9 The IGAD–Eritrea impasse

Future prospects in light of recent developments

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Introduction

Eritrea, for some years, suspended its participation in the African Union (AU) and the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD). In 2011, the country decided to go back to these two organisations only to receive opposite responses: while the AU immediately welcomed Eritrea back, IGAD was not ready to open its doors to the country. This chapter aims at proving that Eritrea's re-entry into the regional organisation (IGAD) was contingent on the settlement of Eritrea–Ethiopia animosity. The evidence of the truth of this assumption materialised when Eritrea was fully welcomed, following the signing of the Eritrea–Ethiopia rapprochement in July 2018, where IGAD showed great willingness to receive back Eritrea. Eritrea is, however, still reluctant to reactivate its membership in IGAD. Eritrea resents the way IGAD treated it and thus abhors the regional organisation.

Eritrea's relations with the Organization of African Unity (OAU), IGAD, and its neighbours in the 29 years since its independence (1991–2020) have not been free from tension and conflicts (Reid, 2009; Clapham, 2007). Regarding its relationship with the OAU, Eritreans have a bitter memory. This memory was expressed by the president of the newly independent Eritrea in a scathing critique he delivered at the OAU Summit of 1993, where he virtually accused the continental organisation of being worthless (Wrong, 2005, 358). This criticism pertains to how the OAU treated the Eritrean liberation struggle. The sense of bitterness was further reinforced because of the role of the OAU during the second Eritrea–Ethiopia war (1998–2000) and the subsequent no-war no-peace situation and UN Security Council-imposed sanctions (Bogale, 2014). IGAD and the AU were behind the 2009 UNSC-imposed sanction on Eritrea, both organisations, according to Eritrea, acting on behalf of Ethiopia.

Eritrea's relation with neighbouring countries was also characterised by tensions and conflicts. In Sudan, influenced by the ideologue Dr Hassan Abd-Allah al-Turabi, the government of Omar al-Bashir aggressively supported the consolidation of radical Islam and its expansion into neighbouring countries. Sudan helped in the establishment and support of the Eritrean Islamic Jihad, which pestered the western Eritrean lowlands. Soon, Eritrea and Sudan became

engaged in a series of battles and broke off diplomatic relations; and Eritrea aligned itself with Ethiopia and Uganda in supporting the rebel Sudan People's Liberation Movement (SPLM) (Bogale, 2014; Healy, 2009). While Eritrea supported the Sudan National Democratic Alliance (NDA) fighting the regime in Khartoum, Sudan supported Eritrean opposition groups. Therefore, throughout the post-liberation period, Sudan–Eritrea relations showed serious difficulties that had implications on IGAD as the two are members.

A treaty between two colonial powers, France and Italy, created the boundary between Eritrea and Djibouti. Following Eritrea's *de jure* independence in 1993, some tensions pivoting around the boundary began to simmer. Until 2008, no notable border dispute occurred between the two countries except for a skirmish and a two-month standoff in 1996. In February 2008, regional Djiboutian officials observed Eritrea was constructing earthworks close to the border on the Ras Doumeira ridge. Djibouti alleged – and Eritrea denied – that on 7 April 2008, Eritrean armed forces penetrated Djiboutian territory, dug trenches on both sides of the border, and occupied Ras Doumeira. Several rounds of negotiations were held, but were halted when Djibouti sent troops, on 22 April, to the border area. It is highly possible that this tension was connected to the Ethiopia–Eritrea conflict, which at the time was experiencing additional tension around the common border of the three countries. On 5 May, Djibouti took the case to the United Nations Security Council (UNSC), the AU, and the Arab League, all of which urged Djibouti and Eritrea to exercise restraint. Consequently, until August 2018, all diplomatic relations between Eritrea and Djibouti were severed.

