



## Donald Trump's “America First” Foreign Policy and Its Impact on the Ethiopia-Egypt Rivalry

**Horn Review Editorial**

**07**

*Discussing the Horn of Africa with Rashid Abdi: Diplomacy, Security & Governance.*

**10**

*Somalia's Diplomatic Dilemma: Navigating Relations Between Ethiopia and Egypt.*

**16**

*Rebels at the Castle: The Case of Syrian Rebels and Their Pursuit of State Affairs.*





## About us:

Founded in 2021, Horn Review is a premier research and publication think-tank dedicated to exploring and amplifying African voices with a goal of interlinking subject matter experts, practitioners, and academics from Ethiopia, the Horn Region, and the African continent with the broader public. With a stated mission of Africa for Africans, Horn Review aims to amplify and mainstream uniquely African ideas and perspectives on sociopolitical, economic, and geostrategic issues relevant to the continent. Horn Review aims to connect African thinkers, practitioners, and policymakers with their respective communities to create greater synergy and a people-centered discourse on African matters.



@HornReview 

[www.hornreview.org](http://www.hornreview.org) 

Horn Review 

## Table of Contents

05	Donald Trump's "America First" Foreign Policy and Its Impact on the Ethiopia-Egypt Rivalry
07	Discussing the Horn of Africa with Rashid Abdi: Diplomacy, Security & Governance
10	Somalia's Diplomatic Dilemma: Navigating Relations Between Ethiopia and Egypt
16	Rebels at the Castle: The Case of Syrian Rebels and Their Pursuit of State Affairs
18	A New Dawn in the Horn: Ethiopia and Somalia Embrace Dialogue Over Discord
20	Somaliland's Strategic Gambit: A U.S. Base in Berbera and its Ripple Effect on the Horn of Africa
22	Strategic Influence and Economic Expansion: The Gulf States' Growing Role in the Horn of Africa
24	CAADP's Transformative Role in Shaping Agriculture and Economic Growth in Ethiopia and the Horn of Africa

## Editor's Note



Welcome to the 11th edition of Horn Review, a publication dedicated to delivering nuanced and thought-provoking analyses of the geopolitical complexities shaping the Horn of Africa. In this issue, we bring together a collection of expert contributions to explore the region's evolving dynamics and their broader implications for global stability. We begin with Donald Trump's "America First" Foreign Policy and Its Impact on the Ethiopia-Egypt Rivalry, which analyzes how a return to Trump-era foreign policy principles could reshape the geopolitical calculus of the Horn of Africa, particularly in the ongoing Nile water dispute.

In Somalia's Diplomatic Dilemma: Navigating Relations Between Ethiopia and Egypt, we examine Somalia's balancing act amid the longstanding Ethiopia-Egypt rivalry. This article unpacks the complexities of trilateral relations and their implications for Somalia's sovereignty and regional cooperation.

Discussing the Horn of Africa with Rashid Abdi: Diplomacy, Security & Governance, provides a compelling interview that sheds light on the region's governance challenges and the intricate interplay of diplomacy and security. Rashid Abdi offers invaluable insights into strategies for fostering sustainable peace and development.

Turning to conflict dynamics, *Rebels at the Castle: The Case of Syrian Rebels and Their Pursuit of State Affairs* offers a fascinating exploration of the Syrian rebels' evolving role and the lessons their trajectory holds for governance and conflict resolution in fragile states.

*A New Dawn in the Horn: Ethiopia and Somalia Embrace Dialogue Over Discord* highlights the recent diplomatic breakthroughs between Ethiopia and Somalia, charting a path for enhanced cooperation and mutual development in a historically fractious relationship.

In *Somaliland's Strategic Gambit: A U.S. Base in Berbera and Its Ripple Effect on the Horn of Africa*, we explore the geopolitical ramifications of Somaliland's pursuit of U.S. military presence. The article examines the potential impacts on regional security, maritime trade, and global power competition.

*Strategic Influence and Economic Expansion: The Gulf States' Growing Role in the Horn of Africa* delves into the increasing engagement of Gulf countries in the Horn. Through investments, strategic partnerships, and economic projects, this article examines how their involvement is reshaping the regional balance of power.

Lastly, *CAADP's Transformative Role in Shaping Agriculture and Economic Growth in Ethiopia and the Horn of Africa* focuses on the Comprehensive Africa Agriculture Development Programme's influence in driving sustainable economic growth and food security in the region.

As the Horn of Africa continues to navigate a landscape of challenges and opportunities, Horn Review remains steadfast in its commitment to fostering understanding and dialogue. We hope this edition inspires meaningful conversations and actionable insights to address the region's most pressing issues.

Thank you for joining us in exploring these critical topics.

**Blen Mamo**  
Editor-in-Chief

# Donald Trump's "America First" Foreign Policy and Its Impact on the Ethiopia-Egypt Rivalry

*Horn Review Editorial*



When Donald Trump returned to the White House, his "America First" foreign policy became immediately apparent, focusing on bilateral diplomacy over multilateral agreements. This approach has already influenced America's diplomatic ties with key partners, particularly in Europe, and is shaping regional politics, especially in the Horn of Africa. The long-standing rivalry between Ethiopia and Egypt over the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GERD) is a prime example of the impact of Trump's foreign policy. During his first presidency, the U.S. was seen as favoring Egypt in this dispute, a dynamic that could persist under his current administration with far-reaching consequences for the region.

