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Executive Director: Abdeta Dribssa Beyene
Deputy Executive Director: Amb. Kasahun Dender
Senior Adviser: Amb. Teferra Shiwil Kidanekal
Senior Researcher: Dr. Belete Belachew

Centre for Dialogue, Research and Cooperation
Ethio-China Friendship Avenue
Medina Tower 5th floor
Tel: +251 11 470370/73
FAX: +251 11470 0359

Email: info@iarethiopia.org, cdrcethiopa@gmail.com
<http://www.iarethiopia.org> / <http://www.cdrcethiopia.org>

Recent protests in Ethiopia

With the potential to undermine peace, stability, political and economic successes Ethiopia registered in the past two decades, protests have been witnessed recently, some planned and others 'spontaneous', in the Amhara and Oromiya regions of the country. Some of these protests were peaceful, while some were deadly destroying properties and resulting in the loss of lives. This has put immense pressure on the government and the public at large. The crisis naturally infused concerns about the sustainability of Ethiopia's developmental efforts. It equally generated questions among observers, inside and outside the country, reflecting concerns with respect to how the EPRDF-led government would address the emerging challenge, which has the potential to jeopardize the hard-won commodity in the country, peace, stability and development. Things now visibly have reached the point where the government has simply to react, at times forcefully, to protests clandestinely organized via social media outlets.

The EPRDF government made solemn declaration and commitment to combat 'rent-seeking' at all levels including top party and government leaders. However, not only the public but also the leadership itself cannot claim that it had been successful to subdue rent seeking. Symptoms signaling ailment of the implementation of government decisions have repeatedly manifested at times with sluggish response to address them comprehensively. The handling witnessed in relation to the delivery of justice and good governance, job creation for millions of unemployed youth in urban and rural areas, the Addis Ababa Master plan, new traffic rules and few other instances, could be taken as cases in point.

The government's initial reason for the protests may not be dismissed out of hand, though this has not as such convinced many. No doubt, the government doesn't discount the possibility that grievances over governance issues and lack of employment opportunities may be the drivers of the protests. But the government narrative is much dominated by concerns with law and order and focuses on the role of external actors in instigating the crisis with a regime change agenda. In the meantime, emotions surrounding governance matters appear to be dealt with by government leaders at the rhetorical level, never being given priority attention. The claim that the country faces external challenge and that the recent turmoil has some external drivers is not all that implausible. Indeed, there are groups, some operating from distant places (paradoxically in states considered friendly to Ethiopia) and others from areas very close to Ethiopia, for whom there is no greater satisfaction than seeing Ethiopia's progress derailed and the very existence of the country put in jeopardy.

But the question that comes to the fore is: how did EPRDF falter to realize the fact that if not properly handled, such popular questions could easily be used and ultimately hijacked by elements conspiring to undermine the trust people have in the EPRDF? How did EPRDF sire a generation, cautiously nurtured and engaged within the fold of an all-encompassing federal arrangement, opt for politics of hatred that engendered violence and destruction? Why was EPRDF unable to question whether it has created one political and economic community that it envisioned for the country?

These opposing groups while they have loud noise and their role in the social media might have been extraordinarily deadly, their effectiveness on the ground, particularly concerning military activities,

has been minuscule and downright insignificant. The results in the propaganda domain, nonetheless, have been different, thanks to the low level of attention given by the government to the role of the media. But still despite the fact that the protests appear to have been driven by social media messages coming from outside the country, it is impossible to ignore that much of the protests appear to be domestically generated, and even more critically, more or less spontaneous. None of the political parties inside the country have owned the protest movements, though there have been some who are inclined to seek credit for the turmoil. The Semayawi/Blue party came close to ride on the Bahir Dar protests of August 7, but distanced itself quickly. Apparently, one cannot rule out the possibility of acquiescence from within the party circles intent on imposing their version of solutions to some of the challenges facing the EPRDF.

Whatsoever the case, how could the security apparatus fail to notice and restrain these protests, letting the whole affair boil up to the extent of involving the military to check the protests? It is fast becoming evident that EPRDF's future depends on the government's determination to pursue long envisaged plans and strategies with clarity and renewed vigor embracing all stakeholders including those with dissenting voices.

Even though the government would pay much attention to its internal cohesion rather than the protests, to observers, both Ethiopians and outsiders alike, what underlies these ever widening protests is perhaps the lack of sufficient trust in what the government says and does and the growing conviction, or feeling, that the government has failed to deliver on its promises.

It is indeed ironic that a government that seeks to control the airwaves within the country is barely listened to; and some media outlets financed by those who are mortal enemies of the country have won significant domestic followers. Moreover, uncharacteristically, the EPRDF has recently not been very coherent, giving credence to the view of many observers that the ruling party is not that united, creating anxiety among Ethiopians that care for the unity, stability and development of the country. That the country is adrift is a sentiment shared by many. Apparently, internal disenfranchisement within the ruling coalition has visibly engendered narrow group interest of a given circle, or circles aspiring to ascend into a ruling elite by exploiting existing deep entrenched backward cultural and political misconceptions, potentially derailing constituting groups from the urgent task of addressing the biggest existential challenge Ethiopia faces—poverty.

Consistent frictions involving political elites, religious groups, diverse admixture of the populace in a way have defined the very fabric of the Ethiopian multi-national state for a longtime. In the process, distinct national identities have crystallized based on a long history of political, economic, ethnic, linguistic, socio-cultural and territorial ties; so has entrenched consciousness for co-existence. Since 1991, Ethiopia has been exercising the establishment of a federal arrangement and the possibility of self-determination by nations and nationalities recognized constitutionally. The nation building process in Ethiopia has yet to be completed. Given these realities, current protests in Ethiopia also need to be viewed in light of an ongoing process of state formation and consolidation. In this regard, the role of the social media, extensively utilized by

government detractors, in fueling the unrest should not be underestimated.

