents mobilised against the Ethiopian presence. Ethiopia responded with massive military operations, which US-based Human Rights Watch (2007) claims resulted in the killing of hundreds of people and displacement of tens of thousands.

At the height of turbulence in the failed state, hundreds of thousands of refugees from Somalia found a safe haven in Ethiopia. Amid the intensified extremist threat against its security in the mid-2000s originating from Somalia, the Ethiopian government embarked on a military intervention in December 2006 to rescue the TFG from being unseated by the UIC, which controlled several territories. This intervention culminated in the ousting of the UIC, which was forced to abandon most of the areas under its control, thereby paving the way for the TFG to move to the capital Mogadishu (Kidist, 2008). The issue then is whether Ethiopia could be viewed as a neutral actor in mediating peacebuilding in Somalia, in the face of its partisan position favouring some factions at the expense of others that remain unaffected by its unilateral intervention.

It should also be noted that the response of IGAD member countries to the emergence of the UIC as a *de facto* and effective power in Somalia diverged. While Sudan and Djibouti were implicitly supportive of the UIC's ascendancy, the Ethiopian regime had invested heavily in the formation of the TFG and was

intensely apprehensive of its (TFG's) leverage as a belligerent to be reckoned with. It is also worth mentioning that the UIC also gambled when it threatened to wage jihad against Ethiopia and called for the return of Somali-inhabited parts of Ethiopia to Somalia. In doing so, it provided Ethiopia with the excuse to militarily intervene. Though the Ethiopian intervention in Somalia in December 2006 was "legitimised" by the invitation of the weak TFG, the UIC's preponderance prompted a feeling in Ethiopian and Western policy circles that if Somalia remained under the control of this group, foreign Al-Qaeda operatives could use it as a base for embarking on terrorist activities that were detrimental to their interests (Bryden, 2007, 16). Moreover, Ethiopia's quick military victory over the UIC did not translate into political victory, as its radical wing, Al-Shabaab, continued to wage guerrilla warfare against Ethiopia, TFG forces, and AU contingents deployed at a later stage. Concurrently, the TFG, which had survived the UIC's onslaught, was affected by endless internal divisions over political power, thereby rendering Ethiopia's peacebuilding position in Somalia precarious. Menkhaus (2007) observed that Islamist insurgency grew in violence and popularity as a manifestation of a nationalist reaction to what was portrayed as Ethiopian occupation.

The subsequent resistance of Al-Shabaab, in Somalia as well as the 1998–2000 Ethiopia–Eritrea conflict, and the continued engagement of the two in proxy wars, is evidence of instances where smaller and weaker states and non-state actors, either separately or working in tandem, strive to counterbalance Ethiopia's desire to influence developments in the region (Kidist, 2014). Another round of Ethiopian military intervention in 2011 boosted prospects for peacebuilding in Somalia by pushing Al-Shabaab from its main strongholds. Reportedly, the Ethiopian Air Force inflicted serious damage on Al-Shabaab forces, which resulted in the liberation of a number of rural areas and urban centres in south-central Somalia where local administrations were formed in the localities abandoned by the insurgents (The East African, 2012). However, progress in this regard appears to be slow and reverses have at times been experienced. In light of this, Ethiopia's peacebuilding efforts in the country seem unlikely to materialise in the short run.

Following the outbreak of the war between Ethiopia and Eritrea in 1998, the two countries continued to engage in proxy wars, not only in and around their common borders but also in other areas such as Somalia and reportedly South Sudan. It is alleged that Eritrea even went to the extent of supporting militant Islamist Somali groups such as Al-Shabaab in their bid to undermine Ethiopia's influence, anticipating that it could take advantage of any weakening of its adversary resulting therefrom. That is why Eritrea was designated as a "regional spoiler" that sought to take advantage of any possible Ethiopian fragility in the Somali conflict. In this connection, it should be remembered that the Eritrean regime also supported the formation of a Somali opposition group known as the Alliance for the Re-Liberation of Somalia in the aftermath of the 2006 Ethiopian intervention (Clapham, 2007) in the name of supporting the TFG, which was recognised by the UN, the AU, and IGAD. According to the UN Monitoring Group on Somalia and Eritrea (2006), Eritrea's support of forces pitted against the TFG increased from

2005 onwards, reaching a peak prior to Ethiopia's intervention. Hence, two IGAD member states were actively engaged in undermining the IGAD peace process.