The core issue between Ethiopia and Egypt centers around the Nile River. For Ethiopia, GERD represents a crucial step toward energy security and economic development, while Egypt, which depends on the Nile for 90% of its freshwater, views the dam as an existential threat. This difference in priorities has led to years of tense negotiations, often mediated by the U.S., but these efforts have tended to deepen the conflict rather than resolve it.

Under Trump's first term, U.S. mediation in the GERD dispute was seen as biased toward Egypt.

The Trump administration suspended \$100 million in aid to Ethiopia following the dam's initial filling and suggested that Egypt could resort to violence to prevent the dam's operation. These actions strengthened Egypt's position, while Ethiopia rejected what it viewed as U.S. favoritism and advocated for African Union-led solutions.

Trump's foreign policy, which emphasized skepticism toward multilateral diplomacy, reinforced Egypt's strategy by solidifying U.S. support. His administration built a strong relationship with Egypt's President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi, giving Egypt significant leverage in negotiations. U.S. backing emboldened Egypt to adopt a hardline stance on water-sharing arrangements, undermining Ethiopia's efforts for a fair resolution.

*"During his first presidency, the U.S. was seen as favoring Egypt in this dispute, a dynamic that could persist under his current administration with far-reaching consequences for the region"*

With Trump back in office, the U.S. is likely to renew its support for Egypt's demand for a legally binding agreement on water allocations. This could further isolate Ethiopia in negotiations, deepening regional polarization and potentially intensifying Egypt's influence in the Horn of Africa.



Although Ethiopia remains an important partner to the U.S. in counterterrorism and regional security, Trump's return to office may expose Ethiopia to greater geopolitical pressure. His administration's preference for bilateral deals over multilateral diplomacy could undermine regional efforts to mediate the GERD dispute, potentially worsening tensions between Ethiopia and Egypt and destabilizing the region.

Trump's continued backing of Egypt will strengthen Cairo's diplomatic efforts, including framing GERD as a national security issue in international forums. With this support, Egypt will likely intensify its lobbying within the Arab League and broader international platforms to demand a legally binding agreement and highlight security concerns.



In response, Ethiopia will likely continue to spotlight the colonial-era treaties that favor Egypt in the Nile's water distribution. Ethiopia may also turn to global powers like China and Russia, hoping to counterbalance U.S. and Egyptian influence. This shift could change the region's diplomatic dynamics, decreasing U.S. influence and creating a more multipolar environment in the Horn of Africa.

To safeguard its interests, Ethiopia must pursue a comprehensive strategy. Strengthening regional alliances, particularly within the African Union, will be essential for advocating equitable water-sharing principles. Simultaneously, Ethiopia must expand its diplomatic partnerships with neutral powers like China and Russia to mitigate U.S. and Egyptian pressure. Ethiopia should also engage in public diplomacy to emphasize the dam's developmental importance and address misconceptions about its impact on downstream nations. While upholding its sovereignty, Ethiopia could show flexibility in technical negotiations that promote water security for all Nile Basin countries, fostering trust and reducing tensions.

***“Trump’s foreign policy, which emphasized skepticism toward multilateral diplomacy, reinforced Egypt’s strategy by solidifying U.S. support. His administration built a strong relationship with Egypt’s President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi, giving Egypt significant leverage in negotiations. U.S. backing emboldened Egypt to adopt a hardline stance on water-sharing arrangements, undermining Ethiopia’s efforts for a fair resolution.”***

Several potential scenarios could unfold as Ethiopia and Egypt continue under Trump's leadership. A prolonged stalemate in GERD negotiations is likely, as U.S. favoritism toward Egypt could further entrench the deadlock. This could escalate tensions, with Egypt's hardline stance increasing the risk of military conflict, destabilizing the region. Alternatively, African Union-led mediation, supported by neutral international actors, could result in a more balanced agreement addressing both nations' concerns. Ethiopia's growing ties with China and Russia may also lead to a shift in regional dynamics, diminishing U.S. influence and promoting a more multipolar Horn of Africa.

Trump's return to office is poised to shape Ethiopia-Egypt relations, particularly with regard to GERD. While Egypt stands to gain from continued U.S. support, Ethiopia faces significant diplomatic challenges. By strengthening regional alliances, diversifying diplomatic partnerships, and pursuing flexible negotiation strategies, Ethiopia can better navigate these complexities. Ultimately, resolving the GERD dispute will require balanced mediation that prioritizes regional stability and equitable resource-sharing—goals that remain elusive in today's polarized geopolitical climate.



## Discussing the Horn of Africa with Rashid Abdi: Diplomacy, Security & Governance.

**Horn Review:** Thank you for taking the time to speak with us about the pressing security issues of the Horn today, Mr. Rashid Abdi.

