The State of Governance, Peace and Security in the Horn of Africa
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<th>Acronym</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ADF</td>
<td>Allied Democratic Forces</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AfDB</td>
<td>African Development Bank</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AMISOM</td>
<td>African Union Mission in Somalia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ARCSS</td>
<td>Agreement on the Resolution of Conflict in South Sudan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ATMIS</td>
<td>African Union Transition Mission in Somalia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AU</td>
<td>African Union</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AUHIP</td>
<td>African Union High-Level Implementation Panel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AUHR-HoA</td>
<td>African Union High Representative for the Horn of Africa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AUPSC</td>
<td>African Union Peace and Security Council</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BRI</td>
<td>Belt and Road Initiative of China</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CAR</td>
<td>Central Africa Republic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CFA</td>
<td>Cooperative Framework Agreement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>COVID-19</td>
<td>Coronavirus Disease</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Co2</td>
<td>Carbon monoxide</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DRC</td>
<td>Democratic Republic of Congo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EAC</td>
<td>East African Community</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EACOP</td>
<td>East Africa Crude Oil Pipeline</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EAFLU</td>
<td>Eastern Africa Fusion and Liaison Unit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EASF</td>
<td>East African Standby Force</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EB</td>
<td>Equity Bank</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ECOWAS</td>
<td>Economic Community of West African States</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EU</td>
<td>European Union</td>
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<tr>
<td>FFC</td>
<td>Forces of Freedom and Change</td>
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<tr>
<td>GDP</td>
<td>Gross Domestic Product</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GERD</td>
<td>Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GMO</td>
<td>Genetically Modified Organism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HoA</td>
<td>Horn of Africa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acronym</td>
<td>Description</td>
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<tr>
<td>---------</td>
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<tr>
<td>ICGLR</td>
<td>International Conference on the Great Lakes Region</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ICT</td>
<td>Information and Communication Technology</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IDPs</td>
<td>Internally Displaced People</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IGAD</td>
<td>Intergovernmental Authority on Development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ICPAC</td>
<td>IGAD Climate Prediction and Applications Centre</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KCB</td>
<td>Kenya Commercial Bank</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LAPSET</td>
<td>Lamu Port, South Sudan and Ethiopia Transport corridor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LAS</td>
<td>League of Arab States</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NBI</td>
<td>Nile Basin Initiative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OPEC</td>
<td>Organisation for the Petroleum Exporting Countries</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OSE-HoA</td>
<td>Office of the Special Envoy for the Horn of Africa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RCs</td>
<td>Resident Coordinators</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RC</td>
<td>Resistance Committees</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SDGs</td>
<td>Sustainable Development Goals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SMEs</td>
<td>Small and Medium Enterprises</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TPLF</td>
<td>Tigray People’s Liberation Front</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UAE</td>
<td>United Arab Emirates</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UK</td>
<td>United Kingdom</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UN</td>
<td>United Nations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UNECA</td>
<td>United Nation Economic Commission for Africa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UNESCO</td>
<td>United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation</td>
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<tr>
<td>UNHCR</td>
<td>United Nations Human Rights</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UNITAMS</td>
<td>United Nations Integrated Transition Assistance Mission in Sudan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UNSC</td>
<td>United Nations Security Council</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>US</td>
<td>United States of America</td>
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<tr>
<td>WB</td>
<td>World Bank</td>
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</table>
Chart 1: The IGAD region
Executive Summary

Since 2018, the Horn of Africa region has experienced major socio-political shifts that the Covid-19 pandemic and the war in Ukraine only exacerbated. While inter-state conflict has continued to decrease, intra-state violence has experienced a peak with communal clashes manifesting themselves in various forms. As a consequence, the region has maintained its position as one of the world’s main regions producing refugees and internally displaced persons.

Under the pressure of structural shifts in demographics, economics, technology and climate change, the region’s governments are adjusting while at the same time facing recurrent demands from a largely youthful population. Governance has experienced mixed fortunes. The volatile security situation has affected the civic and democratic space with many countries experiencing a decline in the respect of rule of law. In general, complex state building processes in the region manifest themselves in governments’ difficulty to consensually manage diversity (political views, gender and identity), thereby fuelling popular grievances and further instability.

On the other hand, contested but largely peaceful elections in Kenya, Somalia and, to a certain extent, Ethiopia, contribute to entrench political competition in the context of decreasing quality of elections. However, the accelerated use of network technology for both delivering social services and managing law and order is changing the governance landscape. Across the region elections, education, famine early warning and even COVID-19 responses are increasingly resorting to network technology. But its multifaceted nature is also facilitating the restriction of human rights through digital surveillance of citizens. The direct and indirect impacts of COVID-19 have limited the ability of governments to respond to citizens demands for services, at a time when mistrust in national leadership is perceived to be growing, especially among young populations. The increasingly apprehensive political environment in all countries of the region is promptly translating into restrictions in civic space, revival of identity politics, constitutional contests, and an aggregate rolling back of democracy.

Violent conflict has widened its scope and affected formerly stable countries. Somalia is struggling to emerge from years of civil war, while Ethiopia is teetering, burdened by seemingly endless internal conflicts, a border conflict with Sudan, and a dispute over its dam on the Blue Nile with Egypt and Sudan. Conversely, South Sudan is in perpetual transition, while the new Framework Agreement in Sudan is yet to receive wide acceptance, especially from the Resistance Committees (RCs).
While being driven by decades old structural dynamics, conflict situations integrate with systemic climate stress, pandemics and new information and communication technology to alter the threat landscape in the region. Although these changes had been decades in the making, the pace at which they are unfolding as well as their complexity cause regional uncertainty in the Horn of Africa. Moreover, they challenge existing regional diplomatic and security initiatives, thereby eroding trust and paving the way for external actors’ involvement.

While regional trade is poorly diversified, the region remains one of the world’s most important geostrategic site. Traditional and emerging powers compete for positioning in the countries of the region using a wide array of material and soft power instruments. The HoA and the Middle East have a long interactive history. In recent years, competition in the Arabian Peninsula has once again seeped into the HoA. Often portrayed as commercial and altruistic ventures, this competition is frequently around rivalries for military bases, agricultural investments and strategic geography. As far as traditional powers are concerned, accelerated processes of multipolarity are playing out in a region in the form of a resurgent Russia, a commercially aggressive China, and the US attempting to hold ground. Economic, political and security interests of external powers often collide to increase fragmentation in the Horn of Africa. The IGAD Red Sea Taskforce is one of the few attempts by IGAD to collectively manage foreign actors’ engagement in the region. It is still in incubation as are efforts to establish sustainable collective security mechanisms.

Owing to changing regional dynamics, global political polarity and institutional challenges, multilateralism is at a crossroads in the region. At a regional level, the combination of natural and man-made disasters is driving intervention strategies to evolve at an unprecedented pace to reach populations affected by conflicts and droughts quickly and effectively. Simultaneously, governments in the region are becoming insular, leveraging sovereignty and the mantra of African solutions to African problems, to stem perceived and real international scrutiny of their internal affairs. This presents an operational constraint to regional and global multilateral entities, in particular IGAD, the AU and the UN, who have to tread gingerly in implementing their mandates. Additionally, all of these entities are fraught by various iterations of the same problems: how to align the implementation of their mandates with the national plans of governments on the one hand and to inculcate political dexterity into their approaches on the other hand.

The report concludes by recommending that the multilateral actors in the region strengthen coordination among themselves, improve the quality of partnership with regional actors, and leverage the proliferation of information and communication technology to deliver their mandates.

Addis Ababa, June 2023
Introduction

In 2018, the Horn of Africa (HoA) region experienced significant political shifts, triggered by leadership changes in Ethiopia and Sudan, and a peace agreement in South Sudan. Shortly after, the previously sour relationship between Eritrea and Ethiopia thawed. New political, economic and developmental opportunities started to emerge in the region. Although the region was in flux, the predominant commentary and narrative was optimistic. Alliances, détentes and intra-state reforms were disrupting entrenched relationships and transforming the HoA’s long-standing image as a ‘regional conflict complex’ could be upended. Indeed, the dramatic shifts in the region were taxing the response capacity of national institutions and regional multilateral entities, leading to questions about the durability of the changes, and the ability of the countries of the region remain on a positive trajectory. If the international community’s interest in the region had been because of the region’s erstwhile negative image, this time around, something of a “goldrush” was underway. However, this optimism was to be short-lived.

By 2019, the HoA’s old habits started to resurface, with deadly political deadlocks and significant reconfigurations in different countries. In Ethiopia, moves to dissolve the Ethiopian People’s Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) and birth a new political party started to unravel the country. In Sudan, the military configuration left by President Bashir proved difficult for the civilian component to countenance. The Agreement on the Resolution of the Conflict in South Sudan failed to ‘take off’, while Somalia was caught in an impasse. At the same time, locusts, famine, and draughts were causing a humanitarian situation in many parts of the region, particularly affecting Ethiopia, Kenya, and Somalia. By 2021, all countries of the region were plagued by one or a combination of delicate political shifts, humanitarian emergencies, economic woes and a pandemic.

The region is now characterised by interwoven crises, including severe drought affecting nearly 20 million people, structural stresses, hybridisation of conflict, transition fatigue and chronic governance deficits. Despite a recent history of economic recovery and the absence of open interstate conflicts, the region is variously portrayed as ‘calm but not collected’, ‘adrift’, ‘fragmented’ and ‘uncertain’. Though widely shared, these depictions should be nuanced to grasp the implications of these shifts on peace and governance in societies and countries of the HoA.

This study was conducted in the second half of 2022 and included field visits to Ethiopia, Kenya, Somalia, South Sudan, Sudan and Uganda between July
and September 2022. The report examines emerging trends, themes and threats to governance, peace and security in the HoA region. During the assessment, political undercurrents in the region continued to evolve, shaping the trajectory of the analysis. A new round of conflict erupted in northern Ethiopia, Kenya witnessed its third peaceful transition following a tense political contest, while in South Sudan, the implementation of the transitional agreement was yet again extended. Given the assessment period, developments with regional security implications such as the clash within the security apparatus of Sudan in April 2023 are not covered.

The report is divided into three main sections. The first section provides contextual background based on structural developments in the region. It highlights the complex interaction between economic, political, environmental and demographic forces and their role in shaping some of the national, regional and global dynamics discussed in sections II and III of the report.

Section II depicts continuing and emerging governance, peace and security trends in the region. It argues that violent conflicts, institutional fragility and socio-political instability are gradually transforming into a systemic feature of a region that has often attracted fierce geopolitical competition from external powers. Section III addresses multilateralism in the HoA from the perspective of the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD), the African Union (AU) and the UN.

The report ends with recommendations for the multilateral entities active in the Horn of Africa, and for governments in the region.
Background and Structural Dynamics in the Horn of Africa

The HoA is a region of economic, political, social, environmental and demographic contrasts. The region comprises extremely poor countries and buoyant economies, distinct governance systems, old and new states, and vastly different cultures. The region’s assets, including diverse ecosystems, natural resources, renewable energy and strategic location, are underexploited and attract a broad spectrum of extra-regional actors, both public and private, as well as state and non-state entities. While some countries are sites of acute and protracted conflict and crises, political turmoil in others, for example Djibouti and Uganda, is barely documented.