According to Healy (2008, 14), Eritrea in particular found it difficult to accept the reality on the ground regarding its weak international standing compared with the position that its adversary, Ethiopia, enjoyed. It is to be recalled that ever since the independent state of Eritrea was founded in the early 1990s, in general, and following the outbreak of the 1998 Ethiopia–Eritrea war, in particular, the country became one of the few most populous countries without access to the sea. This became one of the determinants of the country's foreign policy, driven by the urge to secure port services (Tafesse, 2009, 15–16). By way of reciprocating Eritrea's belligerent stance on a wide range of issues, the Ethiopian regime repeatedly vowed to pursue a tougher policy towards Eritrea. This was concretely expressed by supporting the Eritrean opposition, which aspired to effect regime change, which Eritrea likewise reciprocated. By and large, there has been no change for the better in relations between the two countries; and the internal conflict in South Sudan is becoming a new area of rivalry between Ethiopia and Eritrea (Plaut, 2013). Healy (2008) is of the view that IGAD remained powerless to convince Ethiopia and Eritrea to normalise relations or implement a peace settlement on the basis of adhering to the 2000 Algiers Agreement that established the EEBC, whose rulings on the contested boundary issue were to be final and binding. Intense mutual hostility between the two countries continued to adversely impact on regional relations and exacerbate other conflicts. As a result, the situation became a key obstacle to any progress towards developing an improved regional security framework. Eritrea, disillusioned by IGAD's indifference in inducing Ethiopia to adhere to the terms of the Algiers Agreement and its subservience to Ethiopia's unilateral intervention in Somalia, announced the suspension of its membership of IGAD in 2007.

Ethiopia–Sudan relations between the mid-1990s and 1998 were far from amicable and cordial. Ethiopia accused Sudan on various occasions of exporting Islamic radicalism, which it presented as the greatest security threat to stability in the country. This prompted Ethiopia to respond by enhancing its support of the rebel Sudan People's Liberation Movement/Army, joining Eritrea and Uganda in a US-led coalition of frontline states against Sudan (Shinn, 2004, 6). During the period in question, Ethiopia and Eritrea were among the few African states the US identified as major post-Cold War partners on the continent. The animosity that characterised Ethiopia–Sudan relations thus adversely impacted on IGAD's peacebuilding initiatives and Ethiopia's proactive engagement in the organisation's activities. Ethiopia and Eritrea contributed troops and artillery that were transported to join the Ugandan contingent aimed at boosting operations to attack Sudanese government defence forces (Asnake, 2015).

It was amid this that the Ethiopia–Eritrea conflict erupted on 12 May 1998. This was at a time when the Sudanese government was seeking opportunities to improve its relations with Ethiopia in particular. Meanwhile, however, both Ethiopia and Eritrea were striving to curry Sudan's favour in anticipation of advancing their respective positions. Molla (2002) opined that the protagonists in

the Ethiopia–Eritrea conflict were forced to relax their previously hard-line position against Sudan in order to at least neutralise its stance against them. On top of this, the Ethiopian government, having become extremely occupied by its dispute with Eritrea, could not devote much time and energy to settling issues with Sudan. The new developments in Ethiopia–Eritrea relations are thus believed to have served as a turning point in easing and ultimately normalising Ethiopia–Sudan relations.

Ethiopia and Djibouti, whose bilateral relations are largely cordial and amicable, got into a row over the outcomes of the Arta Conference in 2000, allegedly sponsored by Egypt, resulting in the formation of Somalia's short-lived Transitional National Government in 2001. Nevertheless, Ethiopia–Djibouti relations remained intact due to a number of factors including geographic contiguity, common affinity, close economic cooperation, and the alleged threats posed by their common enemy, the Eritrean regime.

The turbulence and bloodletting caused by conflict between different factions of South Sudan's leadership around the end of 2013 appears to have resulted in divergent interests among IGAD member states, including Ethiopia. According to IRIN (2014), although Ethiopia's economic interests in South Sudan are less pronounced than those of Uganda and Kenya, it has security and strategic interests that could be best served by resolution of the underlying causes that led to the fighting in the new polity. Ethiopia has enough on its hands dealing with problems in Somalia on its eastern border and hence is keen to avoid the same thing happening in another adjacent locality in the west. It is worth noting in this regard that Ethiopia's western border region of Gambella is home to the same ethnic groups that inhabit South Sudan. Among these are the Nuer, who are purportedly supporting opposition leader Riek Machar's faction in the struggle against Kiir's group, which controls the government in South Sudan. Hence, Ethiopia's concern in this regard is understandable given that some of its citizens could provide support or shelter to South Sudanese rebels or even join the fight. Moreover, the 2013 conflict in South Sudan has already produced more than 60,000 refugees (currently reaching hundreds of thousands), who fled to Ethiopia across their shared border.