The Somalia–Eritrea relation has a historical dimension. The former was one of the few countries in Africa that consistently supported Eritrea's independence. Eritreans, therefore, are grateful for the various forms of support – particularly the provision of passports and offices – they received from Somalia during their liberation struggle, and feel indebted to, and obliged to contribute to peace and stability in, Somalia. Ostensibly, they see their role in Somalia from that vantage point. Through IGAD, Eritrea continued to participate in the Somali peace process that finally led to the establishment of a Transitional Federal Government (TFG) in Somalia. With the subsequent outbreak of clashes between the TFG and Islamist groups in Mogadishu and beyond, and Ethiopia's invasion of Somalia in 2006, things changed. While Ethiopia stood on the side of the TFG, Eritrea found itself supporting factions opposing the TFG. This led scholars to maintain that Somalia fall victim to a proxy war between Ethiopia and Eritrea (Lyon, 2009; Abbink, 2003). The Eritrean government took the position that only Somalis, without external intervention, could resolve their problem. This Eritrean position antagonised powerful actors, particularly the US and Ethiopia, who accused Eritrea of supporting terrorist groups.

In December 2009, through IGAD's request and AU's endorsement, the UNSC imposed arms and travel sanctions against Eritrea for its alleged involvement in Somalia and its conflict with Djibouti (Sabala in Sharamo and Mesfin, 2011; Bogale, 2014). The fact that the imposition of sanctions was initiated by IGAD created a bitter resentment in Eritrea towards the regional organisation,

such that Eritrea, even after sanctions were lifted, found it difficult to reactivate its membership in IGAD.

The Eritrean and Ethiopian relation is long and complex. Following 30 years of liberation struggle, Eritrea got its independence from Ethiopia in 1991. The relationship between the post-liberation Eritrean government and the post-Dergue Ethiopian government was highly praised, until the second war (1998–2000) broke out in May 1998, seemingly sparked by border dispute. The end of the war was replaced by a no-war no-peace situation that lasted until July 2018. The unconditional acceptance and readiness to implement the Algiers Agreement by the new Ethiopian leader paved the way for the signing of the Ethiopian–Eritrean rapprochement on 9 July 2018, ending the 20-year state of war between the two countries. Following the rapprochement, also as part of the package they signed, the countries renewed their diplomatic relations; opened embassies in their respective capitals; reinstated sea, air, land, and telecommunication links; began trading; etc. Yet, the village of Badme, the flashpoint of the war, remains under Ethiopian control, which casts a dark cloud on the relationship.

Briefly, Eritrea's relationship with IGAD, the OAU/AU, neighbouring countries, and the larger world is defined by the history and experiences of the last 70-plus years. Understanding these relationships requires unpacking and having an adequate grasp of the difficult experiences of the last several decades.

The sections below will show that IGAD and Eritrea have been at odds with each other – mainly due to the Ethiopian factor.

The 1998–2000 Eritrea–Ethiopia border conflict

Intensive peace efforts in 1998 and 1999 showed to intermediaries – the US, the UN, the OAU, and Algeria – that neither country was ready to fully commit to the peace process. Fighting resumed in May 2000 around the village of Badme, the flashpoint of the war. The war, sparked apparently by a border dispute, raged for two years. With Bouteflika's personal input and under the auspices of the OAU, both countries agreed to a cessation of hostilities (18 June 2000), with the UN and the AU as its guarantors, followed by a comprehensive peace agreement (12 December 2000) signed in Algiers with the Algerian government, the US, the European Union (EU), the OAU, and the UN as witnesses.

Despite the claim by Demeke (2014) that IGAD attempted to mediate between Ethiopia and Eritrea during the 1998–2000 war, IGAD played no discernible role in the peace process that stopped the border war. Nor did IGAD or the guarantors and witnesses of the Algiers Agreement make any notable and persistent attempt to normalise the relationship between the two countries following the stalemate that arose after Ethiopia refused to be bound by the April 2002 decision of the Eritrea–Ethiopia Border Commission (EEBC), which awarded Badme to Eritrea. Ethiopia continues to occupy Badme, even after the signing of the Eritrea–Ethiopia rapprochement in July 2018. After referring to the Eritrea–Ethiopia and Eritrea–Djibouti conflicts, Frank (2015, 115) notes: “Regarding conflict mediation, the failure of the regional organisations, notably [IGAD], to initiate such

action calls into question the ability of these regional security brokers to accomplish one of their fundamental tasks.” As many observers allude to, IGAD, under the spell of Ethiopia, was unable to play any role in the Ethiopia–Eritrea conflict (Mengisteab, 2014).