In the early 1990s, countries of the region embarked on economic, political and technological restructuring, a process that saw some leaders, for example Meles Zenawi, Isaias Afwerki and Yoweri Museveni, christened a new breed on the continent. Despite the mayhem wrought on economies by these programmes, and the overall poverty that ensued, three decades later, human development is improving in the region, driven by commitments to regional integration, and marginal investment in health, education and social services by governments.

Decades-long climate pressures are interacting with economic, demographic and pandemic-related forces

While there is evidence that overall governance is improving on the continent, the region faces a leadership crisis. Some of the ‘new breed of leaders’ is still in charge in some countries, driving analysts to scrutinise the link between the current crises in the region, and the quality of the prevailing leadership, and indeed governance in general.

Today, internal and external shocks, as well as constructed and natural events, have plunged the region into crisis. Decades-long climate pressures are interacting with economic, demographic and pandemic-related forces, breeding region-wide humanitarian emergencies, and contributing towards migration within and out of the region.

At the same time, advances in information and communication technology (ICT) have improved governance and government efficiency and proliferated new experiences but are concurrently disrupting economies and increasing the digital divide, fragmenting communities. Access to information is deepening the region’s volatility by transforming how countries of the region engage with structural forces, emerging trends and regional politics.
Economics and Technology

Economies of the HoA – already divided into those perpetually in humanitarian crisis and those nominally improving – are confronting internal and external shocks, demographic pressure, environmental stress and mismanagement. Despite experiencing unprecedented growth before the pandemic, the Russo-Ukrainian conflict, new distortions caused by the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) and the impact of ICT will continue to shape the economic landscape in the region.

By continental standards, the region's gross domestic product (GDP) was robust in 2012, despite high levels of poverty, especially among youth and, in particular, women and girls. Ethiopia was growing at an average of 8.5%, Kenya at nearly 6%, Uganda at 5.3% in 2013, and Djibouti at 4.8%. In 2017, aggregate GDP growth averaged 3.15%, with Ethiopia growing the fastest at 10% per annum.

In 2020, COVID-19 struck, disrupting the movement of goods, services and people, upending global interconnectivity and trade, and aggravating already fragile economies. The pandemic layered over pre-existing economic pressures in the HoA, upset people’s livelihoods and widened gaping social divisions. The combination of internal shocks, an unforeseen pandemic and global disruptions plunged aggregated GDP growth across the HoA to 1.5% per annum, with negative growth in Kenya and Sudan. With the region already experiencing high levels of poverty, the unemployed and those in informal employment were hard hit, and in all countries, new unemployment was experienced.

In 2022, regional GDP growth rebounded, averaging 3.01%. Although economic growth has not yet reached pre-pandemic levels, forecasts for FY22/23 are promising and may accelerate in some countries, driven by pandemic-related innovations, stimulus financing, and creative health and education solutions.

Pitfalls nevertheless remain and may stall the recovery. Stagflation is looming as national debts swell, unemployment remains high and double-digit inflation persists. The distortion of prices of essential

Chart 2: GDP growth

Note: The above Chart shows the average annual GDP growth in the region. Sudan has consistently had low growth while Ethiopia consistently grew faster. In 2020, all regional economies experienced a slump in 2020, corresponding with the outbreak of COVID-19. Growth is beginning to pick up but is plagued by other non-pandemic factors.

Source: World Bank national accounts data, and OECD National Accounts data files
commodities, together with the Russo-Ukrainian conflict, is increasing production costs and straining economies. Together, this undermines short-term prospects for growth, and is contributing to political crises in countries like Kenya.23

The impact of COVID-19

The effects of COVID-19 and measures to contain it will likely persist for a long time and affect social, economic and political spheres of life.24 COVID-19’s impact emanated directly from the virus as well as from resultant economic and social disruptions, disproportionately affecting the elderly and the predisposed.25 At the height of the pandemic, for example, teenage pregnancies and violence against women and children increased, driven by school closures and restrictions on freedom of movement.26

In Kenya, social stress is allegedly rising, linked to the high prices of fuel, staple foods and fertilisers.27 The consequences of the pandemic have influenced Kenya’s foreign policy and driven the country to source fertilisers from the US instead of from traditional sources, thereby linking vaccine diplomacy, fertiliser diplomacy and genetically modified organism (GMO) diplomacy.28

For landlocked countries like Ethiopia and Uganda, the domino effect of high pump prices and the increased cost of production are exacerbating pre-existing political tensions.29 A failure to promptly and adequately respond to this situation could, by African Development Bank (AfDB) estimates, stoke social tensions,30 and resonates with the UN Economic Commission for Africa’s (UNECA) observation that poor and low-income countries are prone to conflict.31

Leveraging technology

Governments in the region are responding to the cumulative impact of COVID-19, economic shocks and environmental stress by leveraging technology and innovation to create opportunities and new experiences for their populations, especially the youth. Recent government statements from Kenya, Ethiopia and Uganda have emphasised the nexus between technology and youth improvement, and the imperative to prepare young people to take advantage of international opportunities.32

At the heart of these efforts is the spread and use of communication-based technologies (internet and mobile telephones), and deliberate government policies to liberalise and regulate production and management of data and promote interconnectivity. Social media platforms like Facebook, Twitter, TikTok and Instagram have transformed into marketplaces, enabling trade between individuals and small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), and creating new economic experiences.

Mobile money platforms (e.g. Mpesa in Kenya, Mobile Money in Uganda, M-Birr in Ethiopia, MGurush in South Sudan and Momon in Sudan) are driving financial inclusivity and easy banking, and facilitating transactions, not just at an elite level, but also for the bulk of the region’s population, whose economic mainstay is agro-dependent.

The use of such communication-based technologies has also improved the sharing of climate information, closing the information gap for many farmers through early warning systems such as the IGAD Climate Predictions and Applications Centre (ICPAC).33

Recent government statements from Kenya, Ethiopia and Uganda have emphasised the nexus between technology and youth improvement

Furthermore, these technologies are improving some aspects of government transparency. They help integrate services like banking, revenue collection and national identification. Technology absorption is also facilitating regional integration through, for example, integrated border management and reducing the cost of doing business. Overall, this contributes to improving the regional business environment.

The region’s improving technological infrastructure and potential for growth has attracted technological
giants like Amazon Web Services, Google, Meta, Visa, Mastercard and Microsoft. While the benefits of such companies are obvious, their entry into the regional market sparks competition between governments as well as between governments and these companies. For example, despite Djibouti having the highest internet penetration in the region, Kenya has positioned itself as the region’s communication and logistics hub. The entry of these technological giants – and the interconnectivity they promise – is spurring innovation, providing employment and facilitating e-commerce and e-governance. They are also a conduit for accessing transferrable technology and skills.

However, this embrace of technology, and the pace at which it is growing and changing, comes at a cost with respect to data gathering, storage and management, as well as data use and abuse. To take full advantage of these innovations, governments in the region have developed digital investment strategies, but are constrained in terms of funding and securing these assets from criminals. Moreover, companies such as Microsoft, Uber, Google and Facebook have more budget flexibility than regional governments, and often deploy this financial advantage and data monopoly to their benefit.34

The increased reliance on communication technologies has already compromised the region’s cyber-integrity by disrupting financial services and one-stop border operations and facilitating organised crime. In 2020, Uganda’s telecommunication and banking sectors were hacked, causing an estimated loss of $3.2 million, by compromising 2 000 SIM cards.35 It is also estimated that Kenya’s economy loses $36 million to cybercrime.36 Although these disruptions are attributed to non-state actors targeting private business, economic statecraft is diversifying and will include practically all governmental and non-governmental entities.

As a burgeoning economic and technological leader, Kenya is both a beneficiary and a victim of, as well as an entry point for, cybercrime in the region. Its leading position is also polarising, as countries compete for technological supremacy and as technological spinoffs like labour migration take root. Despite Kenya positioning itself as the region’s financial and technological hub – through exporting banking (Equity Bank and Kenya Commercial Bank)....

Chart 3: Internet penetration

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Djibouti</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kenya</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sudan</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uganda</td>
<td>30</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ethiopia</td>
<td>20</td>
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<tr>
<td>Somalia</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South Sudan</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eritrea</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Statista
Bank) and telecommunication (Safaricom) services – neighbouring countries are reluctantly plugging into Kenya’s telecommunications and banking infrastructure. This stems from concern about strategic dependence on Nairobi and overall cyber vulnerability. Underlying this is the tacit technological competition in the region.

Ethiopia, which has long had a complex relationship with communication technologies, is radically embracing it using Chinese funding to upgrade investments in its sector. This strategic competition has an impact on regional integration and influences the pace at which countries of the region converge. This fact is already altering the character of diplomacy in the region and could have both positive and negative outcomes for regional stability.

Demography and Migration

The peace, governance and security outlook of the region has been shaped by the interaction between demographic trends and other structural dynamics, especially in the region’s borderlands. (The region’s borderlands are not only in the periphery of most countries, they are characteristically plagued by arid and semi-arid environments, sparse and continuously moving populations, and disproportionately high levels of poverty.) The population of the HoA is 296,851,885 and is set to double in the next 23 years, if it continues to grow at its average rate of 3%. While this growth rate is high, it is generally slowing down compared to two decades ago.

Seventy percent of the population live in rural areas, sustaining themselves on rain-fed agriculture. Consequently, the region’s cities and urban areas, while growing at alarming rates, accommodate only one-third of the population, making the HoA the most rural region. Overall, 70% of the region’s population are 35 years or younger, the majority of them young men.

There are both positive and negative consequences to the slow population growth rates and current age distribution, with a disproportionately large number of youths. A ‘youthful population, if healthy, skilled, and gainfully employed, can be a catalyst for accelerated social and economic development.’ As observed in the countries visited, governments in the region are in theory focused on tackling youth unemployment, alongside establishing measures for self-development. In practice, however, governments are struggling to provide enabling environments for self- and collective actualisation, resulting in the exclusion of youths (women and girls in particular), especially in arid and semi-arid areas.

Overall, 70% of the region’s population are 35 years or younger, the majority of them young men.

In Ethiopia, Kenya, Sudan and Uganda, respectively, youth dissatisfaction with the overall trajectory of their country forms the bedrock of current political tensions. In this context, some governments have taken steps to suppress free expression and rights of association. Youth throughout the region, and especially in the borderlands, have consequently been defying social norms, experimenting with communication technologies and exploring alternative approaches to addressing their needs, including by participating in violent political activity. Indeed, ‘[A]s the importance of the traditional decision-making institutions erodes, young people are not finding ways to legitimately voice their concerns in the political arena.

Across the region, voluntary and involuntary migration is taking place ‘from rural to urban areas or within urban areas in the same country, creating more competition for the limited number of jobs in the urban areas without necessarily improving the job prospects of those left in rural areas.’ This population movement and the changing livelihood patterns are not matched by sufficient investment in, for example, health, housing and education. Regional cities are failing to meet the expectations of migrating youth, turning instead into hotbeds for political contestation and crime.
Note: While the population of the HoA has been gradually rising, from 1990 onwards, Ethiopia witnessed a sharp increase in its population, followed by Kenya, Uganda and Sudan.

