



Horn of Africa and COVID-19: Peace and Security Implications and Possible Policy Options

Background

Since early March 2020, countries in the Horn of Africa have reported a burgeoning caseload of the novel coronavirus (COVID-19). This has prompted governments in the region to react to the pandemic by activating several containment measures including travel restrictions, declaring national states of emergency, instituting lockdowns and curfew hours, issuing directives on social (physical) distancing and maintaining hand hygiene as well as enhancing fiscal measures to cushion against the economic impacts of the contagion, besides ramping up public health capacity for surveillance, prevention, diagnosis, treatment and control of the contagion.

However, it is important to note that COVID-19 pandemic also bear significant peace and security ramifications, which might become overshadowed as government agencies re-order their priorities to focus on health and economic burdens of COVID-19. Relevant authorities and policy makers need to pay keen attention to the potential secondary political and security implications that the ongoing pandemic may cause, and which might undermine effective response toward

combating the disease or in the worst scenario reverse the gains made thus far. In this regard, it is imperative that governments as well as regional bodies including IGAD and the African Union (AU) design and implement strategies that take a whole-of-society approach in tackling the socio-economic, political and health impact of COVID-19.

Potential implications of COVID-19 on Regional Peace and Security

1. Rise in Crime and Violence

As the economic impact of COVID-19 pandemic takes a toll on vast populations already grappling with extreme poverty and perennial economic deprivations, chances that there will be a surge in crimes and other forms of communal violence are high. Individuals and illicit gangs will seek to take advantage of the prevailing situation and the apparent strain on national security and justice systems to carry out criminal activities such as smuggling, robbery, and theft, among others. Already, fears are building in major towns and cities