The Eritrea–Djibouti border conflict

In a similar manner to how it failed to be involved in the Ethiopia–Eritrea conflict, IGAD did not develop a notable peace initiative to resolve the Eritrea–Djibouti conflict. During the 12th Summit of the Assembly of Heads of State and Government (AHSG) on 14 June 2008, IGAD expressed serious concern over “Eritrea’s military attack” and reprimanded Eritrea for attacking Djibouti.¹ It should be noted that the communiqué of this summit was passed in Addis Ababa during Eritrea’s self-imposed absence from IGAD. A series of IGAD communiqués² on the Eritrea–Djibouti dispute called on Eritrea to release Djiboutian prisoners of war and to be bound by the UN Security Council Resolution 1862 of 14 January 2009 to withdraw from Djibouti’s territory. The author has seen no IGAD communiqué to date taking note of the fact that in March 2016, the Government of Eritrea released four Djiboutian prisoners of war. Hence, IGAD’s statements castigating only Eritrea could be easily interpreted as taking sides. It is hard – or not hard – to understand why IGAD, which had for years insisted on the release of the prisoners, failed to take note of, or appreciate, Eritrea’s action.³

The UN Security Council took relatively quick initiatives. From 28 July to 6 August 2008, a fact-finding mission visited the region and presented its report to the Council on 17 September. On 14 January 2009, UNSC Resolution 1862 demanded that within five weeks of the resolution’s adoption Eritrea withdraw its forces to the *status quo ante* (i.e. to positions they occupied before their deployment to the ridge in April 2008). Eritrea rejected the resolution the next day. It alleged that Ethiopia’s setting up of long-range artillery on Eritrean territory at the tri-border on Musa Ali was proof that the Eritrea–Djibouti conflict was a continuation of the Eritrea–Ethiopia dispute and the UN’s failure to enforce the EEBC decision (Frank, 2015). The Council continued to receive reports on a mediation process initiated by Qatar. On 20 July 2010, the Council held a meeting to discuss Eritrea’s compliance with Resolution 1907 regarding the border dispute between Djibouti and Eritrea. The Council’s uneven-handed treatment of the Eritrea–Djibouti and Ethiopia–Eritrea disputes is disturbing, and seriously undermines its credibility, not to mention further exacerbating its relation with Eritrea.

The most important and fruitful intervention in ameliorating the dispute has been Qatar’s efforts. Frank (2015) refers to Qatar’s “reputation as a fair and honest mediator over a number of [previous] conflicts” such as those in Sudan, Yemen, and Lebanon, a reputation which it brought to the Eritrea–Djibouti conflict without “agendas and ulterior motives.” Djibouti had requested the intervention of Qatar’s “good offices” prior to the Ras Doumeira incident; and Eritrea’s previous good working relations with Qatar – including mediating between Eritrea

and Sudan and Eritrean–Qatari efforts to resolve the conflict in Darfur and East Sudan – made it easier for Eritrea to also accept Qatari mediation.

Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa Al-Thani, the emir of Qatar, took personal charge of the mediation process and Presidents Isaias Afwerki and Ismail Omar Guelleh, of Eritrea and Djibouti, respectively, by an agreement they signed in Doha on 6 June 2010, entrusted him “with full powers to issue a document containing legal and technical actions as well as mechanisms as he deems fit for a final and mutually binding resolution of this border dispute.”⁴ A six-article executive document was signed and a committee of three established to resolve the boundary dispute. The committee was authorised to receive necessary documents and information and ensure the demarcation of the frontiers between the two countries by a world-renowned company. Moreover, it was agreed that each party would provide Qatar with a list containing the number and names of prisoners of war they had detained, if any, and also a list containing the number and names of missing persons. In a letter sent to the UN Security Council on the same day, Qatari Prime Minister Sheikh Hamad bin Jassim bin Jabr Al-Thani, who chaired the committee, confirmed that Eritrea had withdrawn its forces from the disputed border areas. Qatari soldiers would continue to monitor the border area until the final demarcation (Awate Team).