**Rashid Abdi:** Thank you. Let me highlight some key security challenges we are likely to face in the coming year. 2025 is expected to be another difficult year in the Horn of Africa, particularly in Somalia. The ambitious military operation against Al-Shabaab, launched between August 2020 and January 2023, has stalled, and the campaign has largely become dysfunctional. Somalia is also about to undergo a major transition in peacekeeping forces, with a drawdown of African peacekeeping troops. There are significant unresolved issues regarding which forces will be part of the peacekeeping duties, and which nations will or will not participate.

There are also substantial funding challenges that have yet to be addressed. Around 12,000 peacekeepers will be tasked with managing this delicate transition over the next year. Meanwhile, Al-Shabaab remains highly active and controls significant territory in South Central Somalia. It also exerts considerable influence beyond areas it directly controls. The government remains weak and struggles to exert control over its borders, beyond the capital, Mogadishu. While we haven't seen as many terrorist attacks in recent months, this does not mean Al-Shabaab is weak. In fact, it is likely conserving its energy for a new offensive. Most experts anticipate an escalation of terror attacks within Somalia. Regionally, Al-Shabaab is also expected to expand its operations. It has been sabre-rattling against Ethiopia and recently launched a significant border attack, committing over 1,500 troops to breach the Ethiopian border. They have likely infiltrated operatives into Ethiopia. The risk is extremely high that Al-Shabaab will carry out significant attacks, not just inside Somalia, but also in Ethiopia. The security situation remains grim. However, there is potential for mitigation if tensions between Somalia and Ethiopia are eased and Ethiopian troops are allowed to cooperate with

Somali forces to address border security challenges. This cooperation could help alleviate what is otherwise likely to be a very difficult situation.

**Horn Review:** Given Al-Shabaab's increasing adaptability, what innovative approaches are needed to counter its influence?

**Rashid Abdi:** Al-Shabaab is one of the longest-standing guerrilla insurgencies in the Horn of Africa. It has been operational for more than a decade and is one of the most resilient and adaptable insurgencies in the region. It is also the wealthiest insurgency, with estimated annual revenues of around 100 million U.S. dollars—more than what both the regional and the Somali federal government can raise. This suggests that we are not just dealing with an armed group, but with a shadow government, an entrenched bureaucracy, and an efficient economic system in Somalia.

Dislodging such an insurgency is not easy, especially one that is deeply embedded in society and the political economy. To weaken Al-Shabaab, there needs to be coordinated military action. Recently, we saw a hopeful development in South Central Somalia, where clans, supported by the Somali National Army, reclaimed territory from Al-Shabaab. However, that operation stalled, and we must pause and learn from this failure. One clear lesson is that the government prioritized speed and headline-grabbing successes, such as claiming territory in villages, without adequately focusing on holding that territory.

In counterinsurgency operations, it's crucial to not just focus on clearing forces, but also on holding forces. This is a major weakness in Somalia, as we haven't seen capable forces at the federal member state level able to maintain control over territory for extended periods. Structural and logistical issues, which should have been addressed by now, remain unresolved.



*“Al Shabaab remains very active and holds a significant territory in South Central Somalia. They also are able to exert a lot of influence beyond even areas they do not control... The risk is extremely high that Al Shabaab may be able to carry out significant attacks, not just inside Somalia, but also outside, specifically Ethiopia”*

Additionally, military efforts must serve a political purpose. The government must devote as much energy to political stabilization and deal-making as it does to military campaigns. Unfortunately, we have seen the government over-invest in the military aspect while under-investing in the political work necessary for long-term stability. The situation in Somalia is worse than it was under the previous president. Puntland and Jubaland, two regional states, have cut off relations with the government in Mogadishu, leading to fragmentation within the federal system. Al-Shabaab exploits these divisions effectively.

Unless the Somali government makes a concerted effort to engage with these aggrieved regional states and rebuild Somali unity, it will struggle to defeat Al-Shabaab. Al-Shabaab can only be degraded through sustained, coordinated action by all parties, including the national government, sub-national governments, and the federal member states.

Al-Shabaab controls more territory than any other guerrilla insurgency in the Horn of Africa, generates more revenue than any other insurgency in Africa, and has built expertise in executing lethal terror attacks. It continues to invest in improving its military capabilities, including manufacturing its own IEDs and deploying longer-range rockets. It is only a matter of time before Al-Shabaab gains access to even more advanced technologies, including weaponized drones.

These are just some of the key factors in addressing this insurgency, but we cannot underestimate the unique and deadly nature of Al-Shabaab's operations. It remains one of the most formidable threats in the region.

**Horn Review: How do internal political dynamics within Ethiopia and Somalia affect their ability to manage cross-border security and broader regional stability?**

**Rashid Abdi:** This is a crucial question. Over the last year, we've witnessed the most serious tensions in bilateral relations between Somalia and Ethiopia since 1977.

These tensions have significantly impacted their ability to cooperate on security matters. Ethiopia plays a key role in maintaining security in border regions like Hiran, Gedo, Bay, and Bakool. These areas are strategically important for Ethiopia and have historically been vital to the Ethiopian military.