Recent protests fuse historic as well as immediate grievances, and if not addressed in time with all the necessary wisdom and magnanimity, would entail grave consequences for the people and government alike. Embedded tribulations, including developments in the past twenty-five years, simply await a point of ignition to spark an emotional outburst, and can potentially more than dent the country's irrefutable achievements. This must not be allowed to happen.

The government's democratic developmental state strategy and pro-poor initiatives have obviously created losers and winners within the social fabric. Those in power should create mechanisms to address these grievances. If left unattended divergent aspirations and anarchy could easily prevail and may easily impair the way forward.

Whenever governments unwaveringly continue stifling political space and fail to accommodate dissent, discontent and anger naturally seek for an alternate fissure to vent long pent up emotions. Where viable channels - be it access to the media, political association/representation, and/or outright readiness to interact with the masses - remain stifled, those at the helm of power are simply begging for social unrest. It requires vision, wisdom, humility, caution and leadership acumen to touch bases with the essence of the popular demand.

EPRDF has consistently expressed its readiness to create a demanding society. But this requires an independent and functioning civil society. Various sectors of the society must be encouraged and assisted to organize themselves in associations and unions and defend their

interests. They can play a critical role in the country's peace and stability as well as development if they are allowed to function independently. Trying to mold them along party lines might not help either EPRDF or the society. In fact, EPRDF's avowed mission to create a demanding society, whereby the people exert the necessary pressure on the government, cannot materialize unless the people are organized independently along their interests.

On the other hand, opposition groups are not distancing themselves from the 'doomsday' analogy, and are not helping the people to navigate these difficult times and failed to assert their positions of credibility. EPRDF, shouldering the burden of running both the state and government, equally has to scrutinize its deliberations in good governance and democracy as well as public engagement. Those questions, if not attended to, will be hijacked by violence prone opposition parties working day and night to undermine the legitimacy of EPRDF.

In a parallel development, some within EPRDF, energized by self-proclaimed assertion of nationality identity are already doubling down on the claim that bad governance lies at the root of many citizens' problems. The sense of being left aside and decline in living standards, irrespective of the unprecedented economic growth, readily lends considerable appeal to the argument these populists pose.

Rent seeking individuals and groups within and outside the ruling party, distorting and exaggerating existing economic grievances, inter-ethnic tensions, and skewed power representations in the various institutions, are bound to attract support, which will compromise the very fabric of EPRDF. Individual and group narrow interests and rent-seeking compulsion, masked by rhetorical and empty slogan for protecting the interest of this or that nationality, are

out in the open within the party. That is why the stakes are high for EPRDF, and more so for peace, stability, development and national consensus in Ethiopia. EPRDF needs to look deep into itself, engage in soul searching to find out where the Party has stumbled since 2001, and put in place the proper checks and balances needed that are inherently lacking. External threat against EPRDF remains imminent; but what potentially makes or breaks the unity is internal bickering within constituting groups.

Hence, responsible stakeholders need to calm down a bit, taking a decisive step forward and scrutinize their respective attitudes; more so those at the helm of power. Ethiopia has greater threat from poverty, and other enemies that are bent on destabilizing the country and the region. The government of Eritrea and its cohorts, let alone getting a situation like what has been witnessed during the protests in Oromiya and Amhara States, their preparedness to destabilize the region even at pacific times is enormous. Their tradition of readily availing financial and material assistance to all anti-government elements, local as well as those in the Diaspora, by way of destabilizing the nation from within is a well recorded phenomenon. The recent protests were given similar support. Ethiopians should be able to look beyond their political eccentrics. For the sake of peace and stability, and sustaining the ongoing effort to eradicate poverty, or even the survival of the nation, EPRDF should beware of the historic responsibility to skillfully navigate the difficult course. Now is the time to put everything on the table; and the matter of legitimacy and credibility of all parties is at stake.

Why is the current situation tragic?

Taking the challenges of Ethiopia's successes into consideration, the current situation that the country finds itself in is

really tragic. Ethiopia has made tremendous achievement politically, economically and socially over the last two decades. The constitutional framework and the federal arrangements that have been put in place have put an end to the domination of one nationality against the other for good. These arrangements have fundamentally transformed the country and ushered a new political map, which is potentially irreversible. The federal system institutionalized in Ethiopia has decentralized power to the people; allowed each and every nationality to enjoy meaningful regional autonomy to self govern, develop their culture, language and history and concentrate on addressing poverty. The double-digit economic growth and the substantive reduction in poverty levels are out there and no body can deny it. No less achievement is recorded in the social sector over the last two decades.

Overall, the basis for Ethiopia's unity in diversity and renewal has been put in place, and the narrative of "Ethiopia is rising" has been dominating the airwaves. Ethiopians were steadily regaining their dignity, and the basis for a better future was being laid. What remained to be done was to make this process sustainable, and create mechanisms to address challenges faced by those whose lives have not been substantially changed, or even reduced. This applies to the political and security domain as well. Ethiopia has made major progress in creating peace within the country and in being a pillar for security in the sub-region. But here as well the issue of sustaining peace continues to be a challenge. It is within this context that the current setback in Ethiopia should be understood.

The current situation in the country is potentially dangerous. An all out misinformation campaign by opposition groups is anchored on the power-sharing arrangements and the ethnic representation

of the security institutions. In the process, the opposition had the audacity to intentionally misrepresent the security and defense apparatus, which are the pillars of peace and stability in the country, as instruments of a certain group within the government.

But, one may ask, why the protests concentrate on the security institutions? Is it because they think that this is the last nail on the coffin of the EPRDF regime and that of the new political dispensation in the country? Painting an obnoxious picture on these pillar institutions is taken as the only way to bring the demise of the EPRDF regime. Obviously, if these institutions collapse, there will be no state.

But, the reality in these institutions is different. The compositions of the defense and security institutions are no more the same as when EPRDF took over power in 1991. Continuous reforms, at times painful and vacillated, have been going on in the defense and security institutions. The reality is that these two institutions have become the mirror image of the Ethiopian diversity, better than other public departments. This does not mean that these institutions are perfect. They need a continuous follow up and improvement, with full awareness of the geo-political challenges the country faces.