Eritrea’s pull-out and return to IGAD and the AU

On 13 April 2005, IGAD’s CoM resolved to support Ethiopia’s military intervention in Somalia. Eritrea’s objection to the resolution for the next two years had two sides to it: Eritrea objected to the use of the military of one member state in the territory of another; as an undercurrent running the other way, however, was the constant competition between Eritrea and Ethiopia to assert influence in the region. Somalia was allegedly a territory for a proxy war between Eritrea and Ethiopia. Finally, the Eritrean minister of foreign affairs sent a letter to the then AHSG chair notifying him that Eritrea had “temporarily suspended its membership in [IGAD] effective 21st April 2007 [...] in reaction to a number of resolutions passed pertaining to the worsening situation in Somalia” (Andemariam, 2015, 364).

Eritrea has not been pleased with the AU either. Since Ethiopia’s failure to abide by the decision of the EEBC, Eritrea had been developing grudges against the guarantors and witnesses of the Algiers Agreement and had continuously aired its grievance against the US-led collusion with Ethiopia to discredit Eritrea’s independence and stability. Following numerous reminders to the AU to implement the EEBC’s ruling, Eritrea recalled its ambassador from the AU in November 2003.

However, both IGAD and the AU continued to encourage Eritrea to come back to them. In meetings held on 12 and 14 June 2008 (although more than a year after Eritrea’s self-suspension) IGAD’s CoM and AHSG respectively made known their intent to welcome Eritrea back. To unite IGAD and AU efforts, the communiqué of the 14 June IGAD AHSG Summit endorsed the CoM recommendation

for the establishment of a task force that would engage Eritrea in the succeeding the 11th African Union summit, “with a view to convincing Eritrea to reconsider her decision to suspend her membership in IGAD” (Andemariam, 2015, 366).

At the invitation of Eritrea’s president, a delegation led by Kenyan Foreign Minister Moses Wetangula, Sudanese Foreign Minister Deng Alor, and IGAD Executive Secretary Mahboub Maalim made an official visit to Eritrea on 14–15 August 2008, where the delegation invited Eritrea back to the organisation. During the meeting, Afwerki noted his government’s displeasure at IGAD for not living up to its expectation in resolving the Somalis, Sudan, Eritrea–Ethiopia, and Eritrea–Djibouti disputes, but nevertheless welcomed IGAD’s request for his country to resume its participation in IGAD and appointed his minister of agriculture as Eritrea’s IGAD focal person.

In January 2011, Eritrea reopened its Permanent Mission to the AU and its representative, Girma Asmerom, was well received by Jean Ping, chair of the AU Commission, who said that he was delighted and that Eritrea’s return to the AU had been a priority since he took office three years previously (Andemariam, 2015). Following the welcome ceremony, Eritrea continued to participate fully in all activities of the AU in Addis Ababa through its representatives. In fact, during a national conference in Asmara on 11 June 2016, to launch the end of a campaign of child marriage in Eritrea, the conference was attended by an AU delegation led by Dr Mustapha Sidiki, the AU commissioner for social affairs, who also exchanged ideas during the conference.

However, a different state of affairs was unfolding in Djibouti at IGAD’s headquarters. In a letter to Mahboub Maalim, dated 25 July 2009, Eritrea’s foreign minister notified IGAD of his government’s intention to reactivate its membership in the organisation. A subsequent letter sent to Jean Ping described the reason for Eritrea’s decision to rejoin IGAD:

In recognition and appreciation of the consistent and frequent requests and appeals made by IGAD Ministerial Delegation, AU and International Development Partners such as EU; and in the spirit of reconciliation, peace and security and regional integration; as well as in recognition of the current economic and political dynamics of the world, Eritrea has finally decided to reactivate its membership to IGAD effective 25th July 2011.

(Andemariam, 2015, 368)

Maalim reacted positively to Eritrea’s “historic letter” and circulated copies to all IGAD Members. On 30 July 2011 Eritrea’s Foreign Minister Osman Saleh sent a letter to Maalim notifying him that Ambassador Asmerom would represent Eritrea in IGAD. Andemariam (2015, 371) narrates a regrettable incident that occurred subsequently:

On 24 August 2011, the 40th extraordinary session of the CoM was to convene at the Sheraton Addis in Addis Ababa. The chargé d’affaires of the State of Eritrea to the AU and ECA, who had been delegated to attend the meeting,

was, however, informed that he would not be allowed to sit at the meeting and, following a brief altercation, was escorted out of the meeting hall by the hotel's security personnel. The meeting then proceeded without Eritrea's representative.

