

# THE Eastern Africa Standby Force: Roles, Challenges and Prospects

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This study examines the roles, challenges and prospects of Eastern Africa Standby Force (EASF) in the maintenance of peace and security in the Eastern Africa. Findings of the study show that EASF has limited role in maintaining peace and security in the region. It has played only some supportive roles to the United Nations (UN) and African Union (AU) peace support missions. This minimal role is due to hegemonic competition between Ethiopia and Kenya, the prevalence of several interstate and intrastate conflicts in the region, duplication of regional organizations having overlapping membership, absence of strong legal basis, lack of adequate finance, and cultural diversity. Notwithstanding those challenges, EASF has a good future prospect as can be observed from its current activities. The organization is working to achieve its full operationalization. To this end, it has also been conducting pre-deployment joint trainings and field exercises. For more successful future operation of the force, however, the study suggests cooperation among member states, developing unfettered commitment of member states to contribute force, finance and logistics as well as standardizing training and doctrines so as to create effective multinational forces.

**Key words:** Eastern Africa, Force, Peace, Security.

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## INTRODUCTION

### THE GENESIS OF AFRICAN STANDBY FORCE

On theoretical base, the ASF has a long historical origin. The idea of establishing a Pan-African military force is not a new phenomenon. It goes back to the early 1960s when Kwame Nkrumah proposed the establishment of African High Command for the primary purpose of safeguarding the sovereignty and territorial integrity of

newly independent African states (Girmachew, 2008; Vines, 2013; Biney, 2012). Besides, this force was proposed to intervene in intra-state and inter-state conflicts in Africa (Girmachew, 2008). However, due to suspicion of its impact on states' sovereignty, the proposal was objected (Dier, 2010; Girmachew, 2008; Biney, 2008). The continental military force, thus, was not realized during the age of the Organization of African

Unity (OAU).

Later, on the emergence of AU by the Constitutive Act of AU, African leaders took common position in the establishment of Africa-wide military force. Accordingly, African Chiefs of Defense and Security (ACDS) adopted 'The policy framework document on the establishment of the African Standby Force and of the Military Staff Committee (MSC)' (ASF framework) in May 2003 which was approved in July 2004 by African Heads of States (Cilliers and Malan, 2005). The establishment of African Standby Force (ASF), with the aim of providing AU with reliable deployable force, follows from the adoption of two historic documents. The first one is the Constitutive Act of AU, which provides AU the right of intervention in member states' crisis situation while the second is 'The Protocol Relating to the Establishment of the Peace and Security Council of the African Union' (PSC Protocol), which recommended the establishment of ASF for the implementation of this right of intervention. Hence, ASF is the executing wing of the Peace and Security Council (PSC).

African Standby Force is not a single army unit. Rather, it is a combination of standby forces from five sub-regional brigades. ASF was established to comprise five sub-regional standby brigades from West, North, South, Central and East Africa, which are expected to operate under the direction of a proper mandating authority. The focus of this paper is on the Eastern Africa sub-regional standby force.

## EASTERN AFRICA STANDBY FORCE

Eastern Africa Standby Force is one of the five sub-regional brigades of ASF that was established in 2004 as the Eastern Africa wing. Following the decision of AU to establish ASF, Eastern Africa leaders arrived at a decision to establish their brigade in the region. During the establishment of EASF there were different Regional Economic Communities (RECs), notably the East African Community (EAC) and the Common Markets for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA). However, neither of them had a directly mandated security role (Allehone, 2008). Besides, these organizations did not encompass all the 13 member states of the region (Alusala, 2004). Due to its level of involvement in the peace and security area and its inclusion of majority of states of the region, the task of organizing the brigade was assigned to Inter-Governmental Authority for Development (IGAD) temporarily (Allehone, 2008; Sousa, 2013; Jacobsen and Nordby, 2013). Subsequently, in September 2004, EASF was formally established through the coordination of IGAD to include all the 13 countries of the region and to undertake peace-keeping activities under the general framework of the AU (Neethling, 2005; Jacobsen and Nordby, 2013).