Source: World Population Prospects

Note: The above Chart shows changes in the median age of the population of the countries of the region from 2015 to 2023. In the Excel, the average aggregate median age of the region from 2015 to 2023 has remained at 17 years, with a single percentage point change in 2022 and 2023. The median age is highest in Djibouti.

Source: World Population Prospects
Chart 6: Trend over time by population type

Note: Trends in the growth of asylum seekers, refugees, and IDPs of Concern to UNHCR in the Horn of Africa. While the number of IDPs in the region has generally been increasing, from 2019 onwards, the region witnessed a sharp rise in internal displacement, corresponding with either the outbreak of conflict or the continuation of political crises in regional countries.

Source: Based on data from UNHCR’s Global Trends

Chart 7: Population by country of asylum and population type, 2022

Note: In 2022, Ethiopia, South Sudan and Sudan had the highest numbers of internally displaced people in the region. On the other hand, Uganda Sudan and Ethiopia host more refugees than any other country in the region. IDPs and refugees in the region are generated by combination of political persecution, conflict and climate stress. Curiously, the number of asylum seekers is very low across the board.

Source: World Development Indicators
The voluntary and involuntary movement of populations is also, in some instances, spilling over national borders. This indicates underlying governance challenges in countries of origin, and interstate relations in the HoA. The number of internally displaced persons (IDPs) and refugees is increasing, corresponding with the increase in crises in the region. In 2015, for example, the region hosted approximately 4.6 million refugees and asylum seekers, emanating predominantly from Eritrea, Ethiopia, Somalia, South Sudan and Sudan. In 2022, the number of IDPs rose to approximately 7.4 million, resulting in the HoA having one of the highest numbers of displaced populations in the world.

Violent conflicts in Ethiopia, the postponement of the election in Somalia, renewed conflict in South Sudan, the political stalemate in Sudan and the worsening drought in the region account for new forced displacements and unprecedented levels of humanitarian need in the region.

Nearly 36 million people in the region, including nine million women of reproductive age, need humanitarian assistance due to the combined effects of displacement and drought. These demographic trends pressure regional governments to manage migration both within and from outside the region, and shape interstate relations between countries across the region.

**Climate Change and the Environment**

As a threat multiplier, climate and environmental issues are shaping the governance and conflict landscape in the region. They are increasingly taking centre-stage in development and security discussions due to their abrupt episodic disruptions on the one hand, and on the other, the systemic and long-term integration with other socio-political dynamics. The HoA’s historical predisposition to environmental stress has deteriorated into the region’s most acute climate crisis in the last 40 years, despite the region’s negligible CO2 emissions and disproportionate engagement in activities that degrade the environment.

The region’s climate exposure will only increase, at a time when urbanisation, migration and industrialisation are amplifying the demand for energy, food and water, and overall population growth is putting pressure on governments to improve transport infrastructure, address poverty and fortify food reserves. Thus, while economies of the region recover from a pandemic and global supply chain disruptions, a climate crisis is evolving in nearly all countries of the region, triggering social trauma, food and water uncertainty, and human and livestock deaths.

Nearly 36 million people in the region need humanitarian assistance due to the combined effects of displacement and drought.

In 2022, climate extremes triggered food insecurity affecting approximately 50.8 million people in Djibouti, Ethiopia, Kenya, Somalia, South Sudan, Sudan and Uganda, representing a dramatic increase from 42 million in 2021. Of those affected, nearly two million people are vulnerable to floods in Ethiopia, compared to South Sudan (380 000 people) and Sudan (314 000). Kenya and Somalia experience various weather excesses, for example flooding, drought, climate-induced displacement, migration and climate conflicts.

Across the region, rain-fed agriculture, the mainstay of regional economies, is under pressure. Accordingly, ‘[O]ver 37 million people in the region are in crisis, and only marginally able to meet minimum food needs by depleting essential livelihood assets or through crisis-coping strategies.’

The impact of season-by-season below-average rain, combined with drought in some parts of the region, is profound and potentially destabilising, drawing on critical national resources, including the military. The mix of adverse weather events, a youth bulge, economic shocks and migration is likely to cause a humanitarian crisis affecting between 23 and 26 million people throughout the region in 2023 and beyond.
This trend could undercut gains in human security, widen social vulnerability and increase the costs of adaptation at a time when regional citizens, especially pastoralists in the borderlands, are either diversifying their livelihoods, moving to urban areas or coping through increased violence and raids.65

As with other systemic forces, governments in the region are responding to climatic challenges as part of their commitments to the AU’s Agenda 2063, and to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).66 Accordingly, all regional governments have aligned their environmental plans to their developmental priorities, or acknowledged the interconnections between structural fault lines and national development. Yet, no government in the region has performed convincingly on the 17 SDGs, due to incoherence in the implementation of plans, governance challenges and an overall environment of political instability.67

While climate action is under way, especially along the Nile Basin,68 and is perhaps more promising than progress on other SDGs,69 prospects for the exploitation of fossil fuels are complicating debates about environment protection and development, and are acute in Kenya, Uganda and Somalia.70 In Kenya, for example, the Lamu Port, South Sudan and Ethiopia Transport (LAPSSET) project affected the breeding ground for fish, depleting the fish population to pave the way for ports.71 In Uganda, the East Africa Crude Oil Pipeline (EACOP) is facing contestation because it could adversely affect the ecosystem and potentially violate the human rights of communities.72

In this context, climate justice debates are getting bolder with every UN Climate Conference, exemplifying a region in tune with world debates and keen on leveraging the global political crisis to support its loss and damage claims, and green transitions. The costs of climate adaptation are prohibitive, despite IGAD’s support to regional governments. Therefore, while the climate–security nexus is trending, the climate–development gap is pitting HoA countries against global narratives, creating diplomatic discomfort and resuscitating discussions about the sequencing of environmental protection and development.

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Chart 8: Carbon emissions

![Chart showing carbon emissions trends in the Horn of Africa from 1990 to 2019.](chart8)

Note: The graph above shows trends in carbon emission (in metric tonnes) in the Horn of Africa from 1990 to 2019. It shows that Ethiopia, also the most populous country in the region, is the leading emitter of Carbon, followed by Sudan.

Source: CLIMATEWATCH
Broadly speaking, countries of the region are poised to address climate change on their own terms and are additionally advocating for international funding for green transition, in recognition of the disproportionate contribution to CO2, a core trigger of the growing climate crisis.73
Governance, Peace and Security: Continuing and Emerging Trends in the Horn of Africa

The conflict and dispute spectrum in the HoA is in flux, shifting from interstate conflicts to intra-state conflicts, from conventional to non-conventional methods and from traditional to non-traditional threats, all within the context of political transitions. These changes are disrupting governments, upsetting regional integration and posing threats to governance, peace and security that extend beyond the traditional military, economic and diplomatic domains. Across the region, traditional or conventional methods dominate warfare but at the same time conflict is hybridising and increasingly incorporating the use of drones, network technology and ‘influence operations’, such as disinformation and misinformation.

As the examples of Ethiopia, Somalia and Sudan demonstrate, conflict and civil unrest are correspondingly urbanised or urbanising and often include anonymised use of hate speech and information warfare. In Ethiopia, the extensive use of (mis)information campaigns by protagonists and citizens in the country and in the diaspora, and mass online mobilisation against perceived – and real – international meddling in the internal affairs of the country, galvanised the region and pushed the boundaries of traditional diplomacy.

The structural dynamics that undergird the threat landscape have been decades in the making and are not unique to the HoA

Although the transformations appear new, the structural dynamics that undergird the threat landscape have been decades in the making and are not unique to the HoA. The integration of climate stress and mobility is, for instance, a recognised characteristic of the borderlands. Similarly, both UNECA and AfDB have documented the link between economic deprivation and conflict. At the same time, multipolarity gained pace almost immediately after the end of the cold war. Countries of the region are triangulating their regional efforts to navigate the resultant complex, dynamic and multilayered environment. But the proclivity to negotiate independently and to episodically address cross-border threats is likely to increase regional fragmentation. The degree to which the region will change is nevertheless unknown.
Political instability in Sudan and Uganda, intergenerational radicalisation in Somalia, technological integration in Kenya and post-independence disruption in South Sudan provide insight into the trajectory of the region. The HoA will foreseeably be fragile and characterised by hardening sovereignty, transnational pressures against the background of strategic competition in economic and technological domains and a fraught multilateral environment. Multilateral actors, including IGAD, the AU and the UN, have only limited latitude to support countries. Fragmentation and parochialism dominate their approaches. Popular demand for good governance is increasing, interacting with the above dynamics to spur tensions in virtually all countries.

Governance and Intra-state Conflicts: Disillusionment, Exclusion and Promise

Governance in the HoA is characterised by both progress and retrogression. However, violent conflicts, institutional fragility and socio-political instability dominate and are gradually transforming into a systemic attribute of the region. The structural dynamics fuelling this trend (economic marginalisation, political exclusion and environmental stress) are not new. However, rapid population growth and slower economic growth amplify pressure on governments in a context of higher social demands.

In general, overall governance on the African continent improved in the 2000s, raising hopes for good governance. However, it started to slow down in 2015, with Djibouti, Eritrea, Somalia and South Sudan posting the worst governance performance. Modest democratic gains, and improvements in health, education and infrastructure, are therefore unfolding against the backdrop of perpetual political transitions, increasingly violent leadership competition, barely responsive institutions and popular disillusionment.

In 2021, IGAD observed that countries of the HoA are prone to severe governance problems, rampant corruption, election-related violence and low participation in politics, especially by women. The organisation associated governance deficits in the region with human rights violations, lack of political
tolerance, arbitrary application of the rule of law, and conflict. It concluded that governments in the region suffer a popularity deficiency and a legitimacy deficit.\textsuperscript{76}

Echoing a trend observed in other regions of Africa, the panoply of governance systems in the HoA range from autocracies to electoral democracies, and from fairly stable governments to flailing ones.\textsuperscript{77}

As such, the extent to which governments adhere to constitutions and respect the rule of law varies from country to country, and governance is regularly characterised by the concentration of power in the executive and in single individuals.\textsuperscript{78}

These top-down models of governance and weak mechanisms for popular participation further the Chart 10 Mo Ibrahim Governance Index

Note: The Map shows overall governance in Horn of Africa and indicates that South Sudan and Uganda are deteriorating. In terms of overall governance scores, however, Kenya, Uganda and Ethiopia (in that order) are better performing, while South Sudan, Somalia and Eritrea score low, starting with the lowest.