There is a need for a clear communication strategy by the government to make the peoples of Ethiopia know the realities. And that is why the leadership of the ruling Party needs to review its role in the country's politics and on the fact that after 25 years of rule, the country is yet to see a state institution, or any other institution for that matter, that operates independently of what transpires inside the ruling party. This, of course, emanates from lack of clear demarcation between the state, government and the party, the basis of

which was the armed struggle. This is creating a situation whereby the problems of the ruling Party become *ipso facto* challenges for the state. This will obviously be a hindrance to nation building in Ethiopia.

The Ethiopian government has been trying to control the media. Times have changed; the world has become flat and that has its consequences. Transparency is essential for preserving legitimacy. The building of trust in the government is critical and this cannot be achieved without transparency. Ethiopians need a humble leadership. Democracy requires a government, which is perturbed by the concerns of the people; not a situation whereby the people fear their government. State monopoly over the media is passé—an outmoded idea, which should be jettisoned. The government needs to create a situation whereby it would be listened by the people. This is not the case now. The EBC should cease disseminating only about what the government wants to communicate to the people; it must also disseminate the concern and grievances of the various sectors of the society.

Obviously, the EPRDF has no responsibility of creating opposition parties, but indeed has constitutional obligation to create conducive conditions for them to grow and play a constructive role for the progress of democracy in the country and to aspire to assume leadership role whenever the ruling party falters. It is in that way that condition would be created for the stability of the Ethiopian state and for it not to be hostage to what happens to the ruling Party. Opposition parties on their part have the obligation to play by the rules of the game established by the constitution and contribute to the development of the principles of loyal opposition without which multiparty democracy will be nigh impossible. In Ethiopia, times to grab power

through violence, anarchy and “color revolution” have passed, as all these are part of a zero-sum-game and have no place in the current political architecture.

Ethiopia is at crossroads. The current situation should be taken as an opportunity to focus on and resolve the challenges faced by the country. Popular protests in the Arab world had disastrous consequences for the countries and the region at large. Populists pushed the people but the consequences were beyond the imaginations of everybody. Those who have pushed the people to the edge in those countries would definitely regret that they couldn't return the situation back to normalcy, or the previous situation. But Ethiopia, Ethiopians and the government have the opportunity to shape where Ethiopia should go from here.

In this regard, what the Party has done in the last couple of days by engaging in a thorough self-assessment of the last 15 years and the subsequent admission of the existence of progress as well as serious shortcomings is courageous and a good political culture. This should be encouraged. In the assessment, the Party outlined the fundamental problems it faces. The Party leadership's tendency to transform itself into a ruling elite, caused by degeneration and the use of state power for amassing wealth and individual comfort through rent seeking, rather than public service, and the witnessed networking to achieve those personal gains in this connection are the prominent ones. Moreover, the Front's acknowledgement that the failure to deliver on its promises after creating a demanding society, and the recognition that others would hijack these are extremely critical. Accordingly, the Party has decided to go back to its roots and its customary internal struggle and renewal to address the challenges.

As the saying goes “the taste of the eating is in the pudding”, this assessment and review would be measured by its implementation and delivery on the promises made. What is required is the exertion of greater effort than would have been necessary if it had been done much earlier. People are complaining that EPRDF has become insensitive and has failed to address questions of governance, justice and social cohesion. Hence, EPRDF needs to come up with detailed guidelines to guard the democratic system, give confidence and reassure the people so that the country's socio-economic and political transformation continues unabated.

The Party's recent thorough assessment and review of the governance over the last 15 years should be seen in this context. It has come out publicly, stated its shortcomings and mistakes, pledged to correct them by bringing all stakeholders onboard, expressed readiness to take the necessary measures to ensuring the rule of law and to bring the culprits to justice, clean the government from the top and reorganize the leadership in a month. The people of Ethiopia have high expectations. There is no reason why the Party cannot earn the confidence of the people through implementing its promises with humility and wisdom. But time is of the essence. The government should act urgently, as there were many unfulfilled promises up to now, otherwise *it will be too little too late*.

Is the changing geo-political reality paying President Isaias of Eritrea?

Fast changing geopolitical realities in Northeast Africa and the surrounding Gulf area, coupled with the migration crisis in Europe, have reinvigorated Eritrea's position in the region. Asmara is keen on showing the relevance of its geo-political stature; more so with strategic alignments with some Gulf countries. Isaias's closer

collaboration with Iran, as was demonstrated by an outward support to the Houthi rebellion in Yemen, soon gave way to a more profiting patronage the Saudis have offered, thereby ushering in a dramatic reversal in Isaias's alignment. In light of Iran's successful deal with the west and the subsequent easing of sanctions, visible contention for supremacy between two competing coalitions has materialized in the Middle East, with reverberating shocks in the entire region. Efforts to deny the Iranian block a space around the Gulf concomitantly brought the rogue state of Eritrea to center stage, conveniently positioned to thrive in the process.

The windfall from those changing realities and the discovery of mineral resources at its south-western parts, may have allowed the Eritrean government address its financial and economic distress. Nonetheless, the consequential application of this new found fortune to the traditional destabilization mission in the region, as demonstrated by Isaias's track record of the last two decades, rather than attending to local exigencies, is a concern for those following regional affairs.

The self-imposed isolation of the government of Eritrea from the international arena hinged on an array of confrontations it instigated against immediate neighbors; and Isaias's recent geo-political gamble likewise is bound to telltale similar onslaughts. The crisis in Yemen and the recent regional alignment have temporarily tied strange bedfellows which, given historic records, may not last long. Petro-dollar clout of some Gulf States for the moment overlapped with strategic regional interests of countries in the sub-region and particularly the government of Eritrea accidentally finding some maneuvering room along the flow.

In light of anticipated financial gains and, of course, new lines of regional association, Isaias's Eritrea is bound to venture new rounds of regional destabilization. Political and economic challenges immensely affected the regime's behavior temporarily and subdued its belligerent attitude particularly towards Ethiopia. Nonetheless, Isaias's eccentricity and unpredictability leaves all wondering on the government's next step.

