

Why the Assurance of Eastern African Standby Force (EASF) on Regional Peace and Security Remains Uncertain

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Abstract

Eastern African Standby Force (EASF) is the regional security mechanism for the Great Lakes Region. The force is mandated with the tasks of conflict intervention in the region, through preventive diplomacy and peace support operations in conflict zones. For African nations are marred with violent conflicts, durable peace continues to be an illusion despite the presence of ongoing peace support operations. In such pacification processes, regional forces are supposed to augment the efforts of other agencies such as the UN and the international community. Consequently questions raised on the suitability of such platforms suggest that regional security mechanisms are the most appropriate tools to counter conflict challenges. However, these forces have not been able to carry out successful peace support operations in conflict zones due to diverse reasons. In this regard, this article assesses challenges hindering the Eastern African Standby Force (EASF) from successfully executing intervention missions in the Great Lakes Region where there have been recurrent violent conflicts in the Post Cold war era.

Keywords: Violent conflict, EASF, Peace support operations, durable peace & intervention

Introduction

In the past, alliances and security bodies have been formed for peace and stability within a given region. The Warsaw Pact was formed by the former Soviet Union and its allies to protect its members from any external threat and to ensure peace and prosperity within the region. However, with the collapse of the Soviet Union, the organization lost its significance. In Western Europe, there is the Northern Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) which is the regional security mechanism. It ensures peace and austerity within the region.

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It has had various peace support operations ranging from military intervention in Bosnia to Yugoslavia. In Africa, the African Standby Force (ASF) was formed by the African nations to be the continental security mechanism to tackle the violent conflicts that threaten peace and stability of the continentⁱ.

The Eastern Africa Standby Force (EASF) remains the regional security body for the Eastern African Community. It's one of the building blocks of the ASF. Its membership comprises of the following countries: Kenya, Djibouti, Madagascar, Mauritius, Burundi, Uganda, Seychelles, Sudan, Somalia, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Rwanda and Comoros Islands. The force is mandated with the tasks of conflict intervention in the region, through preventive diplomacy and peace support operations in the conflict zones.

1.1 The Debut of Regional Security Mechanism

A recurrent issue identified by researchers in African conflicts has been on the disinterest by the international community to aid in the peace enforcement of the local armed conflicts. This saw the need to dissect the numerous security problems into regional concerns perhaps best justified by the horror caused by the 1994 Rwandan genocide as the rest of the world watched with indifferenceⁱⁱ. Unfortunately, the African countries too lacked the mechanisms to deal with the conflicts emanating from the region. They have been bogged down by many problems in their quest to maintain peace and security across the continent.

The "lack of political will" shown by Western countries is the major hindrance of deployment and success of the UN in Africaⁱⁱⁱ. Western countries are reluctant to participate because few foreign leaders will risk the loss of soldiers in poorly understood (African) countries^{iv}. Considering this logic regional security bodies with local roots would have a better grasp of conflict problems, but that has not been the case. Within this context it is necessary to assess challenges that hinder EASF from achieving its mandate. The discussion further analyzes the logistical constraints affecting the efficiency of the force and how they can be resolved.

2.0 Potential Weaknesses of EASF

These refer to fault lines that may hinder the force from generating its desired outcomes in pacification. They are capability gaps aspects such as competing regional political goals, weak bureaucratic systems, military flaws, command and control gaps, and military training gaps are likely to jeopardize the peace support operations. A brief review of these aspects continues below.

Competing regional political goals

Arguably the most important dimension of conflict management is the political piece. The EASF's effectiveness results from the sum of its members cooperation. Important political enablers that affect the conflict management capabilities of the force include: widespread agreement on what EASF peace support operations can (and cannot) be expected to achieve; unity within the member states in support of those objectives; sustained high-level political engagement to support special envoys, committees, and panels as well as peacekeepers in the field; and genuine cooperation from host-state authorities.

Fight for regional hegemony still dominates the political arena. There is competition amongst the member states as to which country becomes the lead nation. This explains why the planning elements are based in Nairobi, Kenya, whereas, the logistic elements are based in Ethiopia which is a landlocked country. It becomes too costly for the organization to transport its cargo to Addis Ababa. Moreover, it would be difficult shipping logistical items to the host country. The fight for supremacy therefore undermines the institutional build-up. In addition to that, the membership of Sudan, Somalia, Ethiopia, and Eritrea result in a largely dysfunctional organization, contested international recognition, and internal political and military conflict.