Source: Mo Ibrahim Foundation
perception that governance in the HoA serves elite interests. This is borne out by the rural-urban population distribution, with the bulk of the population living in rural areas. The gap between the elite and the rest of society is perceived to be widening, corresponding with the mounting concentration of wealth and opportunities among a few and spreading mistrust of leaders.79

Citizens, especially youth, casually dismiss participation in politics, depicting such processes as contrived and unlikely to deliver free and fair outcomes.80 National leaders and elected officials are perceived as the least trustworthy when it comes to doing the right thing.81 This is the case even though a remarkable number of youth believe that leadership is the most significant driver of positive change and place importance on equality, rights and freedoms.82

The inability or failure to nurture a culture of transparency and accountability, greater participation of citizens in decision-making and budgeting processes, and improved service delivery reflects neopatrimonial forms of governance that have in some instances created pockets of state capture.83 This representation is fuelled by perceptions of governments’ inability to adequately respond to demands for services. In some countries, this failure is breeding a governance and legitimacy void which is occasionally filled by non-state actors and the private sector. In Somalia, for example, Al-Shabaab has filled the vacuum left by government and now provides services in those areas under its control. Indeed, Al-Shabaab is an extreme depiction of this trend, even if the group’s ‘acceptance’ is less a function of its legitimacy than a result of popular fear of reprisals.84

Where non-state groups, including ethnic and religious entities, provide services, community and legitimacy, they are also vectors for hardening identities.85 Consequently, governance and identity are inseparable in the region and this blend fuels ethno-religious conflicts and the trend to federate, devolve or decentralise governance systems. Across the region, therefore, interlocutors underscored the link between ethno-religious identities and governance, an association that has not been lost on the current leadership of the region, all of whom are profoundly religious.86

Government and Technology

Attempts by governments in the region at transparency and efficiency in service delivery are evolving in tandem with the emergence of a new threat and genre of oppression by state entities. Governments are deploying cutting-edge methods and tools to distort truth, surveil populations and undermine democracy, even as they endeavour to improve service delivery and address unemployment.87 Digital uptake is surging, and in the context of global economic and political turbulence, it has become a catalyst for addressing structural challenges, improving government efficiency and transparency and fast-tracking the delivery of essential services.

In the 2022 election in Kenya, for example, technology played an important role in overcoming historical mistrust of the government, and improving electoral integrity.88 Throughout the HoA, governments have embarked on ambitious drives to integrate technology into their operations. However, balancing the integrity and legitimacy dimensions of technology is arduous, given the twin obligation to safeguard citizen data and to protect populations from external ‘influence operations’.89

Citizens both within the country and in the diaspora are using social media to mobilise for and against governments in the region.

As governments deploy technology to address governance inadequacies, these tools simultaneously facilitate population control and are used to discredit democratic institutions.90 Civil society groups and non-state actors recognise, however, that governance progress has been made on some fronts, for example in responding to COVID-19 and in the provision of free primary education. But governments in the region are
suspicious of non-state actors and habitually deploy technology to restrict their activities. Indeed, across the region, civic space is dwindling, restricted by old forms of legal authoritarianism, and technologically-based methods.

ICT is therefore intensifying covert information gathering, deception and information distortion targeting civil society groups, opposition politicians, journalists and civil rights activists throughout the region. For example, before, during and after the elections in Kenya, misinformation and disinformation were allegedly rife, and may have played a role in voter suppression.

At a time when global technology companies are competing with governments in the regions in the management of public information and data, technology provided by such organisations is multiplying avenues for challenging state bureaucracies. For instance, cyber-activism is changing the face of civil disobedience and mounting pressure on governments in audacious ways. Moreover, the nearly actor-less nature of cyber-activism is a new challenge for regional governments, which are adapting by increasing control of the access to information and use of computers. With little or no regard to the economic impact of their actions, HoA governments (with the exception of Kenya) blatantly restrict the use of certain ICT services, or enact laws that criminalise forms of public engagement.

From Eritrea to Uganda, citizens both within the country and in the diaspora are using social media to mobilise for and against governments. In Ethiopia, ‘patterns of political marginalization have turned Ethiopian diaspora blogs and forums into one of the most vocal and unfettered spaces to oppose the incumbent government.’ In Eritrea, diasporic communities have used the internet to popularise national projects, and through organisations like Yiakl have offered opposition against the regime in Asmara.

In Uganda, Facebook has been shut down for two years, both to control popular use of the platform and ostensibly to remind the organisation of the government’s supremacy. In Sudan and Ethiopia,
cyberspace has altogether transformed into the frontier for government–citizen confrontation.

Ironically, these measures are often implemented during high-visibility civic events, including elections and protests and, in the case of Ethiopia, conflict. Across the board, governments are leaning towards control of data management profiles rather than facilitation, while the ICT regulatory environment in the region is becoming restrictive.

Power Devolution and Transitions

Almost all HoA governments are responding to internal governance crises through various iterations of political inclusivity and social cohesion. Political transitions (more accurately leadership transitions) the region have opened spaces for national dialogues, constitutional reforms and transitional justice, with constant references to youth and gender inclusivity. These strategies receive substantial international backing and nudging, especially when accompanied by programmes for elections. However, local actors have to deal with mounting international pressure and, as indicated by an ambassador in Ethiopia, the inclusion of transitional justice in regional peace agreements appears to be sufficient to the international community. Yet the implementation is rarely pursued by governments.

Decentralisation, devolution and federated forms of government are being revisited in discussions about broader issues of governance, constitutions and constitutionalism in Ethiopia, Somalia, South Sudan, Sudan and Uganda. In Ethiopia, disagreement over the nature of the country’s federal arrangement and its implications for national cohesion is at the core of conflicts over power distribution. In Somalia, the dispute between the federal regions and the federal government contributed to President Farmajo’s electoral defeat. Transition politics is therefore becoming a mode of governance in some countries as conflicting parties struggle to find consensual models to manage their respective country’s diversity.

Governments’ difficulty to manage change, resistance by some political actors, lack of trust in national leaders and the failure to meet popular expectations for services reversed political transitions in Ethiopia, South Sudan and Sudan. In these countries, promising political transitions relapsed into conflict (Ethiopia), are unnecessarily prolonged (South Sudan) or are simply inert (Sudan). In South Sudan, the transitional phase of the government was extended for another 24 months. The roadmap for the next 24 months is devoid of concrete plans for post-transition elections. The election is itself a mechanism favoured by the government and feared by the political opposition.

Across the region, politics has become more violent despite, or in some cases because of, electoral competition.

In other countries, popular frustration with the status quo manifests in protests, internal strife and, in the case of Sudan, an interminable revolution. Across the region, politics has become more violent despite, or in some cases because of, electoral competition. At the heart of this is a winner-takes-all political culture, which intermingles with identity politics.

Structural Gaps and Governance Deficits

While the experience of each country is unique, all countries of the HoA present an interplay of structural and governance deficits. For example, swift political, economic and social reforms delivered adverse outcomes in Ethiopia. Against the backdrop of a collapsing economy, the attempted cohabitation between the military and civilians has left Sudan on a treacherous political path, in which fragmented and uncompromising groups, including the Forces of Freedom and Change (FCC), the resistance committees (RCs) and the military are trapped in a cycle of serial agreements that have fragilised the Trilateral Mechanism and brought the much-vaunted revolution to an impasse.
In Djibouti and Uganda, patterns of apparent stability are anchored on patronage and mask deep political divisions. In the region, mild political shocks and routine governmental tasks often overburden governments’ ability to cope, even in cases where they are anticipated.\textsuperscript{104}

**Interstate Relations in the Horn of Africa: Competition, Fragmentation and Optimism**

Although there is presently no active interstate conflict in the HoA, residual disputes exist between Djibouti and Eritrea, Somalia and Kenya and between South Sudan and Sudan, with an intermittently active flashpoint between Ethiopia and Sudan, and between Kenya and South Sudan. This state of affairs in the region is a departure from an earlier trend in the 1980s and the 1990s, when countries directly or indirectly interfered in each other’s internal affairs, earning the HoA the unenviable moniker of the most conflict-prone region on the continent.\textsuperscript{105}

This shift from interstate conflict is deviating towards strategic competition in economic, military, diplomatic, energy and technological domains. While it is difficult to identify a single variable to explain this, the trend probably indicates a greater resort by governments to the various tools of peaceful settlement of disputes, including courts, and regional cooperation.

Countries of the region also have shared aspirations. These are enshrined in foundational regional frameworks, for example the IGAD Agreement, the yet to be finalised IGAD Treaty and the Nile Basin Initiative (NBI). In practice, national policies and interests are not automatically aligned to a traceable set of unifying regional values. Instead, reference to sovereignty and deference to ‘African solutions to African problems’ have become yardsticks for multilateralism in the region. Countries of the region relate through several overlapping bilateral and multilateral arrangements as well as fragile and ephemeral alliances.

In general, political power in the HoA is dispersed between different countries and across multiple economic, political and diplomatic entities. Unlike in West Africa, where Nigeria dominates the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), in the HoA, no state has the economic, diplomatic and political tools and the agreement of peers to act as an overarching centre of gravity.\textsuperscript{106} Hegemonies and anchor states are therefore misleading constructs in the HoA.\textsuperscript{107}

As expected, the military and diplomatic establishments of most of the countries visited are convinced of their own prominent role in stabilising the region.\textsuperscript{108} In practice, therefore, different countries assume leading roles at different times and on different files. The absence of a steady anchor, the opportunistic deployment of sovereignty and the uncertainty of regional multilateralism make for intra-regional competition. This creates rivalry and uncertainty that is regularly exploited by extra-regional actors.

In the HoA no state has the economic, diplomatic and political tools and the agreement of peers to act as an overarching centre of gravity

One strand of intra-regional competition originates from the tension over transboundary resources (chiefly water) and transnational threats as well as the conflicting approaches to addressing them. Although regional transboundary resources are diverse (including flora and fauna, water, environmental systems, and even people) and peculiar to adjoining states, no resource is as strategically divisive in the region as the Nile River, which transcends the region.

The dispute over the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GERD) between Ethiopia, Egypt and Sudan links various politico-diplomatic platforms: the Nile Basin politics confront Horn of Africa politics, and the political dynamics from the Arabian Peninsula often clash with international diplomacy. In a way, the GERD dispute could be a laboratory of the region’s capacity to peacefully address the security, environmental, energy and developmental dimensions of its integration agenda.
Different interpretations of water user rights appear to be behind the GERD dispute. This dispute erupted when Ethiopia embarked on a dam project on the Blue Nile, bypassing colonial-era treaty requirements to obtain the acquiescence of lower riparian states, namely Egypt and Sudan. Frustrated by a deadlock in the negotiations over the Cooperative Framework Agreement (CFA), Ethiopia unilaterally commenced the enterprise, citing its need for energy and the right to development.

By contrast, Egypt asserted that the Nile is an existential resource and Ethiopia’s dam would undermine the country’s very existence. For both Egypt and Ethiopia, the dam is politically symbolic as it rallies domestic audiences and provides a visible adversary. This dispute nevertheless infects diplomatic relations across the entire region, as is visible from frantic diplomatic activity whenever the rhetoric flares up. All countries of the HoA belong to the NBI and all have an expressed position on the Basin, with the majority favouring a new legal baseline in the CFA.

The GERD is additionally the subject of intermittent debate within the League of Arab States (LAS), which includes Djibouti, Egypt, Somalia and Sudan in the HoA. In the search for solutions to this dispute, international financial institutions (such as the World Bank), Western powers (like the US and the UK) and multilateral entities, including the AU, the European Union (EU) and the UN, have played a role.