The local clans in these regions appreciate the role the Ethiopian National Defense Forces (ENDF) have played over the years. The ENDF's sacrifices have helped secure towns like Baidoa, allowing for governance, humanitarian aid delivery, and the survival of local livelihoods. However, the dynamics changed when Ethiopia signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with Somaliland, a region Somalia considered part of its territory. This sparked a major crisis with Mogadishu, escalating tensions to what can be described as an existential level for Somalia.

The situation began to calm towards the end of 2024, with Turkey's mediation playing a critical role. As a major player in the Horn of Africa, Turkey, with its vested interests in both Somalia and Ethiopia, was well-positioned to bring the parties to the negotiating table. The personal intervention of Turkish President Erdogan was pivotal, and a tentative agreement was reached. This allows Ethiopian forces to remain in South-Central Somalia, with deeper discussions underway on maritime access.

*“The government of Puntland and Jubaland has basically cut off relations with the government in Mogadishu. So there is a disarray in the federal system. And these are the weaknesses Al-Shabaab exploits very effectively. Unless there is a very strong concerted effort by the government of Somalia to reach out to these aggrieved regional states to rebuild Somali cohesion, it is very likely that its not going to defeat Al-Shabaab”*

As we start 2025, there is hope that the Turkish mediation could lead to further engagement between Ethiopia and Somalia, which could improve border security. President Erdogan is expected to visit both countries soon, and a summit could further solidify an agreement on troop deployments. If this dialogue continues, there's potential for greater stability in the region.

**Horn Review: What's your take on the MOU signed between Ethiopia and Somaliland last year? How did Somalia, Eritrea, and Egypt react to this agreement?**



**Rashid Abdi:** Ethiopia has long been concerned about its reliance on Djibouti for access to the sea. As the largest economy in the Horn with a rising population, Ethiopia has been looking for alternative outlets. This issue predates Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed's tenure and goes back to when Meles Zenawi was in power. However, what Abiy did differently was introduce the notion of establishing a naval or military presence along the coastline, not just a commercial port.

This posed a problem, as Ethiopia signed an agreement with a region—Somaliland—that Somalia views as part of its territory. This sparked a significant international crisis. While Somaliland has functioned as a de facto state for decades, Ethiopia's move triggered a sharp response from Somalia. The Somali government framed this as a destabilizing act, threatening to revive Al-Shabaab and undermining Somalia's state-building process.

Ethiopia, however, has not formally renounced the MOU, and technically it is still on the table. Yet, Ethiopia has recognized the need for cooperation with Somalia, especially as African Union-led peacekeeping operations in Somalia wind down. The balance Ethiopia is trying to strike is a delicate one: maintaining its special relationship with Somaliland while avoiding exacerbating tensions with Somalia.

On the international stage, Egypt and Eritrea quickly aligned with Somalia in opposition to the MOU. Egypt, in particular, is worried about Ethiopia's potential military footprint along the Red Sea, a region it considers strategically vital. The situation became even more tense with the ongoing negotiations around the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GERD), which further strained relations with Egypt. These geopolitical dynamics have caused significant friction, but Turkey's role has helped ease the tensions, at least temporarily.

**Horn Review:** *How significant is the Turkey-brokered agreement in easing tensions between Ethiopia and Somalia? What role does Turkey play in this, and how might it influence the future?*

**Rashid Abdi:** Turkey's influence in the Horn of Africa is undeniable. It is the single largest foreign investor in Somalia, with a strong economic and military presence.

In Ethiopia, Turkish investments are estimated at around \$8 billion, and Turkish companies are deeply involved in Ethiopia's economy, employing tens of thousands of Ethiopians. The Turkish military also supplies Ethiopia with high-end equipment, including drones.

Given its investments in both countries, Turkey has a unique position to mediate between Ethiopia and Somalia. It doesn't want to lose either country but aims to maintain its leverage in both. The Turkey-brokered agreement has been crucial in reducing tensions, and if both Ethiopia and Somalia continue to see Turkey as a neutral and credible mediator, there is hope for lasting stability.

"Ethiopia has the largest economy in the horn. It also has a rising population. It is a massive state and it is entirely reliant on Djibouti. And Djibouti has a lot of its own challenges and projecting into the future, policymakers in Ethiopia felt that they can no longer rely on one single sea outlet. This challenge has been growing as an imperative within the Ethiopian establishment. It did not start with Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed"

However, Turkey's assertiveness in regional geopolitics has raised concerns. While its peace diplomacy is effective, there's a risk of over-militarization, which could lead to unintended conflicts, particularly with countries like Israel. Additionally, the UAE's alliances with Ethiopia and Somaliland also complicate the situation, as it sees itself as a counterweight to Turkey's influence.

**Horn Review:** *Given Turkey's growing influence, what implications does this have for other global powers, such as Israel, and regional dynamics?*

**Rashid Abdi:** Turkey's geopolitical ambitions in the Horn of Africa are part of a broader strategy to regain influence over territories that were once part of the Ottoman Empire. This has led to an assertive foreign policy, especially under President Erdogan. Turkey's growing military presence, including drones, is part of this broader projection of power.