Weak Bureaucratic Systems

Effective peace support operations initiatives require efficient management and strong bureaucratic structures both at Karen, Kenya and in the field to provide strategic vision and support senior mission leadership teams. At present, however, the EASF still lacks the institutional capacity and human resources to conduct effective peacemaking initiatives and complex peace operations.

EASF suffers from weak bureaucratic processes and management systems poor information technologies; inadequate physical infrastructure; a lack of professional and motivated personnel; weak reputation, presence, and reach; and inadequate sources of funds. The force lacks hi-tech equipments for information gathering and collection. As a result the force's early warning mechanism is very poor. It's not able to efficiently monitor the volatile situation of its member states. With poor pay packages, the institutions becomes a transit camp for the professionals. They leave the institution after gathering the relevant work experience for the high-end organizations. This is bad for the growth of its various departments since the personnel with the know-how are not there to provide the expertise needed. Intervention missions would pose particular institutional challenges to the force at each stage of a mission's life cycle (i.e., planning, deployment, operations, and withdrawal).

In the field, teams of qualified senior leaders, including the special representative, force commander, police commissioner and chief administrator are difficult to assemble and retain.

Poorly Equipped Military Component

EASF consistently struggles to marshal the requisite military personnel and range of military assets needed for complex peace operations. Among the assets in highest demand in difficult the theatres of the region such as Sudan and Somalia are helicopters i.e. utility and attack helis, armored personnel carriers, communications and intelligence equipment, unmanned aerial vehicles, night vision goggles, and, in the case of AMISOM in Mogadishu, battle tanks.

In the absence of the necessary capabilities, such an approach brings a high level of risk, not only of failure but also of raising people's expectations that cannot be fulfilled. Worse still, it undermines the credibility of peace support operations and weakens the organization that is responsible. As for military personnel, the EASF's greatest deficits are specialists with niche skills including medicine, engineering, and intelligence gathering^v. To fill these gaps, the mechanism relies on external donors (the friends of EASF) to provide funding, training, and equipment directly to troop contributing countries—hence bypassing the force systems.

Weak Civilian Component

While military assets are critical, multidimensional peace operations also require civilian capabilities. Here the EASF suffers from a shortage of experts in the rule of law and security institutions such as police, justice, and corrections officers as well as expert trainers to build local capacity in these areas. The qualitative role of civilians in peace operations has changed exponentially and, as a result, the number of civilian functions has also increased considerably.

The civilian components do human rights monitoring, support the establishment of human rights commissions and to ensure that new constitutions and laws are in line with international standards. They support the electoral processes – such as voter education, voter registration and training, mentoring and support to local independent electoral commissions. They offer support for the restoration of state authority or the establishment of state services where these did not exist before, especially in the context of the rule of law (RoL). They support various aspects of security sector reform (SSR) including, particularly, disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration (DDR).

Military Training Gaps

The training should be done collectively with all the elements of the multidimensional force. Unfortunately this rarely happens. The various forces drawn from the member states should be training together to enhance and foster togetherness. The joint training should be frequent so that the personnel get to accustom themselves with the Training doctrines and the weapons.



EASF`s field training exercise (FTX) in Djibouti, 2009.

When the various elements are integrated and carry on with their training together it eases the command and control during the actual deployment. The equipment can only be tested during the training sessions. Different national militaries own different type of equipment more so weapons. The interoperability of these weapons can only be checked at this juncture. The force needs to synchronise and harmonise, the type of equipment that member states should arm their personnel with. Having weapons that other members cannot operate can cause fratricide thus endangering the lives of the soldiers and the bystanders.

Command and Control Gaps

The command structure is likely to be influenced by external forces. This is due to the fact that the troops are not fully under the command of the EASF. The troop contributing country still dictates where her troops are to be deployed within the EASF. The mechanism does not have a force.

The command and control is further complicated by the fact that the troop contributing countries sign an MoU with the EASF on where their troops are to be deployed. This limits the authority which the force has over the troops. If the force has to reassign a specific contingent to a new area of operation then it has to make an official request to that particular troop contributing country. This normally involves a lot of diplomatic chains and protocols which might take relatively a long time before it is effected. In peace support operations, every moment counts and it could mean life or death to citizens of the host nation. The force should be able to exercise full authority over its troops if it has to spring into action on a timely decision making.