With the exception of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), Egypt and Sudan, all Nile Basin countries, which double as member states of IGAD, are aligned with Ethiopia’s position on the GERD and have either signed or ratified the CFA, or both. As a non-signatory to the CFA and a country relying on regional generosity to stabilise its eastern territories, the DRC is eager to develop its Inga dams. It was also recently accepted into the East African Community (EAC).

These two developments complicate the DRC’s position on the Nile but also provide it with new leverage. The Inga dams, if finalised, will trigger energy competition with Ethiopia and reconfigure politics in the East and Horn of Africa. At the same time, the DRC now has to delicately balance its relationship with Egypt and within an EAC that is largely in favour of a new vision on the Nile.

If the CFA enters into force, it will automatically dissolve any prior agreements on the use of the Nile waters and end the GERD dispute on paper but it will also unleash renewed Egyptian rhetoric – and that of its international backers – and possibly drive the HoA into a new era of instability. Even if an all-out regional conflict does not erupt between these countries or between the region and Egypt, allegations of cyberwarfare indicate that the dispute could be played out on various forums.

Border disputes and disputes in borderlands are a long-standing strategic concern in the region

Though the construction of the GERD is a fait accompli, the dispute, which has now shifted to the details of filling the dam and other aspects of its operations, reflects the extent to which environmental resources and access to technology shape conflict and governance in the region. A resolution of the dispute over the GERD is likely to shift attention to the Jonglei Canal on the White Nile, whose revival is already leading to trepidation within South Sudan.

Transboundary resource disputes interlock with dormant but easily inflammable border disputes in the HoA. Border disputes and disputes in borderlands are a long-standing strategic concern in the region and in some instances overlap with pre-existing interstate tensions. For example, the dispute over the GERD is contiguous to disagreement between Ethiopia and Sudan over Al-Fashaga and internal conflicts in Ethiopia.

Conflict in Ethiopia has heightened the region’s strategic vulnerability in that, as a conflict in borderlands, it has attracted the involvement of Eritrea (while the resolutions of the Eritrea–Ethiopia Boundary Commission remain unimplemented). This complicated regional diplomacy in the course
of the conflict and to an extent in the wake of the implementation of the AU-led peace agreement between the federal government of Ethiopia and the Tigre People’s Liberation Front (TPLF). By some accounts, Eritrea is considered a potential spoiler of the agreement, an allegation which Asmara denies.116

The majority of interstate wars of the region have been fought over national boundaries. Border disputes have traditionally taken place ‘over territorial claims, and originate from lack of clearly defined and marked boundaries, the availability of transboundary resources, and security-related matters.’117 In 2010, the most contentious border spots in the region included the Ethiopia–Eritrea border, the Eritrea–Djibouti border, the Somalia–Ethiopia–Kenya borders (Mandera Triangle), the Sudan–Kenya border (Illemi Triangle), the Uganda–DRC border, the Sudan–Chad–Central African Republic (CAR)–DRC–Uganda borders, the Kenya–Uganda border and the Kenya–Ethiopia borders.118

While these disputes remain dormant but unresolved, they are easily inflammable and, in the case of Kenya and Somalia, overlap with resource disputes at the maritime border between the two countries. As a consequence, efforts to address transnational threats like the climate crisis, violent extremism and the management of mobility around the Mandera Triangle, have been hampered.119

**Chart 12: Contested border areas in the Horn of Africa**

Note: This map shows areas in the Horn of Africa (IGAD Countries) where there are active or dormant border disputes. The map is not drawn to scale and therefore the locations are for illustration purposes only.

Source: IGAD, CEWARN
While not related to border disputes, the HoA has seen the creation of two new states seceding from two major players (Eritrea from Ethiopia and South Sudan from Sudan). These secessions partly led to border disputes between the new and the old entities. While the status of ‘Somaliland’ remains uncertain, the HoA is Africa’s region most prone to demands for the revision of colonial borders.

Transnational threats, in particular violent extremism, are a recurrent feature in the region. It is increasingly mutating into an intergenerational issue. In the Mandera Triangle, for example, transnational threats have integrated with economic and climate shocks. They are one of the drivers of regional migration. Indeed, in the HoA, organised criminal activities cohabit with other transnational threats and, in some instances, for example piracy, they constitute a form of livelihood.

Broadly speaking, the region’s transnational threats emanate from cross-border criminal activity (such as human trafficking and smuggling, illicit financial flows, drug trafficking and small arms racketeering) but include more nefarious threats such as extremist violence, radicalism and sporadic manifestations of terrorist activity.

In 2018, IGAD observed that ‘terrorists are taking advantage of a mix of civil wars, conflicts and insurgencies, tapping into criminal networks, occupying weakly governed and sparsely populated spaces as safe havens and exploiting widespread grievances relating to poverty, joblessness, exclusion, injustice and repression to radicalize and recruit.’

What was true then continues to be true today. In July 2022, Al-Shabaab militants crossed into eastern Ethiopia, wreaking havoc for a few days.

After the election of President Ruto in Kenya, the group warned the new government and have since made good on their threats with attacks in Lamu. While this appears to be a counter-offensive against Hassan Sheikh Mohamud’s new efforts to eradicate the group from many areas of Somalia, the inclusion of former Al-Shabaab members in the new Somali government was presented as a potential mutation of the group. Indeed, the group has also adopted digital technology and according to some accounts, they have been deploying autonomous and unmanned systems and forging alliances with Allied Democratic Forces (ADF) in Uganda.

Radicalisation may franchise in the region, getting stronger, bolder and more innovative. This may require a more coordinated economic, political, military and communication response, slightly different from ‘barricading’ Somalia, as Kenya and Ethiopia are accused of doing.

External Influences in the Horn of Africa Region and Changing Global Political Systems

The HoA is one of Africa’s most strategic locations. Its proximity to the crucial trade route that links the Indian Ocean to Europe turns the region into a space of high geostrategic interest. As a result, geopolitical rivalries among old and new powers create the imperative for HoA countries to pick sides, thereby complicating efforts to establish sustainable collective security mechanisms.

From the beginning of the century onwards, Middle Eastern rival countries – the United Arab Emirates (UAE), Saudi Arabia, Qatar and Turkey – have increased investments and relocated their commercial, military and cultural competition into the HoA. While some HoA countries, for example Uganda and Kenya are largely indifferent and maintain cordial diplomatic relations with all Middle Eastern countries, others, such as Sudan and Somalia, aligned with the different factions in the Middle East, with negative outcomes.

In Somalia, the acrimony between the federal Somali government and regional states has been attributed to the increased intervention of external powers backing different sides. Interlocutors denounced the accelerating spread of radical Islam, and the potentially destabilising impact of Turkey and the UAE on the relationship between the administration of Hassan Sheikh Mohamud and the federal states. In Sudan, the alleged rift between Burhan and Hemedti
ostensibly originates from the latter’s relationship with the UAE, and the extent to which both leverage their contacts with the West and Russia.\textsuperscript{131} Then and now, the political economy of the region is defined by the degree to which regional countries commodify their relationships with these and Western powers.\textsuperscript{132} This observation does not, however, neglect the agency of governments in the region. Despite a slowdown between 2019 and 2021, corresponding with the outbreak of the pandemic, Middle Eastern outreach is once again on the upswing, shaping dynamics in Somalia and Sudan, and between Ethiopia and Somalia.\textsuperscript{133}

In 2019, IGAD established a Taskforce on the Red Sea and Gulf of Aden, and appointed a Special Envoy to lead the development of multidisciplinary policy-oriented research to triangulate responses and Chart a common position for safeguarding the security and economic interests of the region.\textsuperscript{134} The Taskforce’s activities were interrupted by the pandemic but have resumed, with a focus on developing a strategy for ‘promoting conditions of stability and the spirit of multilateralism in the Red Sea arena.’\textsuperscript{135} However, the establishment of the Taskforce appears to be rather defensive. This reactive strategy overlaps and competes with the Council of Arab and African States Bordering the Red Sea and Gulf of Aden, a security alliance around the regional waterways, with a provenance that dates back to the 1970s. The membership of the Arab–African Council includes IGAD littoral states of the Red Sea, but not inland countries.

The Taskforce, in contrast, acknowledges the impact of Red Sea dynamics on IGAD inland states. When it matures, the Arab–African Council may have near-term benefits for the HoA but will intermingle with a changing global context, fragment IGAD decision-making and disperse the threat spectrum in the region. Thus, while IGAD’s response strategy is still in development, the degree to which the HoA will succeed in responding to the evolving threat dynamics will depend on the region’s ability to assert its agency in an uncertain environment.

Besides Middle Eastern power rivalry, the competition among global powers also plays out in the HoA. On the one hand, Russia is resurging through its state and non-state activities, underpinned by commercial activity particularly targeting the mining sector.\textsuperscript{136} On the other, China’s economic investments within the framework of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and the decision to appoint a Special Envoy for the HoA point to aspirations for greater economic involvement and political influence in the region. The scramble for military bases in Djibouti symbolises perfectly this jockeying for influence in the HoA.

The US Strategy for Sub-Saharan Africa argues that China sees Africa as ‘an important arena to challenge the rules-based international order, advance its own narrow commercial and geopolitical interests, undermine transparency and openness, and weaken US relations with African peoples and governments.’\textsuperscript{137} The Strategy furthermore notes that Russia ‘views the region as a permissive environment for parastatals and private military companies, often fomenting instability for strategic and financial benefit.’\textsuperscript{138}

By contrast, Russia accuses the US and the West of imposing a unipolar political model on the world, introducing dividing lines around blocs, creating a confrontational environment in which countries are either with or against the US, and deploying multilateralism in the UN, the Human Rights Council and the UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) to accomplish selfish interests.\textsuperscript{139}

Few regions of Africa are exposed to such rivalry between external powers, with clear implications for the external relations of some countries in the region. These trends are complicating relationships between the US and Eritrea, Ethiopia, Somalia, South Sudan, Sudan and Uganda. East–West competition in the HoA is not new. Historically, such rivalry was framed as a proxy war between the West and Eastern camps during the post-cold war era and later in the context of the fight against terrorism and piracy off the coast of Somalia. However, recent manoeuvres
reflect an urgency to define diplomatic, economic, environmental, security and political outcomes in the region.

The reaction of countries of the HoA is variable. Eritrea and Sudan often lean towards Russia and China but covet a functioning relationship with the US. Uganda’s view of Russia is cloaked in the non-alignment credo but it continues to instrumentalise the interests of other states, including the US and the United Kingdom (UK). Ethiopia and Kenya are pursuing a constant balancing act, leveraging their relationships with the East while at the same time maximising transactions with the West. All major global powers, including the EU, China, the UK and the US, thus have a decades-old multilateral footprint in the region, exemplified most recently by military and economic assets and the appointment of special envoys in addition to regular diplomatic presences.
Multilateralism at a Crossroads in the Horn of Africa

Even though interstate conflicts are on the decline, multilateralism in the region is obstructed by an unpredictable intra-state and diplomatic environment as well as superpower competition. While IGAD seems overwhelmed by the quantity and magnitude of lines of fracture, ad hoc alliances do not appear as credible alternatives.

The knock-on effect of conflicts in the region, and superpower competition over international norms and rules, has given way to political paralysis within the UN Security Council.