The communiqué of the meeting referred to Eritrea's application to reactivate its membership, stating that the CoM

[r]eaffirms the credibility of IGAD as a regional organisation governed by established rules and procedures, and urges that these be followed in the conduct of its business; further underscores that the application of Eritrea for re-admission to IGAD should follow appropriate rules and procedures including consideration of the summit of the IGAD Heads of State and Government.

(IGAD Assembly of Heads of State and Government, 2011)

The incident provoked a series of condemnations from Eritrea. However, IGAD, mainly through its executive secretary – until at least as late as 2013, during a speech he made at Chatham House, London (Maalim, 2013) – continued to maintain that there were formalities that needed to be carried out before Eritrea could resume its participation in IGAD: specifically, a formal decision by the AHSG to welcome Eritrea back. Andemariam (2015) tried to show why IGAD's position did not make sense under international law nor by IGAD's own constitutive agreement. Since August 2011, when the 40th Extraordinary Session of the CoM met, and 25 November 2011, when the 19th AHSG Extraordinary Session was held, no AHSG or CoM communiqué had raised the case of Eritrea's coming back to IGAD. The most recent meetings on record that the author could find were the communiqué of the 56th Extraordinary Session of the CoM in July 2016, which was the CoM's 16th extraordinary meeting since August 2011; and the communiqué of the 29th Extraordinary Session of the AHSG in December 2016, which was the AHSG's 10th extraordinary session since November 2011. In none of these *at least* 26 meetings of IGAD's organs was the question of Eritrea's re-entry into the organisation raised. However, as is described in the next section, Eritrea was discussed in these post-August 2011 IGAD meetings, among other reasons, to condemn its detention of Djiboutian prisoners of war and to welcome and call for additional UN sanctions against Eritrea.

The impasse continues and Eritrea has yet to be welcomed back into IGAD. Eritrea blames no other IGAD member but Ethiopia for the impasse (Permanent Mission of Eritrea to the UN, 2012, 2). According to Mulugeta (2014, 3), "Ethiopia has also managed to drive regional agendas through the existing regional and continental organizations, namely [IGAD] and the African Union."

It is regrettable, indeed, that Ethiopia continues to hold – or refuses to abdicate, according to some observers – the chair of the AHSG, a position it has held since June 2008 (TesfaNews, 2013). Such a position has, it appears, helped Ethiopia block the question of Eritrea's re-entry into IGAD from being discussed in any

of IGAD's organs. The reluctance of the other IGAD members to raise Eritrea's case will, moreover, be counted as providing tacit support to Ethiopia's alleged efforts not to welcome Eritrea back into IGAD. Following a change of government in April 2018, and after ten years of incumbency, Ethiopia handed over the chairmanship of IGAD to Sudan in November 2019.

Eritrea's self-suspension from IGAD had – or could have – negative consequences. The most notable of these was IGAD's request, during Eritrea's absence, for the UN Security Council to sanction Eritrea for its involvement in Somalia and the conflict with Djibouti. The Security Council in December 2009 issued a sanction to that effect. Eritrea's inability to rejoin IGAD has also kept it outside the organisation's area of influence in situations where IGAD has been active in matters concerning the Horn of Africa. For instance, Eritrea has not been able to join the IGAD effort to resolve the conflict in South Sudan, a country in the creation of which Eritrea made a significant contribution. Finally, Eritrea's being away from the IGAD table will deny it active participation in shaping discussions involving the use and allocation of resources provided by the international community to IGAD. For instance, in October 2014 a consortium of donors – the World Bank, the EU, the African Development Bank, and the Islamic Development Bank – announced it would provide USD \$8 billion in assistance to the Horn of Africa to support numerous social, educational, and development efforts. IGAD will be at the heart of the implementation of these ambitious projects (World Bank Group, 2014). It is difficult to see how, being “on the outside,” Eritrea can actively cooperate in harnessing the benefits of this initiative. Nevertheless, the role played by IGAD to isolate and marginalise it has left such an indelible impact on Eritrea that, having now the possibility to reactivate its membership, the country is still reluctant to do so and sees no worth in rejoining.