Israel, for example, sees the potential for conflict with Turkey, especially if tensions in Syria escalate. Turkey's growing influence in the Horn and the Red Sea, especially concerning military installations, could also disrupt regional balances, and Israel is closely monitoring this situation.

# Somalia's Diplomatic Dilemma: Navigating Relations Between Ethiopia and Egypt

**Jalene Tesfaye, Deputy Director, Horn Review**

In early January 2025, the Horn of Africa witnessed a series of high-level visits, notably the trip of Somali President Hassan Sheikh Mohamud to Cairo. The visit, which follows a trip to Ethiopia in January, provides an insight into Somalia's foreign policy which attempts to balance relations between regional powers with often competing interests.

Although Somalia's aim to protect its economic interests and national security is a conventional approach, the diplomatic route it is pursuing between Ethiopia and Egypt, longstanding enemies, carries threats that need to be carefully considered.

Somalia's engagement with Egypt and Ethiopia is based on its strategy of advancing regional security while securing its sovereignty and national interests. On the surface, President Mohamud's visit to Cairo seems a continuation of Somalia's historic ties with Egypt. The official statement from President Hassan Sheikh Mohamud's Office stated discussions on counterterrorism efforts and enhancing regional peace and security, emphasizing both nations' shared interests. This visit was presented as an important step in reinforcing cooperation in military, economic, and strategic affairs.

Additionally, President Mohamud thanked President Abdel Fattah El-Sisi for Egypt's enduring support, emphasizing that their bilateral relations are built on "brotherhood" and common interests. Yet, the deeper context indicates a sophisticated maneuver.

Somalia is aiming to maintain a balance between Ethiopia and Egypt, two countries that are regional powers and historical rivals.



This diplomatic balancing occurs at a time when both nations are involved in the African Union Support and Stabilization Mission in Somalia (AUSSOM), a critical peacekeeping mission aimed at stabilizing Somalia. AUSSOM has been a cause of tension between Ethiopia and Egypt, with both countries seeking influence in Somalia's security environment.

The timing of President Mohamud's visit to Cairo only two weeks after he visited Addis Ababa indicates the urgency of this balancing measure. President Mohamud met with Ethiopian Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed prior to departing for Egypt to reestablish relations following Ethiopia's disputed agreement with Somaliland in early 2024.



*Egyptian President Abdel Fattah El-Sisi receiving Somali President Hassan Sheikh Mohamud*

The Ankara Declaration, brokered by Turkey, helped facilitate this reconciliation, allowing Somalia and Ethiopia to restore diplomatic relations. In this regard, the Somali President's engagements with both regional powers demonstrate the continuous struggle to maintain several, occasionally incompatible alliances.

### **A History of Rivalry between Ethiopia and Egypt**

Ethiopia and Egypt have a lengthy dispute over the Nile River. Ethiopia views the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GERD) as essential to its development, while Egypt considers the dam's construction as a danger to its water supply. This rivalry is not solely a matter of water, it extends to geopolitics. Both nations are competing for influence over Somalia, which occupies a strategically important position in the Horn of Africa.

***“Somalia is aiming to maintain a balance between Ethiopia and Egypt, two countries that are regional powers and historical rivals.”***

Egypt's interest in Somalia is both strategic and historical. Along key maritime routes, Somalia's location gives Egypt a vested interest in maintaining influence in the region. Additionally, Egypt has been involved in counterterrorism operations in Somalia and has provided military and financial support to the Somali government. Conversely, Ethiopia views Somalia as a vital partner in ensuring regional stability, particularly in countering insurgent groups like al-Shabaab. Beyond security, Ethiopia is interested in Somalia since it seeks to increase its access to the sea through Somali ports, which has been an aspect of conflict with Egypt.

A significant alteration occurred recently when Somalia and Ethiopia normalized relations after a year of diplomatic dispute, with Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed welcoming President Mohamud with a major diplomatic ceremony that signified a new beginning for the two countries. Nonetheless, this reconciliation complicates Somalia's relations with Egypt. This balancing approach is risky given that Ethiopia and Egypt have a stake in Somalia's political alignment and security. While Egypt wants to keep its influence in Somalia, Ethiopia views the reestablishment of relations as a chance to improve its standing in the region.

### **The Strategic Pitfall**

Engaging both sides simultaneously could have long-term consequences, as Somalia's efforts to balance relations between Ethiopia and Egypt may carry inherent risks.

While seeking Egypt's support to counterbalance Ethiopia's influence might appear strategically advantageous, it is equally important for Somalia to maintain strong ties with Ethiopia, given its crucial role in Somalia's stability and security. For Somalia, the stakes are high, as demonstrated by President Mohamud's recent diplomatic trips. The president made a conscious effort to achieve a balance between these conflicting interests by taking two weeks off between his trips to Addis Ababa and Cairo. However, this timing could also be perceived as an attempt to hedge between two rival powers, risking Somalia's standing with both. The Somali leadership must manage the multifaceted political and security realities in a region where tensions are on the rise as Egypt provides more military and economic assistance to Somalia, including troop deployments under AUSSOM and military cooperation agreements. Additionally, given Ethiopia's strategic position in fighting al-Shabaab and its reservations about Egypt's expanding influence, the prospect of Egyptian military engagement could disrupt the already unstable dynamic in Somalia's ties with Ethiopia.