Although the UN has remained a key player in conflict management and resolution in the region, the knock-on effect of conflicts in the region, and superpower competition over international norms and rules, has given way to political paralysis within the UN Security Council. For its part, the AU has made various efforts to navigate the delicate political dynamics of the region. However, like IGAD, it seems to suffer from a constant expectation-delivery gap that often leads to an underappreciation of its achievements.

The Intergovernmental Authority on Development

IGAD is often accused of developing normative frameworks that it lacks the capacity to implement owing to a variety of factors. Over the course of its existence, IGAD has been credited with several achievements, most recently in coordinating responses to COVID-19 and the serious humanitarian situation in the region. In general, the extent of IGAD’s activities and achievements is relatively unknown, even to the most seasoned observers and partners, most of whom are preoccupied with the organisation’s peace and security operations. This ignorance of IGAD’s range of activities is at least partly responsible for the rather low reputation of the organisation and the uneven appreciation of its operational context.

Some of the region’s unsolved crises are due to IGAD’s ineffectiveness at technical and political levels. The aggregate impact of the organisation’s inadequate resource base, delays in domestication of regional frameworks, weak information and institutional support infrastructure, and persistent nationalistic tendencies leave it in a situation of constantly putting out fires. This results in it being unable to consolidate its processes and systems and
therefore to provide effective strategic guidance in addressing urgent regional challenges.

Two years into the conflict in Ethiopia and nearly three years after the revolution in Sudan, for example, IGAD had rarely been in the driving seat of responses. Instead, the organisation sheltered behind the common multilateral refrain and selectively reaffirmed its principle of non-interference in the internal affairs of its members.144 Thus, even when the organisation was supporting Somalia and South Sudan, the region’s weakest states, it was conflicted on how to intervene in Ethiopia and Sudan.

In Sudan, IGAD – and the AU – were incited into escalating their stabilisation roles by the establishment of the UN Integrated Transition Assistance Mission in Sudan (UNITAMS).145 In Ethiopia, IGAD’s role only became publicly obvious after progress by the AU High Representative was imminent. This leadership lethargy has impacted other political processes in the region, for example, the situation in Somalia146 and the supervision of the implementation of the Agreement for the Resolution of the Conflict in South Sudan (ARCSS). Despite the existence of IGAD mechanisms for both countries, Somalia’s transition is in search of a new impetus, while South Sudan appears to be in perpetual transition.147

As a result of the leadership vacuum within IGAD,148 countries of the HoA are slow to converge or to mobilise their political capital to address region-wide threats.149 For example, Middle Eastern presence has a long history in the HoA but only in 2019 did IGAD elevate its focus on this situation.

This leadership unpredictability, coupled with the divergent positions and interests of its member

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Note: This table shows some of the primary regional bodies active in the Horn of Africa, and their membership. Uganda is member of all the regional bodies, followed closely by South Sudan and Kenya.

Source: ISS sources
states, contributes to decelerating prospects for robust multilateralism and disperses the allegiance of countries of the region into several multilateral domains. These are primarily the EAC, the NBI, IGAD, the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region (ICGLR) and the East African Fusion and Liaison Unit (EAFLU). While this tendency is not unique to the HoA, this diffusion shapes interstate interactions at regional and international levels and influences the choices made at national level.

This distribution of loyalties diminishes IGAD’s political clout and creates competition with adjacent or co-dependent multilateral actors, in particular the EAC. IGAD’s integration challenges are therefore somewhat political and, despite prior EAC protectionism, its receptivity towards Somalia’s membership application may relegate IGAD to a holding mechanism, as its core members ‘migrate’ their alliances.

In an extreme scenario, these political shifts may consolidate the evolution of the smaller HoA, a notion in limbo but recently revived by rapprochement between Eritrea, Ethiopia and Somalia. Indeed, Sudan’s lingering interest in joining the EAC and South Sudan’s acceptance into the HoA Initiative raise this spectre. Due to these challenges and IGAD’s lack of defined plans in some areas, the HoA region is considered the least integrated on the continent.

The African Union

Faced with limited engagement from IGAD leadership, the AU has performed a backstopping role in the HoA, first through the AU High-Level Implementation Panel (AUHIP), led by President Thabo Mbeki, and more recently through the appointment of President Obasanjo as High Representative for the Horn of Africa.

HoA countries, in particular Ethiopia, Somalia, South Sudan and Sudan, regularly feature on the AU Peace and Security Council (PSC) agenda. It was noted, however, that the AU has failed to investigate human rights violations in Ethiopia and to establish a hybrid court in South Sudan. However, the AU’s peace support operation in Somalia remains a strong testimony to the continental commitment to ending violent conflict in the HoA.

While initially controversial, the role played by President Obasanjo in brokering agreements between the Ethiopian federal government and the TPLF has reasserted the AU’s role in the region. Given the AU’s initially lacklustre response to the conflict in Ethiopia, various observers, civil society and some countries of the region were sceptical about Obasanjo’s fortitude in shifting the dynamics in the conflict and navigating the diverse African and non-African interests.

The Pretoria and Nairobi settlements reclaimed the AU’s image in the region but optimism in a durable resolution of the conflict is cautious. Ethiopia’s strategic threat to the region and to itself remains, as conflict intensifies in other parts of the country. The High Representative consulted a broad section of Ethiopian publics, including the leadership of Oromia regional states, supporting the AU’s peace efforts to ending what remained a very troubling conflict in Northern Ethiopia. To say the least, the multi-layered, and highly evolving nature of conflict rendered response efforts highly unpredictable.

Broadly speaking, the AU is hamstrung in the HoA by two interrelated challenges

Besides, the durability of agreements between the federal government and the TPLF remains to be seen even if they appear to be holding. While some progress in the implementation of core commitments has been achieved, it seems likely that more time will be invested in building confidence than envisaged in the Cessation of Hostilities Agreement.

Broadly speaking, the AU is hamstrung in the HoA by two interrelated challenges, namely the Commission’s traditional reverence to its member states and regional actors and the ongoing institutional reforms. These factors, in addition to the AU’s physical location in Ethiopia (one of the founding members of the Organisation of African Unity), have presented the
organisation with political liabilities in the case of the war in Tigray. Just like IGAD, the AU is constrained to effectively engage with its host state on a complex internationalised internal armed conflict.

The AU Commission and the PSC struggled to engage Ethiopian authorities, attracting criticisms of inaction. To some observers, and until the appointment of Obasanjo, the organisation’s claim of silent diplomacy was merely lip service. Additionally, interlocutors underscored the complexities of conducting diplomacy amid institutional realignment, reprioritisation and the search for sustainable financing. For example, at the time of writing, the AU is lagging in its implementation of recommendations for the reform process.

Despite modest – albeit contested – gains in Ethiopia, the AU is financially handicapped and struggles to maintain its operations in Somalia, South Sudan and Sudan. This reality undercuts the effectiveness of the organisation’s operations in those countries.

With the conflict in Ukraine raging, partners’ support to the AU is affected and may dwindle for as long as the conflict continues.

In the case of Somalia, it exposes the AU to allegations of profiteering from the crisis. The transition from the AU Mission in Somalia (AMISOM) to the AU Transition Mission in Somalia (ATMIS) speaks more to the AU’s and the international community’s failure to robustly fund a Somali-led state-building and stabilisation process than to the resilience of Al-Shabaab. An interlocutor in Mogadishu indicated that ATMIS is facing a financial crisis, partly resulting from the shift in focus of its benefactors, namely the EU and the US.

Conversely, the suspension of Sudan from participating in AU activities and subsequent scramble to join the Trilateral Mechanism are as much a function of norm adherence as of lack of funding. In South Sudan, by contrast, AU obligations towards the ARCSS appear to have simply been muted.

With the conflict in Ukraine raging, partners’ support to the AU is affected and may dwindle for as long as the conflict continues. Until the AU reforms are entrenched and the organisation is able to rely on its own core resources, the ability to meet its mandate obligations will be challenged, not least in the HoA, where sovereign rhetoric is resurging. Beyond sustainable funding for peace support operations, the main challenge of the AU seems to be the lack of a clearly defined and predictable approach to conflicts in Africa and the HoA. The rather clumsy reallocation of the HoA file from AUHIP to the High Representative epitomises this difficult gestation of an acquis communautaire in conflict management.

The United Nations

The UN Security Council (UNSC) has nurtured an interest in adding Ethiopia to the situations under its watch. That would bring the number of regional files before the Council to four, in addition to Somalia, South Sudan and Sudan. Over 23 months after the conflict erupted in Ethiopia and after over 14 attempts, the UNSC remained deadlocked on the format for intervening in Ethiopia. This was primarily due to the objection of Russia and China (permanent members with strong ties to Ethiopia) and the A3 (group of African countries in the UNSC).

Russia and China have argued that the situation in Ethiopia is internal and can be addressed within an African context. The US, France and the UK differ and are joined by their other allies. The UNSC emerged as another playground of geopolitical rivalries on the HoA, especially the competition between the three big powers – China, Russia and the US.

As noted, China and Russia pursue different and perhaps even contradictory foreign policies but they are united in challenging what they consider to be US and Western dominance. In addition to their disagreements in the UNSC, the two countries are aggressively multiplying their bilateral, multilateral, public and private footprint in the region, a move...
the US is reciprocating through various channels, including its Strategy for Sub-Saharan Africa. Alongside key infrastructural projects in Ethiopia, Kenya, Sudan and Uganda, China has, for example, also been promoting its culture through the provision of scholarships and the aggressive construction of Confucius Institutes throughout the region. Russia is amplifying its role in doubling down on military support to several regional governments, most notably Uganda and Sudan. This great-power competition has influenced the priorities and actions of the UN in the region and affected the organisation’s ability to effectively carry out its political mandates. As observed by one interlocutor, great-power competition presents ‘a real challenge’ for the UN and is an undercurrent in the organisation’s approach to situations in the region, most notoriously Ethiopia.165

China has also been promoting its culture through the provision of scholarships and the construction of Confucius Institutes throughout the region

Against the backdrop of Chinese and Russian support, resounding calls by regional governments for ‘African solutions to African problems’166 are also a major contributor to multilateralism’s challenges in the region. Although the formula of ‘African solutions’ is pragmatic, it sometimes offers options for addressing challenges that are not exclusively African, for example, migration, piracy and transnational crimes. Similarly, climate change, which poses systemic risks to countries of the HoA, is a global phenomenon to which African countries contribute relatively little.

The resurgence of this notion was thus invigorated by Ethiopia’s mobilisation through the #Nomore movement (and through other transregional youth alliances) and its fervent diplomatic drive to stem American and European pressure over its handling of the situation in Tigray.167 This formulation of regional preferences has made it difficult for the UN to mediate conflicts or help countries in the region beyond the provision of humanitarian assistance. The UN has, on the other hand, failed to find a counter-narrative on which to anchor its activities, and justify some of its presences.

Indeed, by its own admission, the UN lost the narrative in the region a decade ago.168 Peacekeeping operations in the region have previously been dubbed costly and ineffective as a remedy to regional instability.169 Today, the UN is increasing investment in conflict and crisis prevention and establishing ‘integrated’ mandates. To some degree, this approach is rectifying the prior deficiency, and infusing a political lens into peacekeeping, stabilisation and transitional situations.