UN sanctions against Eritrea

On 23 December 2009, the UN Security Council passed Resolution 1907, which stipulated an arms embargo, travel sanctions, and asset freezes on Eritrea and on select political and military officials for providing support to armed groups that were undermining peace and reconciliation in Somalia – in particular, Al-Shabaab – and for not withdrawing its forces from Djibouti.⁵

The narrations of these sanctions constitute a reminder, from the AU and the US, to Eritrea to desist from supporting terrorist groups in Somalia and to peacefully resolve its dispute with Djibouti, as well as a refusal from Eritrea to heed to such reminders. Finally, IGAD called upon the AU and the UN to work on imposing sanctions on Eritrea (Sharamo and Mesfin, 2011). For the first time in the history of the UN, a continental organisation – the AU Peace and Security Council – called on the UN Security Council to sanction one of its own member states (Eritrea) (Bogale, 2014). Eritrea, for its part, has referred to cable messages leaked by WikiLeaks in which the former US ambassador to the UN, Susan Rice, made known her intention to support a UN sanction initiated by IGAD and

proposed to the Security Council by Uganda, which was exactly what happened (Permanent Mission of Eritrea to the UN, 2012).

Once again IGAD, during the 18th extraordinary session of AHSG in Addis Ababa on 4 July 2011, called on

the AU and the UNSC to fully implement the existing sanctions [of December 2009] and impose additional Sanctions selectively on the Eritrean Regime specially on those economic and mining sectors that the regime draws on including the Eritrean Diaspora as well as ensuring compliance with previous decisions of the UN.

(IGAD Assembly of Heads of State and Government, 2011)

Although this wish was not granted, the UN Security Council slightly toughened its 2009 sanction through Resolution 2023 (December 2011), urging companies involved in mining ventures in Eritrea to exercise further vigilance and due diligence to ensure that money generated from mining is not used to destabilise the region. The AHSG, during its 19th Extraordinary Session (27 January 2012), “welcome[d] the resolution on additional sanctions against Eritrea for its continued destabilization activities in the region and calls for the expeditious implementation of the enhanced sanctions.” Mulugeta (2014, 29) states that, throughout the period of the sanctions, “Ethiopia was instrumental in the imposition of sanctions against Eritrea. It skilfully used its diplomacy to mobilize the support of the states in the region, the AU, and the UN Security Council to impose the sanctions.”

Mosley (2014, 3) adds:

Eritrea, a small state with limited resources, is using the Horn of Africa’s tried and trusted methods to undermine its perceived adversary. Meanwhile, Ethiopia, a much larger state on the path to unlocking its economic potential, is not only using traditional methods, but is also exploiting its international diplomatic position strategically in an effort to keep Eritrea (and the threat of instability that it poses to Ethiopia) isolated and contained.

The experience of Eritrea’s dispute with Djibouti, which ended in peace at the border and the release of Djiboutian prisoners of war; Eritrea’s self-suspension from IGAD, which ended in Eritrea notifying IGAD of its intention to resume its participation in the organisation; as well as the UN Security Council sanctions, monitoring of which has shown that Eritrea’s involvement with Al-Shabaab has been discontinued, show a pattern whereby IGAD continues to put pressure on, or denounce, Eritrea whenever it takes actions contrary to peace and security in the region; but, ironically, keeps silent whenever Eritrea takes steps to remedy those actions. Moreover, IGAD or the UNSC have never attempted to put pressure on Ethiopia for not abiding by the International Court of Arbitration decision and thereby withdrawing from the Eritrean territories that it still occupies. This double standard infuriates Eritreans.

Eritrea–Ethiopia rivalry in IGAD

Since 1997, when Eritrea and Ethiopia parted ways and engaged in a conflict that involved a bloody border war, Eritrea’s relationship with IGAD – narrated in the previous sections – has been defined by three key factors.

Firstly, due to Eritrea’s continued clashes with its neighbours and the country’s resultant perception as a “geopolitical pariah in the Horn of Africa,” “prickly and difficult to deal with” (Müller, 2015), and a “bad neighbour” and “exporter of instability” (Mosley, 2014), it has become relatively easier for Ethiopia to use its influence against Eritrea through IGAD and the AU.