According to international observers and United Nations reports, about three to four hundred thousand people currently remain enslaved in Eritrea; and around 5,000 Eritreans risk their lives each month to evade forcible army conscription that last decades, if not indefinite. More dismaying accounts of events reveal the plight of veteran EPLF fighters rotting in the notorious jails spotting the length and breadth of the country and young conscripts held as slaves in the labor camps that the regime calls factories.

Refugees from the repressive Red Sea state have in recent years made up one of the largest contingents of people risking the dangerous journey to seek a new life in Europe. No amount of Saudi or Emirati assistance can soften the regime's heart to treat its own people humanely. But rather, Isaias has started his belligerence, demonstrated by resurgence of confrontations with Ethiopia along the contested boundary. Isaias does not want relations between the two neighbors, more than anything else, determine the viability of Eritrea as a sovereign African nation-state. But, if Asmara, emboldened by these sudden financial fortunes, prefers to pursue the traditional route of destabilizing Ethiopia, on the face of yet another possible geo-strategic realignment, the regime may find itself exposed and disenfranchised. Regional states, particularly Ethiopia, need to seriously look at all possible scenarios,

and above anything else keep their respective houses in order and maintain the highest moral ground for all eventualities.

There were visible economic changes in Ethiopia and in its endeavor for improving the standard of living and the lives of its citizens. Ethiopia's growing role in the region has given it a leverage to contribute to peace and stability. Its prominent roles in peace keeping in Rwanda, Liberia, Darfur, Abyei and Somalia are conspicuous enough. This was done, including together with other African countries such as Uganda, Burundi, Djibouti and Kenya. IGAD, though it has not been all that effective in the process of the economic integration of the sub-region, has indeed been very helpful in getting the regional countries come together for peace and security.

What would be the effect of the latest shift in the geopolitical situation in the region? This change appears to empower countries such as Eritrea that have contributed little to peace in the region and who have instead been factors of instability and insecurity. This is the paradox of this latest development. It is not necessary to attribute ill intention on the part of those who have been behind this new geopolitical departure, but the unintended consequences could be quite damaging and with long-term consequences. The AU could also be affected by this new development.

With a potential for a ripple effect in the entire Northeastern parts of Africa, the current geo-political realignment might entail changes within IGAD as well as the nature of inter-state relations. Positions countries readily assume alternating between existing coalitions have consequences on the region's balance of power, provoking competition and triggering instability. Tensions between states on how some problems should be resolved will also be further influenced: the

cases in point could be realities in South Sudan and Somalia or economic development and integration agenda in the sub-region. The way some of the failed states in the region try to manipulate the existing or future alliances will also come into play, further complicating the already fluid situation, and dashing the hopes that have been witnessed in the last couple of years. In return, this scenario could thwart the already fragile posture of IGAD, prejudicing bilateral and multilateral relations between and among regional states.

Ethiopia should work hard not to stand a loser if parts of these possibilities eventuate. Peace and security in the Horn is vital for Ethiopia and it could impinge on its developmental efforts. Asmara's traditional belligerence has the potential to fuel local discontents, as has been evident in recent times.

Obviously, in the short run, a windfall has emerged that benefits Eritrea politically and economically from the current geo-political realities. The regime in Asmara has a knack for scavenging on such opportunities, and this venture will definitely not be the last. So adept at geo-strategic politicking, assisted by fast changing realignments, Isaias is bound to sustain his reign. Simultaneously, the Eritrean president is bound to continue with his destabilization activities in the region with his primary target being Ethiopia. While, as has always happened, he is bound to fail, this, however, would not be because of lack of trying or because of shortage of support. The latter has been made available to Eritrea as a result of the geopolitical shift in the region—a shift which is very much pregnant with danger to which those who are responsible for this are either totally unaware or, more tragic, don't care.

Regional stability and the military presence of major powers in Djibouti

Djibouti, a small state straddling the Red Sea and Indian Ocean, with an equally crucial position connecting the Middle East and the Horn of Africa, is an emerging regional security hub attracting global powers. It is sprouting as another epicenter in the global partnership scheme against terrorism. Apart from the permanent US AFRICOM base (constituted of the US army, Navy, Marine, Air Force and other operatives) and a military presence of EU Naval units, Djibouti hosts 1500 French Troops, as well as Spanish, Japanese and Chinese forces. In spite of ongoing debates on the stabilizing role of the presence of foreign forces to Djibouti and the region at large, these arrangements definitely carry a substantial financial benefit to the government of Djibouti.

Policies of neutrality Djibouti has espoused, which some claim is merely feigned has enabled the country navigate the difficult contours of complex upheavals in the Horn, which at times challenged the very survival of the state. With minor scars it managed to survive, gradually attaining a position of strategic importance, not only to immediate neighbors, but also to international actors. For long, Djibouti has remained a viable lifeline to Ethiopia, especially after 1998, as the main gateway to its import-export trade and access route to the wider world. But fast changing regional as well as global realities even endeared Djibouti to others who seek to dominate political and economic realms along the shores of the Indian Ocean and the Red Sea.

Apart from its strategic positioning, however, turmoil in the Horn, reinvigorated initiatives by the Gulf States to dominate the Red Sea littoral, security concerns along international trading routes have facilitated Djibouti's sudden ascension to a position of

critical importance. In this regard, the role of the French, the US and China would be interesting. The Port of Djibouti, earlier run by UAE shareholders, and the scant infrastructures in the territory appeared simply insufficient to entertain these parties; thus triggered the rush to invest on additional ports and airfields in the territory. Every stakeholder is in a hurry to make its presence felt, immensely bolstering the sense of importance of Djibouti. How this plays out in the complex dynamics of the region remains to be seen.

The presence of multiple foreign forces in Djibouti is considered a stabilizing factor in Djibouti and the region at large. Some others argue to the contrary that foreign powers stationed in Djibouti might engage in a competition, and try to influence leaders of the Republic or create clients. Those following developments in the region indicate that with the given reality, the Djibouti government might be unable to bear the pressure from multiple actors, leading those foreign powers resorting to create their own clients in the country. Some opposition politicians were trying to organize popular revolt in the country that the government quelled successfully. Even if these concerns might be seen plausible, the presence of foreign forces in Djibouti, on the other hand, deters bullying countries and rogue states from destabilizing the country and the region.