However, as EASF was to be coordinated by IGAD member states, non-IGAD member states resisted this monopoly by a portion of states of the region (Cilliers, 2008; Robinson, 2014). Besides, it is also stated that, IGAD had no command and control structures required to give technical and political coordination (EACDS, 2005). As a result, Eastern Africa Standby Brigade Coordination Mechanism (EASBRICOM), as an independent and all-inclusive coordinating mechanism, was established in 2007 to take over the coordinating mandate of IGAD (Kimathi, 2010; Cilliers, 2008; Hull, *et al.*, 2011; Robinson, 2014).

It is to be stressed that EASF is still in a formative stage. It is in the course of setting up structures and policies (Kimathi, 2010). Moreover, the name of the Brigade and the coordination mechanism is changing indicating the organization's internal transformation. Accordingly, the name 'brigade' has been changed to 'force' by the Council of Ministers' meeting held in Nairobi on June 18, 2010 to show 'multi-dimensionality' (Robinson, 2014; Hull, *et al.*, 2011). This is meant to indicate the Brigade's incorporation of not only military but also police and civilian components, which were negligible until this period. Accordingly, the EASBRICOM was also renamed as the Eastern Africa Standby Force Coordination Mechanism (EASFCOM) (Robinson, 2014). Hence, EASF is still in its institutional establishment and transformation.

## THE ROLE OF EASTERN AFRICA STANDBY FORCE

Eastern Africa Standby Force is still in the process of formation to reach its planned full operationalization by 2015. The force is yet appraising its systems and getting ready for its future deployment role (Mumma-Martinon, 2010). Hence, EASF has played only a very limited role in the maintenance of peace and security in the region. EASF has undertaken conflict prevention activities in the region. These include military advice, observer missions and fact finding missions (*ibid*). EASF sent fact finding mission to Somalia upon the request of the AU to observe the situation on the ground and inform the decision to deploy a peace-keeping force (Bouhuys, 2011). In addition, EASF has worked as part of the United Nations Political Office for Somalia (UNPOS), which is mandated to prevent conflict in Somalia through facilitating negotiations between key political actors (*ibid*).

In addition, EASF has played some role in the AU Mission in Somalia (AMISOM) peace-keeping operations to stabilize conflicts in the country. EASF has cooperated with international offices to support the AMISOM. Accordingly, EASF has worked as part of the United Nations Support Office for AMISOM (UNSOA) and also EASF takes part in the UN Training Needs Analysis Team for TFG Military Forces (*ibid*). Besides, EASFCOM

has signed MoU with the African Union Commission (AUC) to augment the capabilities of AMISOM, specially, in the areas of operational planning, logistics planning and operations, training, medical support and assistance (AU, 2011)

Based on the MoU, EASF has deployed 14 officers (including medical and logistics officers) to assist AMISOM, while it is also on the process to engage in different capability areas (Bouhuys, 2011). EASF has also conducted the force generation workshop involving its member states to increase the AMISOM's forces (Miranda, *et al.*, 2012). Moreover, EASF has helped the AMISOM operations through providing command and staff headquarters. These and the above discussed contributions may make EASF the first and most advanced among the five sub-regional brigades of the ASF in terms of actively involving in the prevailing AU peace support operations.

Eastern Africa Standby Force, though to a very lesser degree, also contributed to peace missions operating in Sudan. EASF provided pre-deployment training for United Nations-African Union Mission in Darfur (UNAMID) in collaboration with other trainers (UNDP, 2011). AU Mission in Sudan (AMIS) and UNAMID also received command and control assistances from EASF (Ekengard, 2008). Besides, some trained women police officers were also deployed from EASF to United Nations Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS) (UNDP, 2011).

## **CHALLENGES OF EASTERN AFRICA STANDBY FORCE**

Eastern Africa Standby Force has plenty of problems that hindered its institutional development. The process of developing and operationalizing the EASF has been a daunting task characterized by a multiplicity of interrelated challenges. These are discussed in detail herein under.