Secondly, it should be mentioned that Ethiopia’s rise as a regional player had an impact on Eritrea–IGAD relations. Ethiopia’s military and economic strength has given it added leverage to use IGAD in the exercise of its policies against Eritrea. Similarly, Eritrea believes that IGAD is used as a Trojan horse by Ethiopia (Mulugeta, 2014) and that “Ethiopia is singlehandedly and illegally blocking, to date, Eritrea’s return to [IGAD]” (Permanent Mission of Eritrea to the UN, 2012, 2). Bereketeab (2012, 185–186) concurs:

the most conspicuous factor of [IGAD’s] negligence [to address the Eritrea–Ethiopian conflict] can be found in the fact that Ethiopia occupies a dominant position in the regional organization [i.e. IGAD]. Therefore any discussion, let alone decision, that would offend Ethiopia could not be entertained within IGAD [...] Ethiopia persuaded IGAD to initiate a UN sanctions on Eritrea [...] This seriously taints the credibility and integrity of IGAD, since it has been deadily silent regarding the verdict of the Permanent Court of Arbitration (PCA) on the border dispute between Eritrea and Ethiopia which has been stalled for the last [13] years due to Ethiopia’s rejection while it invoked a border dispute with Djibouti to punish Eritrea.

Thirdly, although of lesser significance, is the fact that since around 2010 most IGAD meetings have been held in Addis Ababa, not in Djibouti, which may have put additional pressure on Eritrean representatives to freely participate in IGAD meetings. The weakness of this observation may lie in the fact that Eritrea’s mission to the AU, which is also mandated to attend IGAD meetings, is based in Addis Ababa and has been freely attending AU meetings. The author invites further inquiry into why Ethiopia did not care to stop Eritrea from rejoining the AU. Why focus on IGAD only and not also the AU?

IGAD cannot present itself as an effective regional peacemaker unless it takes a hand in resolving the animosity between Eritrea and Ethiopia. It has been repeatedly noted that solving the conflict between Eritrea and Ethiopia is a litmus test for IGAD’s role as a regional peacemaker. Bereketeab (2012, 85) observes:

The most glaring failure of IGAD regarding peace and security concerns the Ethiopia–Eritrea conflict. In spite of the fact that Article 18A on Conflict Resolution states that Member States shall “accept to deal with disputes between Member States within this sub-regional mechanism before they

are referred to other regional or international organizations,” IGAD has not been able to do anything. IGAD has not been able to seriously, objectively and neutrally discuss the issue in spite of the fact that the conflict has been described as the epicentre of most of the conflicts in the region. Strangely, the IGAD conflict resolution mechanism was not even invoked.

Healy (2009, 12–13) has also observed that:

The region’s most enduring failure since the establishment of IGAD’s peace and security mandate has been the inability to dissuade Ethiopia and Eritrea from settling their differences on the battlefield in 1999 and 2000 [...] IGAD has been powerless to persuade Ethiopia and Eritrea to normalise relations or to finalise a peace settlement. Their intense mutual hostility continues to poison regional relations and exacerbate other conflicts. It remains the key obstacle to any progress towards developing an improved regional security framework.

Dersso (2014, 4) comments, “The resultant tension between [Eritrea and Ethiopia] not only spilled over into the existing conflicts in the region (primarily the Somali conflict), but it also has become a major stumbling block for IGAD’s regional integration mandate.” As Kasaija Phillip Apuuli, in Chapter 12 of this volume, notes, the president of Uganda, for instance, has repeatedly stated that Uganda would not allow itself to be drawn into the constant quarrels between Ethiopia and Eritrea. Indeed, Uganda has increasingly been looking towards the East African Economic Community (EAC).

The statements quoted above were selected to give context to the line of argument in this paper that Eritrea’s recent relations with IGAD have essentially been the reflection of its hostile, post-1998 relation with Ethiopia. In contravention of its statute, Ethiopia has occupied the chairpersonship of IGAD from 2008 to 2019, inducing suspicion and mistrust among member states that the organisation became a tool of Ethiopia (see Berhanu’s chapter in this volume), while others opine that Ethiopia’s reluctance to hand over the chairpersonship was intended to block the Eritrean case from appearing in the agenda of the Assembly of Heads of State and Government.