However, political mandates in the region remain fragmented. The existence of country-specific missions and country teams alongside region-wide mandates increases opportunities for forum-shopping, creates mandate overlaps and undermines effective prevention. This leads to the charge that the UN is structurally incompatible with regional realities, despite – and because of – the presence of a huge family comprising political missions, agencies, funds and programmes (AFPs) without a focal point.

The UN’s standardised approach to regional challenges has led to deference to bureaucracy over political acuity. Some respondents, including from UN ranks, indicated that the organisation is strong in diagnostics but weak in response. In Somalia, South Sudan and Sudan, interlocutors stressed a mismatch between prolonged UN presence and protracted violence and conflict, describing the organisation merely as an ‘employment agency’.170 In Uganda, a senior military official described the UN as always being in ‘a hurry’ but unable to act fast.171

In response, the UN underscores its achievements in stabilising the situation in Darfur and the collapse of South Sudan and Somalia.172 In addition, UN officials refer to the multidimensional humanitarian response across the HoA and support to governments in strengthening institutions and navigating the region’s delicate political context.173 Indeed, UN Country
Teams and regional governments are collaborating, among others, on new technology, green transitions, migration and intersectional programming through the Sustainable Development Cooperation Frameworks. Development and humanitarian arms of the UN are therefore visible and highly valued by regional governments.

It appears that humanitarian and development concerns prevail over the political and human rights mandates, which are largely responsible for ‘soiling’ relations between regional governments and the UN. As mentioned by one interlocutor, the UN seems to have a predominantly humanitarian approach to conflict situations, thereby neglecting political causes at the centre of conflicts.174

In Ethiopia and Somalia, fraught relations between the UN and the government climaxed in the expulsion and/or recall of some UN staff. Indeed, in all countries of the region, the UN is constrained in pursuing its good offices mandate owing in part to the intersection of the causes of conflict and crises and sovereignty. Yet, the modus operandi of the humanitarian community sometimes aggrieves governments in the region, complicating the delivery of much-needed supplies.175

In this context, countries of the region have become vocal about both multilateral and bilateral sanctions and are either advocating against them or are indifferent about their implementation. At present, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Somalia, South Sudan, Sudan and Uganda are either sanctioned or have individuals or entities that are the subject of multilateral or unilateral sanctions. In a recent Communique, IGAD expressed its displeasure and called for the lifting of sanctions.176 This demand has been long in the making. Kenya, then a sitting member of the SC and an important regional security player, has expressed reservations at unilateral sanctions, referring to them as an unacceptable breach of trust. Many governments of the HoA hold similar views and are often at loggerheads with sanctioning entities, including the UN.

Ethiopia has instrumentalised sanctions by moving even closer to Russia and China. Uganda frequently ignores sanctions against its government officials and neighbouring states. In the November 2022 demands, IGAD urged all partners of the region to refrain from conditional provision of humanitarian support.177 Sanctions in a fractured global political system suppress preventive diplomacy, encourages forum-shopping, hardens sovereignty and creates a confrontational environment in the region. The EU is discreetly reassessing the utility of sanctions on third states, following a continental backlash against economic and diplomatic penalties imposed on Russia.178
Conclusion

In 2018, diplomatic and political dynamics in the HoA region were positive and, for the first time, promised to reverse the region’s negative image. The political changes in Ethiopia, South Sudan and Sudan, which infected the relationship with Eritrea and Somalia and the rest of the region, ushered in a dawn of optimism, which had been missing in the region for over 50 years. However, in keeping with the region’s see-sawing political dynamics, this hope was short-lived. In less than a year, conflicts erupted in Ethiopia, and now threaten to implode the HoA. For its part, Sudan descended into a political lethargy after the revolution in that country was hijacked by the military. Kenya, once a bastion of stability, is consistently plagued by post-election crises, while a façade of stability hangs over countries like Djibouti and Uganda. The HoA as a whole is now in deeper uncertainty than previously envisaged, despite the existence of multiple peace processes, and multilateral opportunities that could be leveraged to address the interlinked climatic, development and humanitarian crises.

Indeed, political crises and interstate tensions have paralysed IGAD, the region’s multilateral entity, undermining its ability to provide leadership and coordinate coherent responses to the most pressing regional challenges. This is happening at a time when there is no inter-state conflict in the region, even if the threat spectrum is evolving, and the governance issues are becoming ever more challenging to address. IGAD’s indifference has paved the way for the AU, which is responding to instability in the region by facilitating a peace process for Ethiopia, guaranteeing the implementation of the peace agreement in South Sudan, participating in the Trilateral Mechanism for Sudan, and attempting, through ATMIS, to stabilise Somalia and safeguard the transition in that country.

For the UN system to improve its relevance within such a context, it ought to demonstrate effectiveness and impact, adapt its activities to new realities and learn from political outmanoeuvring at the hands of regional governments. To this end, the organisation should explore avenues for responding to structural variables in the region in a fashion that corresponds with emerging political dynamics, and is synched with regional priorities. Yet, at the same time, UN ought to unlatch itself from global political competition among the permanent five members, and indeed, democratise the institution altogether, if its responses are to be effectively tailored to respond to regional challenges.
Recommendations

**Multilateral entities, including AU, IGAD and UN should:**

1. Re-vision their mandates in the HoA to position themselves—individually and collectively—as the regions trusted partners in processes aimed at addressing the multiple overlapping challenges in the region and deliberately improve visibility, proliferate knowledge of their mandates and increase confidence with regional state and non-state actors at operational and strategic levels.

2. Strengthen regional capacities for the prevention of conflict and crisis through direct and indirect, monetary and technical support in areas of shared interest, for example, in responding to Red Sea littoral dynamics, regional integration, maritime management, blue economy, early warning and good offices, and preventive diplomacy.

3. Harness information technology and leveraging its intersectoral potential to catalyse structural transformations and mitigate the negative impact of emerging governance, peace and political dynamics. Information technologies encompass important tools for anticipating conflict and crises, and capabilities for simulating pathways to solutions. Among others, such technologies are enablers of commerce, fast-track regional trade and integration, mobilise and validate the experiences of youth, provide platforms for counteracting violent extremism and hate speech, improve government accountability and responsiveness, and provide channels for generating high-quality decision support data. To this end, forging partnerships with regionally based global technological entities.

4. Adapt to this new funding reality and start to diversify their sources of financing by forging new partnerships with non-traditional funding sources, especially in the private sector (and foundations), owing to the changing funding environment which has drastically reduced the amount of funds available to multilateral entities in the region. As long as the global political environment continues to deteriorate, this will remain a challenge.

5. Forge sincere and reciprocal relationships with regional civil society entities at all levels by re-examining implementing partnerships. In so-doing, share information, clarify mandates, and promote activities which promote and or strengthen civil society participation in regional civic life.
Regional Governments should, among others, consider the following:

1. Proactively address their ‘popularity deficiency’ and ‘legitimacy deficit’ by deliberately engaging in and budgeting for activities that promote trust between and with citizens (especially youth), social cohesion, and shared national visions. This psychological imperative may include transitional justice measures and other measures that address vertical and horizontal fragmentation in regional countries. To this end, ineffective and or contrived leadership, which features as a prominent harbinger of bad tidings will have to be re-examined across the region. With the median age continuing to lower, and the gap between demand and delivery of services widening, legitimacy will be an important antidote to instability in the coming years.

2. Deliberately respond to deteriorating economic situations in regional countries by, at a minimum, informing publics about the steps governments are taking to address both internal and external shocks. While many governments in the region communicated their efforts at the height of the pandemic, the post-pandemic context is returning to ‘business as usual’, namely, politicising economics and blaming populations while simultaneously increasing borrowing. This within the context of runaway corruption and decades long economic mismanagement. The absence of empathetic communication around dire economic situations will, as is already evident in some countries, contribute to political crisis that could easily spill over national borders.

3. Drawing on available constitutional frameworks, respond to and deliberately address issues of participation and inclusivity at an identity as well as political level. Gender and generational exclusion, political marginalisation, bureaucratic discrimination and general lack of transparency and accountability are at the heart of the region’s governance deficits. Populations in the region are increasingly aware of governments’ rhetoric in addressing these concerns. This consciousness and the associated frustration is linked to demands for devolved governments, affirmative action, and calls for constitutional renegotiation across the region. Failure to respond or responding late is also linked to conflicts.

4. Continue to leverage information technology for the dispersion of opportunities to citizens, providing environments for self-development, improving efficiency in the delivery of government services, and widen space for civic engagement. The proclivity to use the same technology to surveil citizens is detectable, unsustainable, and will, in the near future, transform citizen-government confrontation to unmanageable levels.

5. Expeditiously address political, nationalistic, bureaucratic, and legal impediments to regional integration and adopt a proactive posture to collective threats to governance, peace and security. There is ample evidence from within the continent—and indeed the region—that integration can be fast-tracked. This is going to be urgent within the context of growing multipolarity and changing international norms, and the opportunities these forces portend. Governments in the region must take advantage of this moment, and desist from negotiating independently.
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46 All countries of the HoA have ministry-level portfolios on youth issues.