The peace and stability of Djibouti is critical to Ethiopia as Djibouti continues to remain Ethiopia's only outlet at least for the time being. In an effort to augment this strategic relationship, Ethiopia and Djibouti have created frameworks of cooperation. Ethiopia continues to concentrate on bigger strategic issues and cooperation that takes into consideration those strategic issues at heart. Railway line projects connecting the two countries are well underway; one extending to a new port at Tadjura and the

other newly constructed *Standard Gauge* route between Addis Ababa and the port of Djibouti. Infrastructure developments involving highways, an electric power grid and optical fiber connectivity equally have bolstered the integration initiative between the two countries. This in turn is expected to boost Djibouti's strategic importance and potentially poke the sensibilities of regional states.

Somalia's political developments and the upcoming election

Somalia's political developments are taking shape. Regional state administrations have been established and the last effort in this regard is the administration to be established in the Hiraaan and surrounding areas. Once this is completed, Somalia will have 7 regional state administrations. These are Somaliland, Puntland, Khatumo, Galmudug Interim administration, Hiraaan and Middle Shebelle, the Jubaland, and the South West regional state administrations. Closer assessment of developments in each state will help to get a grasp of the entire country and developments therein.

Somaliland is doing well, except the recent drought that affected the region due to climate change. Somaliland held consecutive elections in the country, almost every 5-7 years. The next election is expected to be next March 2017. Electoral registration is under way. Three political parties are competing for leadership: Kulmiye, Wadani and UCID. Kulmiye appears to be the strongest party and Wadani is believed to challenge Kulmiye's supremacy. Nonetheless, the Somaliland government has recently faced crisis following the resignation of a number of ministers on succession issue. The ministers are accused of links with Islamic groups.

Somaliland's relation with Puntland and Khatumo regional states is daring. Recent

reports on the other hand indicate a rapprochement between Hargeisa and Khatumo leaders. Somaliland is engaging with Mogadishu on the way forward through the support of Turkey, but both are trying to squeeze whatever little benefit they can get out of this engagement. One important development for Somaliland is Egypt's recent effort to engage and take advantage of its strategic interest in Somaliland, but not much seems to have been achieved.

Puntland State of Somalia, established in 1997/98, on the other hand, plays a critical role on national issues of Somalia. Puntland exercises significant influence over Jubaland. But the relation with Mogadishu is not always smooth. Puntland forces, to the surprise of everybody, recently defeated Al-Shabaab, and this has increased Puntland's credibility.

Khatumo state is a small state between Puntland and Somaliland. It claims to have the regions of Sool, Sanaag and Cayn. Puntland contests these regions against Somaliland's colonial boundaries. Both Somaliland and Puntland oppose Khatumo's bid for statehood on the basis of colonial boundaries and from the Harti sub clan's strength, respectively. Mogadishu does not agree with Khatumo either, as it will affect its relation and engagement with either Puntland or Somaliland. Khatumo does not have the capacity to exercise the monopoly of violence over the territory it claims to control.

Galmudug Interim Administrations is one of the Hawiye states. It encompasses the Habir Gedir sub clans (Saad, Ayr, Suleiban). Ahlu Suna Wal Jamaa contests the formation of the regional administration, and power sharing. IGAD is working on the reconciliation between the two. But, ideological differences make the effort challenging.

Hiiran and Middle Shebelle regional State is a state that has yet to be established, but will be the second Hawiye state. An effort by the Somali Federal Government to establish this state faltered due to misunderstanding with the clan elders in the region. The IGAD facilitator's office continues to engage the clan elders in the region. The establishment of this region would complete the state formation process.

The Interim South West State is another state recently established. The Digil and Merifle inhabit the Interim South West state. The establishment had challenges; some politicians wanted three regions of Somalia others six regions, where the clan contests the territories. The difference is shelved for the time being. Bigger clans do not support state formation endeavor in this area, as they recognize that politicians of the state want to use it as a stepping ground for national leadership, and the area is the richest in agriculture.

On the other hand, the establishment of Jubaland regional state has been the most contentious. Currently, the boundary of the regional state is defined, regional assembly is established, president is democratically elected, and the federal state formed; but the relation with Mogadishu is not smooth. Jubaland's statehood has been contentious as a resourceful place in agriculture, sea resources (and fishing rights) and charcoal apart from astronomical income generated from infrastructures such as port and airport of Kismayo. The rivalry to control it, with a clan undertone still persists.

Even if it is getting a strong hit these days, Al-Shabaab continues to pose a threat to the Federal Government, the regional administrations, the national security forces, AMISOM and supporting partners in Somalia. Al-Shabaab's targeted activities will continue to challenge AMISOM force

contributors. Al-Shabaab made operations on all peacekeeping forces with devastating impacts, but faltered on a number of attempts. The recent effort in Halgan aimed at Ethiopian forces, if it succeeded would have completed the circle of a similar impact following Al-Shabaab's military campaigns against Kenyan, Ugandan and Burundian forces in El-Adde, Leego and Janaale respectively.

Those who share borders with Somalia should work towards a common strategy on addressing the challenges of Al-Shabaab. The defeat Al-Shabaab faced recently has affected the organization's cohesion and accusations of infiltration resurfaced within the group. The Halgan operation has encouraged Ethiopia to pursue Al-Shabaab in their bases.

So long as grievances within and between clans exist and if reconciliation does not happen, Al-Shabaab will stay. Somali leaders should think of decentralizing security in Somalia. Puntland defeated Al-Shabaab through its own forces and resources. Other members of the federal state can create capacity locally. Somalia's leaders should look at the issue of Somalia needing a national army. It could be a long-term project.