### **Ethiopia's Diplomatic Response: Proactive Engagement**

In light of recent developments, Ethiopia must continue to adopt a proactive and strategic diplomatic approach to safeguard its national security while maintaining a constructive partnership with Somalia in regional stabilization efforts. It is essential for Ethiopia to continue prioritizing its security interests while also addressing potential concerns that Somalia may have regarding the AUSSOM mission, particularly the involvement of Egyptian troops.

***“While seeking Egypt's support to counterbalance Ethiopia's influence might appear strategically advantageous, it is equally important for Somalia to maintain strong ties with Ethiopia, given its crucial role in Somalia's stability and security.”***



Furthermore, Ethiopia must recognize that Somalia's diplomatic balancing act of navigating relationships with multiple regional powers may not be sustainable in the long term.

Somalia cannot afford to alienate one of its key partners, especially one that plays a significant role in its security and stability. To this end, Ethiopia should focus on strengthening bilateral ties with Somalia, emphasizing cooperation in key areas such as economic development, infrastructure projects, and counterterrorism initiatives.

By ensuring deeper, multifaceted cooperation, Ethiopia will be better positioned to demonstrate its commitment to Somalia's stability and development. This approach will benefit both nations and reduce the potential for external actors, such as Egypt, to influence Somalia's foreign policy. Ultimately, a stronger, more collaborative partnership between Ethiopia and Somalia is essential for advancing regional security and ensuring long-term mutual interests are preserved.

### The Road Ahead

A key shift in the diplomatic arena of the Horn of Africa has occurred with the recent strategic cooperation agreement between Somalia and Egypt, which was noted by President Hassan Sheikh Mohamud's visit to Cairo. This agreement, which includes plans for greater cooperation in sectors such as education, security, and the economy, shows Egypt's growing influence in Somalia. In tandem with Egypt's proactive assistance for Somalia's counterterrorism operations, these developments show a growing bilateral partnership that could alter the dynamics of the region.

However, the relationship between Somalia and Egypt has the potential to strain relations with Ethiopia, a key regional player with vested interests in both Somali and Egyptian affairs. The complexities of the Horn of Africa's political environment shaped by issues such as the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GERD) dispute and competition for Red Sea access demonstrates the challenges Ethiopia faces in maintaining stable relations with Somalia. Ethiopia must approach its relationship with Somalia strategically, carefully balancing its national security objectives while developing favorable diplomatic engagement. Somalia, for its part, must recognize the risks linked to engaging with powers that are historical rivals, as this might aggravate tensions in an already volatile region.



*Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed receiving Somali President Hassan Sheikh Mohamud*

The growing diplomatic ties between Somalia and Egypt could, if not carefully managed, exacerbate existing rivalries in the Horn of Africa, particularly between Ethiopia and Egypt. These tensions, rooted in competing national interests over water rights, regional influence, and security concerns, could destabilize the region and undermine efforts for peace and cooperation. To avoid unintended consequences, it is essential for all parties to engage in dialogue and diplomacy.

Ethiopia, as a central actor in the region, should remain proactive in strengthening its ties with Somalia, emphasizing mutual cooperation on shared challenges such as counterterrorism and economic development. By focusing on trust-building initiatives and offering tangible support in key areas, Ethiopia can demonstrate its commitment to Somalia's stability and reduce the influence of external actors, such as Egypt, from potentially undermining the strategic partnership between the two nations. Ultimately, careful consideration and responsible diplomatic engagement are essential to preventing further tensions and ensuring the Horn of Africa remains a region of peace and collaboration.

Egypt, which has long had strained relations with Turkey, is particularly concerned about Turkey's influence in the Horn, as it undermines Egypt's interests.

At the same time, the UAE has cultivated strong relationships with both Ethiopia and Somaliland, which serves as a counterbalance to Turkey's influence. This rivalry among regional powers adds another layer of complexity to the Horn of Africa's already volatile geopolitical environment.

**Horn Review:** *Will Ethiopia recognize Somaliland in the near future? What could this mean for the future of the Ankara Declaration and regional security?*

**Rashid Abdi:** Recognizing Somaliland remains a tough decision for Ethiopia. While Ethiopia has a strong relationship with Hargeisa, it's unlikely that Ethiopia will formally recognize Somaliland in the near future. The political situation is delicate, and Ethiopia's priority seems to be stabilizing its relationship with Somalia rather than pushing ahead with formal recognition.

However, this doesn't mean the issue is resolved. The Somaliland crisis continues to simmer and needs a regional solution. Ethiopia is likely to continue working with Somaliland in a practical, diplomatic sense without formal recognition. As for the Ankara Declaration, its future hinges on how Ethiopia and Somalia can balance their security concerns without triggering further conflict, especially with Eritrea and Egypt.