There are allegations that Eritrea and Sudan are covertly providing support to South Sudanese opposition forces, whereas Uganda has openly intervened on the side of the Kiir regime, deploying armed contingents. Ethiopia claimed to be neutral³ and embarked on mediation efforts under the auspices of IGAD in the course of which it has emphatically called on Uganda to withdraw its troops. The Ethiopian prime minister, in his capacity as current chair of IGAD, also publicly demanded that Uganda's President Yoweri Museveni should withdraw the troops he unilaterally deployed in South Sudan in support of the government (Daily Nation, 2014). For its part, Uganda indirectly responded to this by stating that it was concerned with the possibility of rebel group the Lord's Resistance Army taking advantage of state failure in South Sudan to continue with its armed insurgency against the Museveni regime. It is, therefore, envisaged that unhealthy developments in South Sudan could set the stage for possible Ethiopia–Uganda

competition, which could complicate the role of IGAD, in general, and Ethiopia, in particular, in brokering a peace agreement in South Sudan. Moreover, Ethiopia's neutrality in the conflict could be questioned by the Kiir regime, rendering the acceptance of Ethiopia as a genuine mediator susceptible to mistrust due to the latter's insistence on withdrawal of Ugandan support.

Misgivings in Ethiopia's peacebuilding initiatives

Ethiopia's proactive involvement in IGAD's activities pertaining to peacebuilding in the sub-region is perceived by some as aimed at promoting self-interest to the detriment of others. This perception is prompted by a host of factors that include its holding of the position of chair of IGAD and the IGAD Executive Council since 2008. Ethiopia's perpetuation as IGAD's chair was precipitated, among other things, by the international isolation of President Omar al-Bashir of Sudan, resulting from his indictment by the International Criminal Court, and continued instability in Somalia and South Sudan. Other IGAD members, such as Eritrea, view this as part of a trend, with the organisation increasingly becoming an arm for expediting Ethiopia's foreign policy and increasingly subservient to doing Ethiopia's bidding. Such a trend also seems to have strengthened existing mistrust and scepticism among other members, compounded by associated occurrences such as Ethiopian nationals successively holding leadership positions in IGAD's Peace and Security Division; and the location of different agencies of the organisation – the Peace and Security Division, the Conflict Early Warning and Response Mechanism, the Facilitator's Office for Somalia, and the IGAD Parliamentary Union – in the Ethiopian capital, Addis Ababa. Moreover, the appointment of Ethiopia's ex-foreign minister, Seyoum Mesfin, as IGAD's special envoy to lead the mediation between South Sudan's warring factions may have fuelled existing apprehension regarding Ethiopia's role. It is widely believed that all these factors give Ethiopia leverage to exert considerable influence as regards regional security matters, including peacebuilding, within the framework of the organisation.

In view of the fact that no member country has yet managed to single-handedly play dominant and hegemonic roles in IGAD, there exists implicit competition between Uganda, Ethiopia, and Kenya, each of which commands different strengths and comparative advantages in various areas. Ethiopia's military action in 2006 to oust the UIC and its subsequent engagement against Al-Shabaab demonstrate that it harbours undeclared ambitions to behave as a regional hegemon by deploying peacekeepers to trouble spots in the sub-region under the auspices of either international and continental (UN and AU) or sub-regional (IGAD) initiatives. These actions imply that Ethiopia continues to be an influential actor in IGAD's peacebuilding efforts by making use of its multifaceted leverages.

It is also worth noting that Ethiopia is mistakenly perceived to be a Christian enclave despite its population comprising a large number of Muslim citizens. This has led to Ethiopia's acceptance as a dominant regional power by Muslim-dominated IGAD member countries such as Sudan, Djibouti, and Somalia. The

above-discussed reservations on the part of other IGAD members regarding the role of Ethiopia are further exacerbated by the disposition of extra-regional actors such as Egypt, which enjoys intimate relations with IGAD member countries such as Sudan, Eritrea, Djibouti, and some Somali factions that view Ethiopia's peacebuilding initiatives warily. Worthy of note in this regard is that Egypt is obsessed with a belief that an unstable and weakened Ethiopia is a *sine qua non* for maintaining the status quo in respect of the utilisation of the water from the River Nile, to which Ethiopia is opposed (Kidist, 2014).

Another factor that poses challenges to Ethiopia's peacebuilding role within the framework of IGAD pertains to dual and conflicting membership of several member states in other regional organisations. Of the eight current IGAD members, Kenya, Uganda, and South Sudan are also members of the East African Community (EAC), while Sudan, Somalia, and Djibouti hold membership in the Arab League. As a result, IGAD members have competing loyalties and areas of focus. Ethiopia is one of the very few IGAD member countries that does not belong to other regional groupings, which partly explains why it was at the forefront of the few that endeavoured to ensure the revitalisation of IGADD in 1996.

