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**The Eastern African Standby Force: Regionalising Peace and Security in Eastern Africa -
Credible Hope or Elusive Dream?**

Speakers:

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Introduction

The Eastern African Standby Force (EASF) is one of the five regional brigades (one for each African regional bloc, known as the Regional Economic Communities - RECs) of the African Standby Force, the military arm of the African Union (AU). The EASF was established in 2007, with initially 13 signatory country members, which today amount to only 10 active members: Rwanda, Uganda, Burundi, Kenya, Djibouti, Ethiopia, Somalia, Sudan, the Comoros and Seychelles (the three others having joined the Southern African regional bloc).

The AU has been noticeably more active than its predecessor – the Organisation of African Unity (OAU) – in terms of peace and security, partly due to its initial remit – enshrined in the article 4 of its Constitutive Act, which gives it “the right to intervene in a Member State [...] in respect of grave circumstances, namely war crimes, genocide and crimes against humanity”.

But the regionalisation of peace and security is a new phenomenon taking place in Africa as a whole. Traditionally, this area of action was placed under the aegis of the UN. Bilateral as well as multilateral donors have strongly supported this development since it meant for them fewer costly interventions in particularly intractable and volatile conflicts.

The EASF thus belongs to an environment of increasing numbers of regional actors developing a peace and security unit (the East African Community (EAC), the East African Governmental Development Organisation (EGAD), the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA), the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region, etc.).

The context of security in Eastern Africa

Threats to security in the region are multiple and multifaceted.

- Insecurity has deep and diverse roots: poverty (the countries are among the poorest in the world), environmental issues (climate change), food security, etc.
- It is a key geostrategic region: noticeably in terms of US-led war on terror (pressure on countries such as Uganda, Kenya, Ethiopia, Somalia, to pass antiterrorism laws and conduct antiterrorist operations).
- The internal dimension of security is nonetheless prevailing, quantitatively and qualitatively: post-electoral violence, widespread insurgency (rebel groups), banditry (ex: pirate attacks in Somalia). But it also includes a high level of state violence against these groups (the heads of states of these countries were often initially part of what have been termed ‘rebel groups’ (i.e. Museveni, Kagame), and are therefore very sensitive to and intransigent on insurgency).
- This violence also has a specific regional, or interstate, dimension: rebels are often used by neighbouring counties as proxy groups; fluxes of refugees reinforce the spill-over phenomenon.

This qualifies the region for what is called a “**security complex**”, i.e. a region with a high level of interstate, intertwined conflicts.



Therefore the regionalisation of peace and security seems particularly relevant and appropriate for east Africa, following the rationale that if issues are of regional dimension, then so should be the solutions to these issues.

Organisation of the EASF

The African Standby Force's intervention has been broken down into six scenarios: 1. observation and monitoring missions; 2. preventive deployments in the case of rising political tensions; 3. humanitarian assistance missions; 4. traditional peacekeeping operations; 5. peace support in a non-permissive environment; 6. forceful intervention in a member state in grave circumstances.

In terms of structure, the EASF comprises a 15-staff planning element (the PLANELM), a supporting secretariat, the Eastern African Standby Brigade Coordination Mechanism (EASBRICOM) - both located in Karen, Kenya - and the brigade's headquarters (in Addis Ababa).

The brigade itself is composed of standby multidisciplinary contingents, with civilian, police and military components stationed in their countries of origin and ready for rapid deployment. These different units would be mixed when operating, i.e. multinational.

Ultimately, the brigade will have 5,500 military and civilian personnel and include a police component of 48 officers.

In spite of the fact that experts usually agree that the EASF, along with the Western African Standby Force, is the only regional brigade that can work in the medium term (ambitions are that it will be fully operational in 2015), several issues remain.

A number of challenges:

- There is no lead nation among members: a few of the countries are at the same level in terms of power, which generates conflict (ex: power issues between Ethiopia and Kenya, and between Rwanda and Uganda.)
- The nature of donor support as a whole is destabilising: It too often still responds to national (for bilateral donors) or institutional interests (for multilateral ones), each donor pushing for its own priorities, which ultimately leads to a diversion in the goals of the organisation.
- Mixed units may pose delicate problems stemming from the interstate nature of conflicts: for instance, if a Rwandan-led unit came to operate in Burundi.
- The lack of adequate finances and resources (in terms of staffing especially) is unanimously pointed out. This failing applies to the AU as a whole, and makes it extremely donor-dependent.
- Experts have concerns regarding the framework and mechanisms of the standby force: they may be appropriate for analysis and prevention, but seem quite inadequate for actual intervention.

Recommendations

- Each REC should select a lead member on peace and security, which would head each regional standby force.
- There are too many regional organisations involved in the security sector (notion of a "peace industry"): it is confusing for country members as well as for donors. Some organisations should abandon this sphere of activity. The EASF should remain, and the AU as a whole should play a stronger role in peace and security.
- There should be enhanced harmonisation and coordination in donor support, which would, among other benefits, improve the efficiency of allocated resources.