Election in Somalia this year is expected to be competitive and expensive as the election framework gives a big role for administrations. The number of parliamentary seats are agreed to be 275. The 4.5 formula (four major clans will have equal numbers while minority clans will be allocated half) is the basis for power sharing in the parliament for the last time. Thirty percent of the representatives are slated for women, an unrealistic plan to achieve as clans resist to be represented through women.

A number of politicians have tabled their candidacy. Hassan Sheikh, the incumbent President, Sheikh Sharif, the former President, the incumbent Prime Minister Mr. Sharmarke, Mr. Farole of Puntland, Sharif Hassan of the South West Administration, Abdirahman Abdishakur (former Minister and Advisor to the President), Prof. Ali Mohamed Gedi (Former Prime Minister) and others as well. There is propaganda on an "Abgal President" fatigue. All along the political competition in Somalia since 1991, the Hawiye and Darood were noticed to agree on Rahnweyn becoming the Speaker of Parliament; but no more. Power sharing between Darood and Hawiye has appeared the norm and constituencies are complaining that this time around this should change.

The current leadership is accused of failing to deliver in security, corruption, and links with Islamic groups such as Damul Jadid is in the open. The UN Monitoring Team on Somalia and Eritrea is expected to highlight on some of these issues before the next elections. In the mean time, some are suggesting the Somali National Army take responsibility and embark on national dialogue on issues of reconciliation, and end rampant corruption. Somalis will have challenges to cope with this complicated election given the role of money and clan-sub-clan alliances and Al-Shabaab's possible act to use the existing limbo for election to increase its attack and make the election "illegitimate". Financial flows from the Gulf region, the competition between Turkey and the European Union as well as some Gulf countries might challenge the role of IGAD and Somalia's neighbors. Consultation between those who have a stake in Somalia's peace and stability is critical.

While the IGAD region is following developments in Somalia, Somali leaders should be able to recognize the region's stake on peace and stability: both in

Somalia and beyond. The peace and stability of Ethiopia and Kenya is critical to the survival of Somalia. Ethiopia and Kenya survived the collapse of Somalia. But will Somalia exist as a state if these countries face a similar fate? There is a need for a new paradigm in reshaping Somalia's relations with its neighbors. So Somali leaders should believe that peace and stability in the neighborhood is an asset to Somalia, and will help Somalia revive from the ashes. This paradigm shift will encourage neighbors of Somalia to contribute positively and transparently to Somalia's peace and stability. These in turn should encourage Somalia's neighbors to have frank discussion with Somalis on all issues surrounding governance. Otherwise, others faraway are going to select who should lead Somalia for them financially, and there is ample room for this to materialize in Somalia if not carefully handled. Old policies of whoever comes to power will cooperate with us is not realistic. The neighbors of Somalia, in consultation with Somali stakeholders, need to consult to guarantee a viable cooperation. On the other hand, AMISOM should start thinking of an exit strategy. To ensure this reorganization of the Somali armed forces is critical.

Can the South Sudan's Peace Agreement be saved?

The Agreement that the South Sudan stakeholders signed in August 2015 is unraveling. This is, of course, expected given the reservations disclosed and measures the GRSS took contradicting the Agreement from the very beginning to the end of the negotiations. The security arrangements made following the signing of the Agreement were challenged during implementation on the ground. The region and the international community ignored all these obstacles created by the top leadership in Juba. After the Transitional

Government of National Unity (TGoNU) was established, TGoNU's functioning faced enormous challenges. The Government of the Republic of South Sudan (GRSS) had the upper hand in determining which part of the Agreement could be implemented or not even before the TGoNU was created. Subsequently, the President and the First Vice President of the TGoNU disagreed on the functioning of the TGoNU and the implementation of the Agreement. Unfortunately, the legitimacy of the TGoNU emanates from this same agreement and by undermining the Agreement Juba is weakening the legitimacy of the Transition.

IGAD in collaboration and partnership with the IGAD-Plus partners pressured the Parties to sign the Agreement. But the implementation mechanism in the Agreement does not have clearly spelt-out instruments to put pressure on the stakeholders. The stakeholders signed the Agreement because partly the costs of refusal were visible and real. However, the GRSS signed the Agreement while maintaining a number of reservations and taking the Agreement as sub-optimal and contrary to its objectives. But IGAD and the international community have failed to show in the implementation of the Agreement not only the necessary determination and commitment, but also the level of credible support and guarantees that they displayed to force the Parties to sign the Agreement.

The Joint Monitoring and Evaluation Commission (JMEC) leadership failed to secure unequivocal support from the IGAD region from the very beginning. The GRSS leaders made it appear the Agreement belongs to the Mediators and not to the stakeholders, creating uncertainty within JMEC as to whether the Agreement is implementable. Having observed IGAD's withdrawal from the matter, the GRSS not only squeezed JMEC into a corner, it took measures that further unravel the

Agreement. The firing of the First Vice President is one result of this

IGAD Leaders cannot be less engaged now than they were during the Mediation. They should actually engage more and ensure that the Parties move towards a single objective—implementing the Agreement without prevarications. Unless this development is reversed, the Agreement will join the many other peace agreements that have been signed to stop wars but failed to do so. There are arguments of keeping the two principals out of the way to enable South Sudan towards peace and stability. That is impractical and an illusion.

The growing frustration over SPLA actions—killing members of the opposition army one by one, and disappearances of senior security officers as well as the establishment of security checkpoints - triggered reactions from the opposition military forces; and the eruption of fighting in Juba, in turn elicited a reaction from the international community. President Salva Kiir, rather than sorting out his differences with First Vice President Dr. Riek Machar, opted for dividing the opposition. Subsequently, the President of TGoNU replaced Dr. Riek with Gen. Taban Deng, the SPLM/A-IO Chief Negotiator, whose relation with Dr. Machar has been critically delicate. Nonetheless, President Kiir's attempt to clinch diplomatic recognition for his measure from IGAD-PLUS states has failed to materialize. The IGAD-PLUS Summit in Addis Ababa of 5th August 2016 declined to acknowledge Gen. Taban as the First Vice President, but received him as the *Representative* of the President. Gen. Taban is currently on a diplomatic tour of Nairobi and Khartoum in search of approval and legitimacy. In the mean time, First Vice President Dr. Riek Machar had to navigate through a difficult terrain through Western Equatoria State of South Sudan to reach safety in Democratic Republic of Congo, and

ultimately to be airlifted to Khartoum. Irrespective of TGoNU's protests, Khartoum indicated that the First Vice President has been received on purely humanitarian grounds. From this relative safety Dr. Riek Machar now could easily access his previous bases in Pagak, if the crisis is not comprehensively addressed politically through negotiation.