2.1 Sustainment and Reimbursement Constraints

The heart of humanitarian and peace support operations lies in the ability to conduct operational logistics to sustain the assigned forces. The sub-region`s austere environment presents difficult logistic challenges^{vi}. The region`s landscape is generally hilly and rugged with thick forests. Limited transportation infrastructure requires that airlift be present to augment ground and sea transportation assets in response to crises and conflict situations. The EASF and its member states have near to non-airlift capability thus will have to rely on external assistance to deploy and sustain the forces.

Sustainability, reimbursement and logistics all point to the issue of funding. The issue of funding is the most crucial problem that may affect the whole EASF system both at its establishment and deployment levels. Funding under the EASF is needed for pre-deployment activities such as training, communication, logistical interoperability, deployment and post deployment activities such as transportation and remuneration.

There have been donor supports from the 'friends of the EASF'. There have been both bilateral donors like Canada and multilateral donors like NATO. However, these supports have been clouded by a lot of incoherence. The lack of clarity in the assumptions underpinning the EASF largely explains the discrepancies and lack of coherence in donor support. As long as all assumptions remain potentially valid, and none has clear authority over the others, each donor remains free to 'pick and choose' among the components of the EASF that best matches its national or institutional preferences or habits. This makes donor coordination even more vital, but such coordination remains ever a challenge as donor coordination is time and effort consuming-each donor is motivated by its own national or institutional interests, there is a degree of competition among donors, primarily for reasons of political visibility on the international scene and before home constituents. The consequence is gaps, overlaps and, in the case of military training or equipment, problems of interoperability in the field.

3.0 Proposed Recommendations

Durable peace remains elusive in the sub-region as most of the member states struggle with internal conflicts which threaten to destabilize the region. EASF is the best mechanism that can offer the much needed peace and security in the Great Lakes Region. The organization should be able to deliver on its mandate if the various shortcomings mentioned above could be corrected. The potential weaknesses should be bridged with the mechanism establishing sustainable source of funding. Below are the recommendations for continued norms of practice and policy implementation.

Recommendations for continued norms of practice

A continued partnership is recommended with other donors and the friends` of the EASF. Yet, care must be taken that EASF advisors continue only to have an advisory function so that the organisation`s regional ownership is not at risk of being compromised. It should have the member states` ownership. The members should also pay their assessed contribution.

The force should foster good relationship and communication with other regional bodies. It should strengthen communication between EASF and AU, as well as between EASF and organizations of regional economic cooperation (RECs). This could have implications for the solidification of initiatives supported through EASF. The force should not only sign MoUs with the RECs but should work towards the integration. Improved communication with the RECs in the region i.e. Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) and East African Community (EAC) is very vital.

Enhance the EASF`s information management capabilities. Information management is a crucial but often neglected aspect of dealing with armed conflict. Without it, early warning efforts are doomed to failure; mediation initiatives are unlikely to consistently generate the desired effects; and peace operations cannot be expected to succeed. The Force`s dire lack of capabilities and limited human resources to gather and analyze information relevant to conflict management should be addressed. Priority areas for action should include bolstering the EASF secretariat, enhancing the mechanism`s ability to collect early-warning information, and developing the organization`s capacity for institutional learning. For institutional memory, EASF should improve and strengthen the lessons learned and the documentation process. This would help in enhancing the efficacy of the early warning systems. Without the ability to evaluate missions, produce lessons learned studies, and generate recommendations for reforming existing practices and systems, the force will never be able to conduct its own peace operations effectively.

Recommendations for policy implementation

The force is operating on a weak legal framework. Currently, there is only an MoU and a policy framework. There is no binding arrangement between member states for force deployment. However, every year the member states renew their troops pledged. The legal framework should therefore be strengthened. The EASF's brigade should have a standing force rather than troops being in their respective countries pending any deployment. Most of these troops pledged are usually committed in their countries and would take relatively long time before they are ready if they were to be deployed by the EASF. Hence, the members should commit the pledged troops to the EASF. Command and control of these troops should exclusively remain with the mechanism.

The member states should enhance regional cooperation through trade affairs thus promoting good political and diplomatic ties within the region. This is because interstate tensions dog the efficiency of the force. The regional economic integration should be hastened so as to increase trade affairs amongst the member states.

The member states to offer the much needed political support to the force. It will strengthen its institutional build up. This will give the Head of the Mission, Head of Police and the special envoys easy time in coordinating the peace support operations in the field. The unity amongst the member states and high-political engagements is very crucial in facilitating the peace support processes.

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