47 Interview with CSO representative in Mogadishu, 20 July 2021.

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72 See, Joint Motion for a Resolution on violations of human rights in Uganda and Tanzania linked to investments in fossil fuels projects, 2022/2826(RSP). The resolution was in respect of ‘The Lake Albert Development project [which] consists of several partners, with the French multinational oil company Total Energies (Total) as the main investor, together with the China National Offshore Oil Corporation, the Uganda National Oil Company, and the Tanzania Petroleum Development Corporation. The production from the project will be delivered to the port of Tanga in Tanzania via a cross-border pipeline, the East African Crude Oil Pipeline (EACOP).’ In this resolution, Parliament expressed grave concern about the human rights violations in Uganda and Tanzania linked to investments in fossil-fuel projects, including the wrongful imprisonment of human rights defenders, the arbitrary suspension of NGOs, arbitrary prison sentences and the eviction of hundreds of people from their land.’
73 In his inaugural speech, President Ruto asserted that ‘[A]s members of the international community, we shall support a successful Climate Summit in Africa in November, by championing delivery of the finance and technology needed for Africa to adapt to climate impacts, support those in need and manage the transition.[add access details]
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77 During a meeting of UN presences in the HoA, held in Nairobi on 6 October 2022, one representative remarked that elections in the region are a sham, as wins are frequently secured with large monetary incentives from aspirants. With one exception, all regional governments hold regular elections.
78 Interview with Member of Parliament in Uganda, [date]. [highlighted by author] While this interview was conducted with a Ugandan parliamentarian, this peculiarity is cross-cutting and pronounced among interviewees in Ethiopia.
79 See data on these domains [to be completed][highlighted by author]
80 Discussion with South Sudan youth, Juba, 25 August 2022. See also https://issafrica.org/issa-today/ethiopia-election-was-peaceful-but-not-competitive.
81 Africa Youth Survey, 2022,[who conducted this survey?] This study was based on a sample of countries from Africa, four of which were from the Horn of Africa.
82 Ibid.
84 Interview with an official of Somalia’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Mogadishu, 18 August 2022; discussion with a political affairs officer of UNSOM, Mogadishu, 20 August 2022.
86 All leaders of HoA countries, with the exception of Eritrea, publicly associate with various strands of religions, in some instances stopping short of compelling populations to follow.
87 In Uganda, for example, the suspension of Facebook was accompanied by the commencement of draconian computer use legislation. See, Uganda: New law imposes restrictions on use of internet, www.africanews.com/2022/10/14/uganda-new-law-imposes-restrictions-on-use-of-internet//, accessed 1 January 2023.
89 Facebook defines influence operations as ‘[a]ctions taken by governments or organized non-state actors to distort domestic or foreign political sentiment, most frequently to achieve a strategic and/or geopolitical outcome. These operations can use a combination of methods, such as false news, disinformation, or networks of fake accounts (false amplifiers) aimed at manipulating public opinion.’ See Jen Weeden, William Nuland and Alex Stamso, Information operations and Facebook, Facebook, Version 1.0, 27 April 2017.
91 Interviews with civil society organisations in Kampala, 12 July 2022, and in Mogadishu, 19 July 2022.
95 Ibid.
96 President Museveni’s address to media house editors on 23 December, www.youtube.com/watch?v=PZ35jqKTRT4, December 2022.
97 Ibid.
98 Interview with a UN staff, Kampala, 12 July 2022.
99 Statement by a representative of an internationalised political think tank, Nairobi, 6 October 2022.
100 Interview with a diplomat based in Addis Ababa, 15 October 2022.
101 South Sudan, Sudan and Somalia are cases in point. The issue appeared in various meetings with civil society organisation representatives in those countries.
102 The Republic of South Sudan, Agreement on the Roadmap to a Peaceful and Democratic End of the Transitional Period of the Agreement on the Resolution of the Conflict in The Republic of South Sudan (R-ARCSS), August 2022.
103 Interview with interlocutors in Kampala, 11 July 2022, and in Khartoum, 16 July 2022.
104 Meeting with representatives of think tanks based in the HoA, Nairobi, 4 October 2022.
106 See President Museveni’s inauguration speech and comments made at the inauguration of President Ruto.[provide access details for these]
Several diplomats interviewed traced the hegemonic narrative to the democratic administrations in the US. They state that the Clinton administration fabricated the notion of a new breed of African leaders, and from their different iterations of this concept was used to reward different countries and leaders in the HoA.

Interviews with high-ranking officers and diplomats in Kampala, Nairobi, Addis Ababa and Khartoum.

The 1959 Treaty, titled Agreement for the Full Utilization of the Nile Waters, awards Egypt and Sudan a significant percentage of user rights over the Nile water and implies that upper riparians have to obtain their acquiescence to undertake any developments that might interfere with the river’s flow.

This dispute has gone through several iterations involving many phases of negotiation, exchanges of letters, involvement of multiple parties and technical experts, all without resolution. A recent iteration was in a letter sent to the UN Secretary-General by the Foreign Minister of Egypt on 22 July 2022, updating the Secretary-General on Ethiopia’s intention to undertake a third filling of the GERD, and its objections.

Article 14(b) of the Agreement on the Nile River Basin Cooperative Framework done on 14 May 2010 to 13 May 2011, replaced with: . opened for signature from 14 May 2010 to 13 May 2011., at Entebbe, Uganda, seeks to repudiate any prior agreement on the Nile and provide for a regulatory regime that is equitable and in line with current international law. Egypt and Sudan favoured wording that would have retained colonial-era user rights on the Nile.

The CFA requires six ratifications or accension for it to come into force. At the time of writing, four ratifications (Ethiopia, Rwanda, Tanzania and Uganda) and two signatories (Burundi and Kenya) had been achieved.


Burundi and Kenya have signed but not ratified the CFA.

In a letter from the Embassy of the State of Eritrea to the US, 4:2, 2010, 279–297.

The Jonglei Canal is an incomplete 240-mile Egyptian-funded megaproject started in 1978 and suspended in 1983. The project was meant to divert the White Nile to enable it to deliver more water downstream. To some, the revival of the project is akin to rubbing an old wound. See, Reviving the Jonglei Canal Project is rubbing an old wound, https://sudantribune.com/article258603/, accessed 20 November 2022.

In a letter from the Embassy of the State of Eritrea to the US, published in Foreign Affairs magazine, the Eritrean Embassy reprimanded Jeffrey Feltman, former US Special Envoy for the HoA and author of an article titled ‘Ethiopia’s hard road to peace,’ accusing him of witch-hunting Asmara. See www.foreignaffairs.com/ethiopia/ethiopias-hard-road-peace.


Ibid.

Interview with CSO representative in Mogadishu, 19 July 2022.


Secession has often been a feature in Ethiopia’s contested state-building process. The dispute over Al-Fashaga and the maritime dispute between Kenya and Somalia are also situations to observe.

Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD), Regional strategy for preventing and countering violent extremism, 2018, page of quote.


Interview with a senior military officer, Kampala, 12 July 2022.

Interview with CSO representative in Mogadishu, 19 July 2022.


Centre for Dialogue, Research and Cooperation (CDRC), Public seminar on the implications for the Horn of Africa of the current Gulf crisis, CDRC Digest, 2:7, 2017, pages.

Interview with a diplomat in Mogadishu, 19 July 2022.

Interview with UN official in Khartoum, 18 August 2022.

UN Strategic Assessment of the Horn of Africa, August 2016.

Joint Communique between Ethiopia and Somalia, September 2022. In this communique, the parties agreed to jointly address extra-regional actors that could destabilise their relations, tacitly referencing actors from the Arabian Peninsula.

The 46th Ordinary Session of IGAD Executive Council of Ministers held in Djibouti on 27 February 2019. Accordingly, [T] he IGAD Council of Ministers designed Red Sea and Gulf of Aden Taskforce to be focal point for increasing IGAD’s understanding of common regional challenges by engaging with institutions such as the Red Sea Council, Arctic Council, Baltic Sea Council, Straits of Malacca, Open Pacific and adjacent organizations in the Middle East, and Sahel aimed at fostering collaboration and coordination on matters of common interest thereby contributing to the shared goal of promoting maritime security and stability while identifying opportunities for cooperation in the Red Sea arena.

Intergovernmental Authority on Development – Red Sea, Gulf of Aden and Somalia Office (IGAD-RSGAS), IGAD-RSGA/2022/0908/01, September 2022.

Several interviewees in Sudan spoke to Russian mining and port development activities. Interview with UN staff, Khartoum, 18 August 2022, and with representatives of a professional association, Khartoum, 16 August 2022.


Ibid., page.


Interview with senior IGAD representative, 6 October 2022.

Also see, Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD), Running with the baton: Regional action plan for the implementation of United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 (2000) and 1820 (2008), 2013. In 2011, for example, IGAD drafted an Action Plan for the Implementation of UN
Resolution 1325 and 1820. A decade later, no evidence of its implementation could be found but, in the meantime, several unrelated positions on gender and women have been adopted.

On 30 March 2020, IGAD Heads of State and Heads of Government met to ‘Collectively formulate a comprehensive regional response strategy and task the IGAD secretariat to develop an accompanying implementation plan to address the COVID-19 pandemic in the IGAD region that also incorporates the protection of populations and special groups that face difficulties accessing the national health systems such as IDPs, refugees and migrants.’ IGAD Heads of State and Governments Declaration on the Coronavirus (COVID-19) Pandemic, 30 March 2020. See www.tralac.org/documents/resources/covid-19/regional/3479-final-declaration-on-the-igad-response-to-covid-19-pandemic-30-march-2020/file.html.

At the time, UNITAMs appeared to be making progress in addressing the situation in Sudan, to the exclusion of the AU and IGAD.

IGAD has a Special Envoy for Somalia, the Red Sea and the Gulf of Eden, and a Joint Monitoring Mechanism for South Sudan.

Interviews with a Member of Parliament, Uganda, 12 July 2022.

Uganda appears satisfied with the trajectory of political events in South Sudan, while Sudan is indisposed and in political crisis. Despite its tenure in the UN Security Council, Kenya is championing a Kenya Kwanza (Kenya-First) agenda, and is inward-looking.

Sudan is currently the political head of IGAD, with Ethiopia leading the Secretariat.

Interview with senior IGAD representative, Juba, 24 August 2022.

Interview with former civil servant and with CSO representative in Khartoum, 16 August 2022.

Interview with diplomat in Khartoum, 17 August 2022.

Refer to the Communique of the 38th Extraordinary Assembly of IGAD Heads of State and Government, Djibouti, 20 December 2020. In fact, weaker IGAD states like Somalia and South Sudan are frequently on the agenda of IGAD summits.

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Interview with diplomat in Khartoum, 18 August 2022.

African Union, African integration report: Putting free movement of persons at the centre of continental integration, 2021. The index [which index?] identified Community of Sahel-Saharan States (CEN-SAD) and the Arab Maghreb Union (AMU) in the same breath. [AQ to check this footnote] Measured against eight (8) indicators (namely free movement of persons, social integration, trade integration, financial integration, monetary integration, infrastructure integration, environmental integration, political and institutional integration).

The Panel has long held the AU Mandate for the HoA and was in the process of defining a regional response to Middle Eastern influences in the Horn.


Interview with a representative of a regional thinktank, place, 6 October 2022.

Ethiopia’s reference to the conflict as ‘a law and order operation’ implied that there was no conflict in the country and therefore that the situation that existed could appropriately be addressed by internal law and order mechanisms.

AU PAPs presser [highlighted by author]

Interview with an AU official in [add place], 5 September 2022, and with UN officials in Addis Ababa, 8 September 2022, and Nairobi, 3 October 2022.

Refer to Summit [highlighted by author]

Online interview with AU official in Somalia, 10 August 2022, and interview with an AU official based in Addis Ababa, 5 September 2022.

Online interview with ATMIS staff, 10 August 2022.

Statement of the chairperson of the Commission on the Situation in Sudan, April 2019.

Online interview with senior AU staff, 5 September 2022.

Interview with an academic in Juba, 21 August 2022.

Online interview with UN official, 9 September 2022.

Interview with senior AU representative, Mogadishu, 13 August 2022.

It is noteworthy that Ethiopian diplomats purposely traversed the continent during the early phases of the conflict, and that all Ethiopian embassies were proactively addressing commentary about the conflict.


Ibid.

Interview with a diplomat in Mogadishu, 19 July 2022.

Interview with a senior military official, Kampala, 12 July 2022.

Interview with UN officials in Mogadishu, 21 July 2022.

Interview with UN officials in Mogadishu, 21 July 2022, and in Juba, 22 August 2022.

Group discussion with representatives from research organisations, Nairobi, 3 October 2022.

The situation in Ethiopia is a classic example in which humanitarian politics overlaps with conflict resolution, and creates tense relations with government.

IGAD Communiqué of the 48th Ordinary Session of the IGAD Council of Ministers, November 2022.

Ibid.

Birgitte Markussen, Letter from EU Ambassador and Head of European Union Delegation to the African Union (AU), July 2022.
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