The abrupt eruption of the war, though expected, has shocked the world and triggered a reaction. The IGAD Council of Ministers met in Nairobi and issued a communiqué proposing UNMISS to take control of the airport. Subsequently, the African Union took a decision on the matter, followed by an IGAD-PLUS Summit decision in Addis Ababa. The Security Council now has adopted Resolution 2304 (2016) by 11 votes in favor to none against, with 4 abstentions (China, Egypt, Russian Federation, Venezuela). Unfortunately, the abstentions from these major actors in the Security Council would encourage spoilers to continue to challenge the full implementation of the resolution. The crisis in South Sudan defies logic. As an extraordinary problem, the crisis is forcing the Security Council to put in place a mechanism that gives a different mandate for a protection force that would be deployed as part of UNMISS. The Security Council has decided that UNMISS shall include "a Regional Protection Force established for an initial period until 15 December 2016, which will report to the overall UNMISS Force Commander, to be based in Juba, with the responsibility of providing a secure environment in and around Juba, including in support of the outcomes of the Permanent Ceasefire and Transitional Security Arrangements Workshop, and in extremis in other parts of South Sudan as necessary, and stresses that the Regional Protection Force will carry out its mandate, as set forth in paragraph

10, impartially and in strict compliance with international law, including, as applicable, international humanitarian law."

This arrangement was demanded by the Mediation in 2014, but landed on deaf ears. The TGoNU is still prevaricating whether it will allow the deployment of such a force. Lack of coordination among IGAD member states was a challenge during the reconciliation process. This appears to have sustained even after the Parties have signed the Agreement. The way Juba is looked at by the region will have a serious impact on the way the Parties to the Agreement cooperate with the international community in the implementation of the UNSC Resolution 2306 (2016). In the way forward, the international community should heed the very fact that the TGoNU is legitimate so long as it respects the Agreement and implements it to the letter and spirit. Every stakeholder involved in the process need to recognize this fact and abide by it.

It is critical to realize that there are three factors that are key for ensuring the Agreement for peace and national reconciliation in South Sudan would succeed. The first is the readiness of the parties to take some risks for peace and exercise wisdom in this regard. This is easier said than done for in general wisdom in governance is usually in short supply in many places, but South Sudan has no other option. South Sudan should not be allowed to continue bleeding. Here it is vital that the parties in South Sudan realize that their friends, among which Ethiopia is one, seem to have no other agenda than helping their friends in South Sudan achieve peace and national reconciliation.

The second element for peace in South Sudan is the role of IGAD and the other regional countries forming the IGAD-Plus as well as the AU. Speaking in one voice is

indeed a key factor and there is a need for a major improvement here. None of the regional states can be assumed to have strategic, political or economic interest or ambition that puts South Sudan at a disadvantage, thus no conceivable reason to pursue contradictory policies, all the more so when it involves horrendous challenges of the kind that South Sudan is facing.

The third factor for peace in South Sudan is the role of the international community, and the Security Council, which must be assumed, speaks on behalf of the global community on matters of regional and international peace and security. The people of South Sudan should be the last ones over which members of the Council should have contradictory positions. The basic human interests of the people of South Sudan, their need for peace and security as well as the interest of regional peace and security, places heavy responsibility on the Security Council to develop a common position for contributing to durable peace in South Sudan which starts with ensuring that the Agreement is effectively implemented.

If all these are met, the hope that many had about the future of South Sudan a few years ago could easily be rekindled—a tall order, no doubt, some would say. We say it is achievable.

Ethiopia in the UN Security Council

Ethiopia has been elected for the non-permanent seat at the UN Security Council for the term 2017-2018. This is the third time that Ethiopia is serving in the Security Council, and the previous terms were 1968-69 and 1989-1990. The fact that Ethiopia was able to get the highest votes (185 out of 190 votes) in the election process is indeed a bold statement. It shows the confidence that the global community has in Ethiopia's role in the maintenance of regional peace and stability. No doubt, the

fact that Ethiopia is the largest troop contributor for the UN peacekeeping operations and its leadership role in various efforts to resolve regional conflicts has significantly contributed to this positive perception.

During its two-year term Ethiopia is expected to live up to this confidence and expectation. The IGAD region and the Security Council would look forward to Ethiopia taking the lead on issues of South Sudan, the Sudan, Somalia and Terrorism in the region and other Horn of Africa related issues. The African Union (AU), which endorsed a resolution that demands the African members to the Security Council (A3) to reflect the positions of the AU into the decision making processes of the UNSC, expects Ethiopia to be not only a champion of the African Common positions, but also ensure that those positions are supported by concrete decisions and resolutions.

Topical issues such as predictable and sustainable financing for AU-led UNSC authorized peace operations, reforming the peacekeeping architecture, the need for more investment in the areas of conflict prevention and peace building would also seek serious attention. In light of the current geo-political changes at the global level and the toxic environment within the UNSC, contentious issues such as developments in the Middle East, Terrorism, Non-proliferation, Civilian-protection, Use of force are also expected to be challenging matters for non-permanent members of the Security Council. To meet the expectations from Africa and other allies, Ethiopia needs to put its house in order and ensure the necessary resources are deployed for this major responsibility. Ethiopia's secured weight within the international community, reflected in an overwhelming support during the election for a non-permanent Security Council membership, emanates from its role in peace making and peacekeeping in the

IGAD region and beyond. Since the issues in the Horn of Africa such as Somalia and the crisis in South Sudan would remain in the Agenda of the Security Council, it is absolutely critical to get the support and cooperation of IGAD member states on these issues so that the region's issues of peace and security are properly addressed.