"There is a darker side to this Turkish projection of power, which is the over militarization, and that could probably cause Turkey to overplay its hand, overreach, and then going to conflict with the states. The likely conflict scenario will probably be with Israel, especially if the tensions in Syria are unresolved. The likelihood of proxy conflicts is also very high in the Horn of Africa, but also in North Africa"

**Horn Review:** *What's your take on the possibility of a Trump administration recognizing Somaliland and its implications for the U.S.-Somalia relations?*

**Rashid Abdi:** It's hard to predict how the Trump administration would handle the recognition of Somaliland. The U.S. government has a policy document, Agenda 2025, which hints at increased engagement with Somaliland, but President Trump has distanced himself from this document.

Given that Somalia is now a member of the UN Security Council, the U.S. may be hesitant to act unilaterally on Somaliland recognition.

That said, there is a growing push for closer engagement with Somaliland, particularly from certain factions within the U.S. military and political circles. The Pentagon might explore establishing a military presence on the Gulf of Aden coastline, especially with the UAE's close ties to Somaliland. However, a rush to formally recognize Somaliland seems unlikely in the immediate future, especially given the complexities of Somalia's international relations.

**Horn Review:** *How can Ethiopia and Somalia strengthen security ties without exacerbating tensions over Somaliland or provoking regional rivalries?*

**Rashid Abdi:** This is a challenging question. The Horn of Africa is prone to instability, and multilateral systems of diplomacy are weaker than ever. Regional organizations like IGAD must play a more proactive role in long-term peacebuilding, rather than just responding to crises.

Ethiopia and Somalia must resist the temptation to militarize diplomacy. Dialogue, cooperation, and integration of economies are key to ensuring sustainable peace. The Somaliland issue won't go away, and resolving it will require careful negotiation and a shared vision for regional stability. Both countries need to adopt flexible approaches, and the broader regional community, including the African Union, must support a concerted diplomatic effort to find a resolution.

Ultimately, the key to avoiding further conflict is open dialogue, mutual respect, and strategic cooperation, with an eye on long-term regional integration rather than short-term gains.

**Horn Review:** *How does Eritrea's regional isolation, militarized governance, and complex relationship with its neighbors influence its role in the Horn of Africa's security and diplomatic landscape? And what is the future of the Ethiopia-Eritrea relationship?*

**Rashid Abdi:** Relations between Ethiopia and Eritrea have fluctuated over the years. We saw close cooperation between Addis Ababa and Asmara during the Tigray war, but tensions began to rise after its conclusion.



Eritrea was dissatisfied with the peace treaty and wanted Prime Minister Abiy and the Ethiopian government to prosecute the war to its finish, which did not happen. This likely contributed to the deterioration of relations. Eritrea is very much part of the Horn of Africa, not an external actor. At present, it has a difficult government and strained relations with all its neighbors.

However, we must avoid viewing the Ethiopia-Eritrea conflict as an existential threat. In the long term, there is a need for greater peace diplomacy and outreach towards Eritrea. The goal should be to reintegrate Eritrea into the regional fold while addressing unresolved issues, especially the border dispute. Ethiopia and Eritrea still lack a final, conclusive agreement on their border, which must be settled. A transparent settlement of the border conflict would significantly improve confidence between the two nations.

Furthermore, Eritrea must recognize that it cannot impose its will on its regional neighbors. The country likely requires a generational change in leadership and governance. In the long run, everyone has a role to play in reducing tensions in the Horn of Africa. Pressure must be placed on Eritrea to rebuild its relationships with regional states. I hope that Ethiopia, along with other regional countries like Kenya, will lead initiatives to bring about a broader regional settlement to address these geopolitical tensions.

**Horn Review: *Let's now shift our focus to how conflicts and political instability in the Middle East and Gulf region influence security, economic interdependence, and geopolitical alignments in the Horn of Africa, and beyond.***

**Rashid Abdi:** This is a vast question, but yes, over the last two decades, we have seen a growing involvement of external Middle Eastern actors in the Horn of Africa, especially in the Red Sea region. These actors have brought significant economic resources and investments into regional governments. For example, the UAE has acquired an entire African coastline, from Salalah to Maputo. This stretch of territory is controlled by one actor, DP World, which illustrates the scale of Gulf investments in the region. This has significantly altered the economies of the Horn.

Moreover, we are seeing the rise of middle powers, like Turkey, who now exert more influence in the Horn than traditional Western powers. For instance, Turkey's role in Somalia is now more prominent than that of the United States. This shift highlights how the global balance of power is changing.

Looking ahead, I believe the Middle Eastern and Gulf countries will remain the dominant geopolitical and geoeconomic players in the Horn of Africa. This shift, however, creates imbalances and tensions. Some of the countries in the region are weak and unstable, and this lack of collective bargaining power means they may not secure favorable terms in their dealings with these new external actors.