### **Hegemonic Competition**

The Eastern Africa lacks a clear hegemonic power unlike the case of West Africa and Southern Africa where Nigeria and South Africa are hegemonies, respectively (Kimathi, 2010; Kagwanja, 2013). Notwithstanding their historical cordial relations, the two relatively powerful states, namely Ethiopia and Kenya, are in a state of constant competition to secure their respective supremacy in the region. The competition between the two countries was manifested at the very outset of EASF's creation. Some maintained that as Ethiopia is dominant in IGAD, it is using the organization as a tool for pursuing the country's national security project under the cover of regional security (Jadcobsen and Nordbay,

2013a). Due to this reason Kenya strongly resisted the establishment of EASF under the mandate of IGAD as the event was felt to boost Ethiopian dominance in the region through the accumulation of military force under IGAD (*ibid*). This mistrust and unholy alliance of the two countries, therefore, hindered the institutional development as well as smooth running of the EASF (Burgess, 2009; Mungai, 2011). Consequently, the protest by Kenya and other IGAD and non-IGAD countries in the region led to the establishment of EASBRICOM, later EASFCOM.

The competition between the two countries remains intact even in the newly created coordinating mechanism, which is EASFCOM. Kenya considers EASFCOM, which is located on its soil, as the supreme organ of all other structures of EASF, while Ethiopia regards them as equal (Mandrup, 2012). Therefore, even though the EASFCOM was established as a solution, the discrepancy over its status continues to persist as a challenge to smooth running of EASF.

The competition between the two countries for supremacy and influence in the region is also best manifested in the allocation of EASF structures. Internal rivalry between the two countries to assume regional leadership leads to separate allocation of elements of EASF in Ethiopia and Kenya (Vines, 2013). The EASFCOM and the Planning Element (PLANELM) are located in Kenya, while the EASF Headquarters and Logistic Base (LOGBASE) are co-located in Ethiopia. This has an adverse effect on the organization. This separate placement resulted in weak coordination among those structures of the EASF and may further delay the rapid deployment of EASF (Fisher, *et al.*, 2010). As a result, it is suggested that all components of EASF should be in one place for more flexibility and effectiveness.

### **Conflicts in the Eastern Africa**

The Eastern Africa has experienced most tragic conflicts. Conflicts in the region, including interstate and intrastate conflicts, have detrimental effect on the development of strong regional standby force (Mandrup, 2012; Kimathi, 2010; Mumma-Martinon, 2010; Fisher, *et al.*, 2010; Burgess, 2009). In this regard, almost all members of the region are in a constant turmoil, where one can mention the case of North and South Sudan hostilities, Ethio-Eritrea and Djibouti-Eritrea hostilities as well as the crises in Darfur, Somalia, South Sudan, Ethiopia and Uganda. Most importantly, the Somalia and Sudan conflicts have an immense contribution in retarding the development of EASF, given the magnitude of their impact (Mungai, 2011; Burgess, 2009). Besides, post-2005 election crisis in Ethiopia and post-war hostilities between Ethiopia and Eritrea have also contributed to the suppression of the

progress of regional security architecture (Kinzel, 2008).

It is important to see the adverse effect of conflicts in the region from two angles. Firstly, internal crisis within member states affects the development of EASF. Member states have been disturbed with internal insurgents. They are too busy with their own internal problems. As Berouk (2014) notes, they devote the available best troops, officials and equipments for domestic purpose, fighting against internal insurgents. It is a matter of prioritizing issues in that the best troops and instruments will not be given to the EASF, which is a planned capability for the future deployment, while states are burning with recurrent, pressing and timely issues domestically. Generally, the prevailing conflict situation in the member states makes regional security less important than national security (Hull, *et al.*, 2011). The whole effect of this internal problem is it downsizes member states' contribution to EASF.

Secondly, the commitment of member states to the peace and security efforts in the other countries also affects the institutional development of EASF. Conflicts in the region have become the focus of international community and, hence, UN and AU are involved in various peace-keeping operations. Several UN and AU missions have been deployed in different countries of the region such as Somalia, Sudan and South Sudan. EASF member states have been participating in these missions by providing their resources which would have otherwise been available to build up future capability of EASF (Mumma-Martinon, 2010). Hence, this reduces their contribution to the capacity development of EASF, even if their commitment was for the peace of the region.

The other issue that can be raised as a challenge to EASF is the issue of mutual destabilization. States in the region are characterized by mutual destabilization. Advancing the motto of 'the enemy of my enemy is my friend', states of the region are known to support the internal decedent groups of neighbouring countries. Tlalka (2013) noted that political tensions between member countries or their historical and present day's international relations, which is characterized by, *inter alia*, support of armed opposition groups in the neighbouring countries, create a climate of mistrust among member states of EASF. Hence, mutual destabilization actions and the subsequent mistrust reduce regional states' collaborative work for security of the region.