Despite Ethiopia’s rise in regional influence, Eritrea has not totally gone into the darkness of irrelevance. Since 2016, Eritrea has been actively engaged in Yemen in a 34-state military coalition against Houthi rebels, allowing Saudi and Emirati warships and fighter planes to make use of its ports, airports, and airspace, as well as to build new military bases (Gridneff, 2015). Ethiopia had made known its dislike of Eritrea’s military alliance with Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) (Geeskaafrika, 2016), since Eritrea’s new move could be interpreted as an action aimed at garnering more influence in and around the Horn. Ethiopia’s Prime Minister Hailemariam Desalegn in 2015 warned Saudi Arabia and the UAE of the consequences should Eritrea use its new relations with them to destabilise the region (African Globe, 2015; Ngaish, 2015). Seen in light of a

July 2016 visit to Ethiopia by Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu (Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2016), the Eritrea–Ethiopia dispute has probably been elevated to an across-the-Red-Sea, if not a global, level. Despite being a sub-regional bloc immediately affected not only by the Yemeni conflict, but also the alliances mentioned above, IGAD’s continued silence on the Eritrea–Ethiopia dispute has damaged its reputation.

Conclusion

The change of government in Ethiopia in April 2018 was a landmark in the Horn of Africa region. It not only ended the 20 years of state of war between Eritrea and Ethiopia, but it also restructured inter-state relations in the Horn of Africa. Somalia and Eritrea opened diplomatic relations, the president of Eritrea and Djibouti met for the first time in ten years. Subsequently, Somalia, Ethiopia, and Eritrea convened several summits and agreed to work together on common issues of security, development, and regional integration. These are issues that are of central concern to IGAD, which could be facilitated under amicable relations among member states.

IGAD has been pursuing regional integration since 1996 (IGAD, 2009, 2010) and has adopted its own Minimum Integration Plan that covers transport, industry, information and communications technology, peace and security, agriculture, livestock and food security, environment and natural resources sectors, as well as cross-cutting sectors such as gender and health (Dersso, 2014). However, IGAD has been consistently identified as a low-performing regional economic community in the African integration strategy, particularly in the economic/trade integration plan (Abdi and Seid, 2013; Gebeyehu, 2015; Abraha, 2013; Dersso 2014). This is partly due to festering conflicts among member states.

Events and developments in the past few years have highlighted Eritrea as a country with huge mineral and agricultural resources (Thomas, 2012), signalling the potential for economic and trade development for the country. However, most of Eritrea’s exports have been to countries outside Africa. Since trade cooperation has proven to be a catalyst to solving political conflict, engaging Eritrea in IGAD’s economic integration activities is an ineluctable solution. Moreover, it is imperative for IGAD to address peace, security, and development in the entire region. In order to do that IGAD needs to stay neutral and impartial with regard to treating its member states. Its treatment of Eritrea has tainted the image of IGAD. It is vital Eritrea is incorporated in the regional organisation, and for that to happen IGAD needs to earn Eritrea’s confidence.

Following the Eritrea–Ethiopia rapprochement in 2018, the door is open for Eritrea to reactivate its membership. But, so far, Eritrea seems very reluctant to reinstate its membership. It might take a while for IGAD to gain the trust of Eritrea, but at the end, it is only through organic, mutual trust and genuine integration that the region will be able to deal with the convoluted problems the region faces. The image of IGAD has very much been tainted; populations in the region have a very low opinion of the organisation. The new landmark, however, opens

a golden opportunity for IGAD to revitalise itself, make itself meaningful, and change its image.

Notes

- 1 See the communiqué of the 12th Ordinary Summit of the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD), held at the Sheraton Hotel Addis Ababa, Ethiopia on 14 June 2008.
- 2 See, for example, IGAD Council of Ministers (2009, 2012); IGAD Assembly of Heads of State and Government (2011).
- 3 In fact, the Commission of Inquiry established to investigate human rights abuses in Eritrea took note of the release of the prisoners of war in a report in June 2015 (United Nations Human Rights Council, 2015).
- 4 See the unofficial translation of the letter by His Excellency Sheikh Hamad bin Jassim bin Jabr Al-Thani, Prime Minister, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the State of Qatar, dated 6 June 2010.
- 5 A monitoring group working under the Sanctions Committee has issued reports following up implementation of the sanctions; its reports are available at <https://www.un.org/sc/suborg/en/sanctions/751/work-and-mandate/reports>.

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