In light of the foregoing, it could be argued that the foreign policy issues with which Ethiopia is grappling in the short and medium terms are closely tied up with its interests in a manner that could relegate its contribution to IGAD's peacebuilding initiatives to the background. The problem in Somalia; the intra-state conflict in South Sudan; a border dispute over the oil-rich Abyei area located between Sudan and South Sudan; the controversy surrounding the utilisation of the Nile waters, particularly in relation to Egypt; the quest for a secure and sustained access to ports in Djibouti, Somaliland, and Kenya; and the persistent standoff with Eritrea (Asnake, 2015) are some of the primary areas with which Ethiopia's foreign policy direction is primarily concerned. Hence, there is a need for Ethiopia to actively strive to foster trust and nurture a sense of common belonging among IGAD member states. This serves as an entry point to induce a collective endeavour to transform the sub-regional organisation into a viable institution that could broker peace with relative ease and convenience. Expediting peacebuilding ventures in this manner calls for sincere engagement that is free from exerting undue influence aimed at attaining short-term objectives that militate against the efficacy and credibility of ongoing efforts of peacebuilding. Short of this, perceived and actual scepticism of Ethiopia's role on the part of those affected due to a plethora of short-sighted manoeuvrings by Ethiopia would likely result in weakening IGAD, which does not benefit anyone in the long run.

Concluding remarks

The IGAD region continues to be rocked by instability, despite relative improvements experienced in recent years. There is widespread crisis propelled by conflicts in the different member countries, including Ethiopia itself, which is compounded by soured relations between the regime in power and other IGAD members. As has often been the case, conflicts in the region continue to be interconnected,

feeding into each other and assuming sub-regional, regional, and international dimensions. The maxim “My enemy’s enemy is my friend” has often shaped intra- and inter-state politics in the Horn of Africa. This appears still to be very much at work in a manner that is reminiscent of the state of affairs during the Cold War era. By and large, such a mindset among political regimes in the sub-region is bound to render futile efforts aimed at peacebuilding and drives towards political and socio-economic transformation. As things stand, the absence of peace and stability in individual countries is mainly driven by the imperatives of regime perpetuation and survival that tend to preoccupy state actors in the sub-region, with the resultant effect of often deploying the energy, focus, and resources of member countries in a manner that shapes the direction of their engagements and interventions. By and large, such dispositions have proved inimical to expediting peacebuilding initiatives that are underway. Hopefully, the rapprochement between Ethiopia and Eritrea will contribute to a better peace, stability, regional integration, and development.

The unabated persistence of complexities and intricacies surrounding peacebuilding ventures that characterise the existing state of affairs in the sub-region has the propensity to make Ethiopia’s contribution to the peaceful settlement of conflicts on the domestic front and beyond a daunting task. It is believed that developments experienced in this regard are underpinned by the entrenchment of mistrust and scepticism caused by the quest to enhance vested interests to the detriment of other stakeholders and protagonists. Under the prevailing circumstances in the IGAD sub-region, what is in store during the years to come is uncertain, given the aspects of change and continuity that surround the dynamic nature of conflicts and alignment and realignment of forces in the Horn of Africa. There is no doubt that Ethiopia is one of the key players in terms of spearheading peacebuilding initiatives in the IGAD sub-region and beyond, due to leverage that it commands. However, building sustainable peace can be successful only under conditions characterised by enhanced trust, and by proven acceptance and legitimisation of its role. It is hoped that progress will be made in this regard that enables stakeholders to erase doubts and misconceptions that ulterior motives and self-aggrandisement constitute the drivers behind Ethiopia’s interventions in resolving conflicts under the auspices of IGAD.

Notes

- 1 By the Ethiopian government’s own admission, emerging trends of governance failure, corruption, intergroup rivalry, communal unrest, and the taking shape of a legitimacy crisis could undermine prospects for its effectiveness.
- 2 Since the mid-1990s, Ethiopia has deployed peacekeeping missions in conflict-ridden countries in the IGAD sub-region (Sudan, Somalia, South Sudan), East Africa (Rwanda, Burundi), and West Africa (Liberia).
- 3 The government of South Sudan reportedly questioned Ethiopia’s neutrality and requested the peace talks be moved to Kenya (Daily Nation, 2015). It was also reported that South Sudan rebels accused IGAD of “confusing” the peace process (Sudan Tribune, 2015).

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