### **Duplication of Regional Organizations and Their Membership**

Despite the emergence of EASF as a regional peace and security architecture, IGAD and EAC continue to take their own actions in the same domain of peace and security. Therefore, there are three regional security

organizations in Eastern Africa, namely the EAC, EASF and IGAD. Each of the three organizations requires external fund for their activities in the area, thereby creating a fierce competition for external fund (Mbaye, 2014). Thus, the existence of multiple security organizations in the region has inevitably complicated the external support for EASF.

To complicate the matter, the prevailing regional security organizations have overlapping memberships. Members of EASF at the same time belong to COMESA, EAC, IGAD and Southern African Development Community (SADC). This inevitably complicates the support of member states to the EASF, as it leads to confusion and duplication of pledges (Jacobsen and Nordbay, 2013a). Furthermore, overlapping of memberships also allows states to choose the institution which best serves their interest. In this regard, Kenya and Uganda seem to prefer working with EAC, reducing their support to EASF (Hull, *et al.*, 2011). The whole idea of the above discussion is that the presence of diverse organizations with overlapping members greatly affects regional states' as well as external donors' support to EASF.

### **Withdrawal of Member States**

Departing of member states is also one main obstacle to the development of EASF. All member states of the EASF are not actively participating in the organization. Some member states resigned their membership to EASF. Tanzania, Madagascar and Mauritius have become active in Southern Africa brigade (Cilliers, 2008). Eritrea is not also active in EASF due to its unfriendly relations with some member states, principally Ethiopia. Since EASF loses financial, military and other contributions, the breaking away of those above mentioned members has a direct effect on the development of EASF.

### **Weak Legal Basis and Lack of Commitment**

The Eastern Africa Standby Force is operating with a weak legal basis. EASF only has the MoU and a Policy Framework. These documents are not binding among members and, hence, have relatively low legal basis (Tlalka, 2013). Due to the absence of binding legal document EASF member states have low commitment to support the organization (Kasaija, 2014). Member states may give lip service regarding their pledge of contribution, while being unwilling to make tangible sacrifices in actually sending their forces or financial contribution. Despite the presence of personnel trained in the region from identified centers of excellence, the possibility of utilizing them at the time of deployment

remains dependent on the political will of the countries concerned (Mumma-Martinon, 2010). Contributions depend also on how each member state perceives the degree of the crisis situation, how each state feels threatened, and what each state might gain from involvement (Robinson, 2014).

### **Lack of Funding**

It is apparent that for an organization to successfully conduct a Peace Support Operation (PSO) a huge amount of funding is required. However, the AU and sub-regional brigades have low financial capacity. AU highly relied on external support, especially from the USA, UK, France and the European Union (EU) for every single one of its PSOs (Mumma-Martinon, 2010). Hence, lack of fund is not only the problem of EASFCOM but Africa as a whole.

Financial problem, being exacerbated by mismanagement, has been a major challenge to the development of EASF from its inception (Hull, *et al.*, 2011). EASF's internal support is insufficient as it is only some of the member states that have regularly paid their membership payment (Hull, *et al.*, 2011; Robinson, 2014; Allehone; 2008). This shows that member states are not in a position to effectively finance the EASF annually. As a result, most of financial supports come from external donors (Hamad, 2014). Donors fund the various exercises of the force, including educational programmes, real-life deployments as well as other activities it carries out (Jacobsen and Nordby, 2012, 2013a). Hence, EASF is highly vulnerable once the donation changed in its amount, or if it is absent at all. It is unwise to always rely on outsiders' support as there is a possibility for emergence of donor fatigue due to changing priorities or other commitments. Since EASF highly relies on external support for its over all operations, any substantial decrease in external funding inevitably affects the effectiveness of the force.

Due to poor internal funding and the possibility of occurrence of donor fatigue, states may refrain from actively committing their forces to the crisis area for the reason that no sufficient means exist to compensate costs they incurred (Allehone, 2008). This discourages, especially, states with less financial capacity, thereby undermining the EASF's multi-national effort towards peace and security of the region.