It goes without saying that a couple of points need to be underscored. First, the need for clear and well-considered guidance from the headquarters—the Foreign Ministry should be able to ensure that the positions that Ethiopia takes at the UNSC reflect the strategic interest of the country and aligned with the views of the region and the African Union. This requires proper and thorough research and analysis, wider consultation and speedy communication mechanism. It also entails closer consultation with the AU Peace and Security Council, its members bilaterally as well and the AU Commission.

Secondly, emphasis should be given to cooperation and coordination—the work of the Security Council requires speedy and effective coordination mechanism. UNSC works in a very dynamic and fast changing global environment that necessitates greater synergy between New York and Addis Ababa. It is also critical that the coordination between concerned institutions is enhanced, institutionalized and framed.

Thirdly, there is a need for staffing the New York Mission with diplomats with the necessary experience and caliber in the area of peace and security—all successful past experiences abundantly demonstrated that countries tend to deploy their best and articulate diplomats during their tenure in the UNSC. The experts need to have a detailed knowledge of conflict situations and the requisite negotiation skills in order for them to contribute and influence

discussions in the UNSC—this is an absolute necessity.

Regional integration and the role of Ethiopia's flagship projects

Ethiopia has launched its second Growth and Transformation Plan (GTP-II). GTP-II follows the first Growth and Transformation Plan (GTP-I), which ushered, among others huge infrastructure development in the country. Ethiopia's relative economic successes need to be integrated with its immediate neighbors to sustain rapid development and regional cooperation. This is critical given Ethiopia's sustained investments in projects and infrastructure development that will create a framework for regional cooperation and economic linkages. These projects would immensely benefit immediate neighbors, with the potential to integrate the entire region. Mega hydro-electric power generation projects, coupled with railway and road networks interweaving the sub-region, have elicited strong demand for cooperation. Others that are considered adversaries see these developments as threats. Economic integration agendas, for long espoused at regional and continental organizations would be boosted although they could not abate misgivings from those perceiving direct affront to immediate interests.

These projects would potentially fill the gaps for IGAD led integration initiatives. It is to be recalled that when IGAD was revitalized in 1996, it identified three priority areas: Peace and Security, Food Security and Environment Protection and Infrastructural development; and it subsequently identified 17 projects. But since these projects formulated on the three priority areas, especially those in the infrastructural developments, required huge investments, they did not secure the support of IGAD's Partners and were thrown into dust bins. But now some of these

projects are slowly materializing through Ethiopia's unilateral investments. The Djibouti-Addis Ababa Railway line, fully refurbished and electrified, is expected to transform socio-economic activities along the corridor. So do highway projects as well as fiber telecom lines interconnecting Ethiopia, Sudan, South Sudan, Djibouti, Kenya (and in the near future Somalia) would facilitate regional integration. Ethiopia's mega projects, entertained within the regional integration mold, have a high possibility of success and effectiveness. Electric power transmission lines already supplying Djibouti and Sudan, and at final stages of completion in connection to Kenya, are expected to reposition Ethiopia as an actual 'power house' in the region.

Ethiopia's developmental agendas, mainly related to the hydro-electric power generation projects on the Nile and Omo River basins, is triggering reactions and suspicions. Ceaseless efforts at assuring these suspicious parties of Ethiopia's imperatives and well intentions have yet to materialize. Hence, to undermine Ethiopia's efforts, some opt for the environmental impact rhetoric, contriving catastrophes on the river basins and the livelihoods of adjacent communities. Others attach the matter to mere survival, clinging to historic rights, which for centuries have allowed them uncontested use. Involved parties, though recognize that the efforts are targeted at addressing the challenges of poverty in Ethiopia, they have yet to objectively assess their respective positions by way of addressing mutual concerns.

A bird's eye view of the whole trajectory, nonetheless, would identify the calculation for geo-strategic supremacy between and among those aspiring for regional hegemony in the play. The Great Ethiopian Renaissance Dam ushered a new dynamics whereby age-old stakeholders on the Nile waters now have to contend with a rising

powerhouse in the region. The Dam has changed the regional dynamics by creating immense opportunities for neighbors. Behind the scene altercations and diplomatic maneuvers, witnessed along the past four years, simply boil down to geopolitical suzerainty and ascertaining a position of supremacy in Northeast Africa.

Adamant not to forgo entrenched interests, some seem to entertain all options to derail Ethiopia's initiatives. This has brought to the fore strategic realignments and revitalized efforts in the region that might undermine Ethiopia's interests over the long-term. Countries have been seen in full diplomatic vigor to cement these alliances and to bring others, even with significantly limited role, on board. Such attempts are bound to continue, and hence there is no need for complacency as Nile Riparian states have yet to bring their protracted negotiations to a successful conclusion by establishing a regime that governs the equitable utilization of the Nile River. Following the stalemate after Egypt's decline to sign the Comprehensive Framework Agreement (CFA), collective talks on the way forward apparently weakened; and more attention is focused on the tripartite discussion among Ethiopia, Egypt and the Sudan.

It is very critical that Ethiopia equally focuses on nurturing the achievements in the CFA and further engages on practical measures that would cement the CFA to a regional cooperation regime, so that there are no reversals in those achievements. Those states that didn't sign or endorse the CFA appear to be weighing geo-strategic benefits, and one can expect policy shifts pending much pressing problems in the region. Notwithstanding the fact that Ethiopia is fully determined to bring its mega projects to their successful conclusion and there is no turning back, it has to take the initiative in revitalizing an all rounded discussion among riparian states on the

basis of the CFA, finalize ongoing discussions with Khartoum and Cairo, and more importantly, remain ever vigilant on strategic realignments mushrooming in the region. Apart from these, pushing for a strategic framework on linking the regional infrastructures would be the first concrete step towards regional integration. The more linkages are made on infrastructures in the region including the electricity grid, commonalities of interests and benefits would protect threats that emanates from others that were given free reign in the region for decades and even beyond.