### **Logistical Problems**

As apparent from the past African PSOs, African armies possess 'notoriously' weak logistics capabilities (Bachmann, 2011). Thus, most African states are dependent on foreign intervention to protect their

sovereignty. Successful PSOs need adequate logistics and equipment supplies such as helicopter, artillery assets, air defense capability, communication platform and engineering. However, EASF lacks such capability, which compels it to remain under the mercy of western countries (Berouk, 2014). As Omar (2014) confers, operationally, one of the biggest problems of EASF is the question of logistics as it is not in a position to support its troops logistically.

Better equipments such as artillery may be crucial for grave circumstances, like genocide. However, EASF member states would not agree on the use of such a material as it can be used in any states including those who contributed it (Tlalka, 2013). Hence, if EASF deploys troops while it has shortage of better weapons like artillery, it may suffer the same fate as AMIS which had its both 18-man patrol and 20-man rescue teams kidnapped by one of the factions fighting in West Darfur (Feldman, 2008: 269). It is very unlikely that member states could provide air support to move such equipment even when it is available (Robinson, 2014).

### **Cultural Diversity and Lack of Interoperability**

An effective operation of combined forces in the PSOs is very crucial. However, this appears increasingly challenging particularly in Eastern Africa and also in Africa at large. Culture has significant impact in the process of establishing united forces from different African countries (Feldman, 2008). Religion, values and traditions can create various challenges. States of Eastern Africa have diverse background. In connection with this, Mumma-Martinon (2010: 27) contends that, "given the Eastern African Region ethnic, cultural and religious diversities as well as the anglophone-francophone divide, substantial friction between (and even within) EASF itself may be unavoidable". It is also asserted that such diverse cultures affected the progress of EASF (Kimathi, 2010).

The major problem, in this regard, is associated with language differences. This problem is apparent in the AU peace-keeping forces. Feldman (2008: 268) noted that "military commanders might find themselves not only having difficulty of communicating with their counterparts from other nations, but also even with their own troops, as many individual African nations have numerous languages spoken within their borders". It is difficult to create a well integrated force having such diverse linguistic backgrounds. In this connection, Berouk (2014) shows the negative effect of language difference among EASF personnel, by indicating its practical effect in AMISOM. There are French, English, Arabic and Amharic speakers in the region, which creates problem of interoperability (Hamad, 2014). These heterogeneous forces with their own language face an obstacle in

exchanging and using information in their joint operation. This lack of interoperability may remain the core challenge in the operationalization and future activities of the EASF (Tlalka, 2013).

## FUTURE PROSPECTS

EASF intends to become a more effective security mechanism both in conflict mediation and military intervention in response to security threats. To this end, it is struggling to achieve its full operationalization by the year 2015. Accordingly, EASF has undertaken a series of preparatory exercises to make ready the force for full deployment in the aforesaid period.

In the first cycle of the exercises, EASF successfully conducted Command Post Exercise (CPX) in Nairobi, Kenya in 2008, a Field Training Exercise (FTX) in Djibouti in November 2009, and a Logistics Mapping Exercise (LoggMAPEX) in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, in November 2010 (Tlalka, 2013; Bouhuys 2011). The first historical joint Field Training Exercise, consisting of about 1,500 troops, police and civilian personnel from 10 countries, conducted in Djibouti to broaden the peacekeeping capacity of the region and to evaluate the level of preparedness and interoperability of the force (UNDP, 2011). This exercise shows that EASF is in a good move as it assembled all forces of the region which have not ever met before. By successfully completing this and the above mentioned exercises in the first cycle, EASF attained the Initial Operational Capability (IOC) (EASF Information Manager, 2014).

In the second cycle of the exercises, EASF conducted a second CPX in Khartoum, Sudan, in November 2011 (*ibid*). Besides, successful Field Training Exercise known as Mashariki Salam 2013 (FTX13) was held in Jinja, Uganda, from May 5-26, 2013 to train and examine the level of readiness of the trained forces for Full Operational Capability (FOC) based on the AU training doctrine and objectives.

From the above discussion one can understand the effort of EASF to achieve its full operation by 2015. However, the possibility of achieving its FOC in the prescribed time is subject to different arguments by different authorities. Pertaining to the last field training exercise (FTX13), the EASF Commander, Brigadier General Jack Bakasumba, announced that the force would have full operational capacity, which means that the Force is capable "to undertake any mission assigned by the United Nations or the African Union" (Xinhua, 2013). Similarly, Tlalka (2013) argues the possibility of achieving FOC of EASF by 2015, considering the level of personnel involved in the second field training exercise, which are more than 1,200 troops, police and civilian personnel.

Conversely, Burgess (2009: 4) states that "...the sub-

regional commands have a long way to go to full implementation. In fact, one must conclude that it is highly doubtful that the sub-regional commands will ever be fully implemented". Omar (2014) also contends that the FOC of EASF could not be achievable by 2015 because of its multiplicity of problems, while recognizing its current progress and bright future. Similarly, Berouk (2014) asserts that the idea of African solution for African problem to avoid foreign intervention is good, but EASF as well as states of the region are still weak having multifaceted problems. Hence, the reality on the ground could delay the expected full operationalization of EASF by 2015. Full deployment of EASF, especially, in grave circumstances needs adequate logistics and equipment supplies to deploy troops within short period of time. However, EASF is by far in short supply of it, which perhaps delays its full operation (*ibid*).

One can infer from the above discussion that the concept of EASF as a regional mechanism to prevent and respond to conflicts of the region is important. The concept of African solution to African problem is an imperative. And EASF has a good potential capability to contribute to efforts in addressing the region's conflict in the future. This can be inferred from all the efforts EASF is making in its move to achieve full operationalization by 2015. However, as regards the time of becoming fully operational, there exist different speculations. Hence, the achievement of EASF's FOC by 2015 is remains to be seen. Nonetheless, what is most important is the fact that EASF has a good prospect of maintaining the peace and security of the region, despite the fact that it may take some time in the future. Though the literature and the interviews conducted with officials and experts reveal the existence of two lines of views as to the operationalization of EASF by 2015, none of them challenges the positive contribution the force will have in addressing conflicts of the region in the future. Moreover, once the force becomes fully operational, it will deploy in all scenarios of the ASF set by AU, including genocide situations and thereby assures the stability of the region.

## CONCLUSIONS

Eastern Africa Standby Force was established in 2004 in Eastern Africa as a sub-regional peace and security architecture. It is aimed to undertake the functions of maintaining peace and security in the Eastern Africa in particular and, the African continent in general. While EASF is still in the process of formation, it is planned to make it fully operational by 2015. Due to a multiplicity of interrelated challenges, EASF has not made significant contribution in maintaining peace and security in the region. EASF, as a sub-regional mechanism, has played only few supportive roles to UN and AU peace support operations in the region, rather than deploying its own

authorized peace-keeping force. Hence, EASF has not yet deployed its own autonomous peace support mission in any of the crises in the region despite its ambitious objective. Notwithstanding its minimal role in terms of maintaining peace and security in the region, the current trends and activities of EASF show that the organization has good future prospect to make positive contributions to the maintenance of peace and security in the region. For more successful future operation of the force, however, the study suggests that member states, notably Ethiopia and Kenya should replace their hegemonic aspiration with regional security agendas, develop proper management of finance, including their unfettered commitment to provide forces, finance and logistics as well as standardize training and doctrine so as to create effective multinational force. The EASF also needs to have a binding legal framework that obliges member states' contribution of forces and necessary equipments in time of deployment.

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## INTERVIEW

- Interview by author with Colonel Said Ali Omar, Chief of the Logistics Base, Eastern Africa Standby Force, Addis Ababa, 3 March 2014.
- Interview by author with Berouk Mesfin, Senior Researcher, Institute for Security Studies, Addis Ababa, 20 February 2014.
- Interview by author with Colonel Fathelrahman Hamad, Chief of Operation and Training, EASF Headquarters, Addis Ababa, 28 February 2014.
- Interview by author with Apuuli Kasaija, Programme Manager, Institute for Security Studies, Addis Ababa, 17 March 2014
- Interview by author with Mamdou Mbaye, Acting Head, Policy Development Unit, Peace Support Operation Division, Addis Ababa, 17 March 2014.