IGAD, as a regional organization, should take the lead in strategizing how the Horn of Africa can position itself in these changing dynamics. The region should avoid becoming just a passive recipient of external influence but instead work to extract better terms for economic partnerships and push back against political meddling, especially when it comes to fueling proxy conflicts. We have seen some of these external actors deeply involved in conflicts, like the one in Sudan, which is a major concern. Ultimately, there are both opportunities and risks tied to this growing involvement of external players in the region. The challenge for us is to find mechanisms for collective bargaining and action to protect our interests.

**Horn Review: *Do you think external players like Turkey, the US, or the EU are striking the right balance in supporting regional security efforts?***

**Rashid Abdi:** We live in an era of widespread conflict and crisis around the world. Multilateral diplomacy and the structures supporting it are increasingly undermined. Given this, it's no surprise that external actors are struggling to find an effective response. The responsibility lies with the African Union (AU) and regional structures to devise mechanisms for addressing these challenges.

However, no single region can resolve its own problems, as modern conflicts are driven by global geopolitical competition. No single actor can effectively resolve these issues alone. While the idea of "African solutions to African problems" is commendable, it is not always enough. Regional alliances should be built to ensure stabilization.

If external actors like the European Union or the United States can support de-escalation efforts in the Horn of Africa, or push for peace initiatives between Ethiopia and Eritrea, that would be valuable. But it is crucial that the region plays a leadership role in these efforts. IGAD, in particular, has the potential to be at the forefront of conflict resolution and prevention in the Horn, as it was specifically created for these types of situations.

In conclusion, no single region or state can address these challenges alone. The AU, United Nations, and global powers all have roles to play in resolving the region's conflicts. However, it's vital that the Horn of Africa leads the conversation and takes the initiative. I support IGAD's active role in this process, and there is definitely room for public engagement in demanding greater investment in multilateral diplomacy.

**Horn Review:** Thank you very much, Mr. Rashid Abdi, for sharing your valuable insights with us today.





## Rebels at the Castle: The Case of Syrian Rebels and Their Pursuit of State Affairs

*By Yabsira Yeshiwas, Researcher, Horn Review*

Rebel forces rise against perceived injustices, taking up arms to challenge the status quo that they believe causes their suffering. While their motivations may vary, a common thread runs through their actions: the desire to shift power dynamics, typically with the aim of securing a better future for their people. Yet, when these rebel groups seize power, their narrative evolves. They often find themselves defending national integrity and sovereignty, adopting the very principles they once challenged. The shift is stark: from insurgents to state leaders, they must navigate the complex and ruthless arena of international politics, where national interests reign supreme and conflicts are often resolved at the expense of others.

A compelling case study of this transformation is the Syrian rebel group Hayat Tahrir al-Sham, which began as a formidable opponent to Bashar al-Assad's regime. Originally formed to topple the Syrian president, Hayat Tahrir al-Sham emerged as one of the most powerful rebel forces in the Syrian conflict. As their military successes mounted, they found themselves at the helm of a fragmented, war-torn state. Their new position as key players in Syria's future required them to shift from militant fighters to the stewards of the country's survival

Having expelled Assad's forces from large swathes of territory, Hayat Tahrir al-Sham now finds itself occupying essential state roles in Syria's ongoing struggle for stability. In their current leadership capacity, they've transitioned from rebels to staunch defenders of Syria's territorial integrity, positioning themselves in opposition not only to Assad's remnants but also to foreign powers such as Israel and the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) in the Golan Heights and on the issue of North eastern Syria respectively. In a bid to assert their legitimacy on the international stage, the group has engaged in diplomatic outreach, hosting foreign envoys and initiating shuttle diplomacy with key Middle Eastern players. Their goal is clear: to reshape Syria's future by rebuilding the country, although the question remains whether their words will match their deeds.

Despite their rhetoric, Hayat Tahrir al-Sham's rise to power hasn't come without its contradictions. They continuously criticize the Assad regime for the destruction it has wrought upon Syria, decimating cities, creating millions of refugees, and destroying the country's economy. Yet, many of these problems were exacerbated, if not directly caused, by the prolonged conflict that their own forces participated in. While they vow to rebuild Syria, their ability to fulfill this promise is uncertain, particularly as they lead a nation in ruins. The economy is fragile, millions remain displaced, and the country's infrastructure lies in tatters. The prospects of returning to peace seem bleak.

*"As their military successes mounted, they found themselves at the helm of a fragmented, war-torn state. Their new position as key players in Syria's future required them to shift from militant fighters to the stewards of the country's survival"*





The future of Syria is equally uncertain. As multiple factions, including the SDF, control different parts of the country, the road to national reconciliation is fraught with challenges. The SDF, particularly active in the northeast, has emerged as a power in its own right, with its own vision for Syria's future. The rebel forces, who once fought to oust Assad, now find themselves in the uncomfortable position of determining the fate of Syria's people and its future governance. The role of foreign powers is also in flux; while various international actors have pledged support for Syria, it remains unclear how their competing interests will align or clash in the coming years.

Syria's situation also mirrors the challenges faced by rebel movements across the globe. The Horn of Africa, for instance, has long been a region rife with rebellion, state collapse, and conflict. Countries such as Somalia, Ethiopia, and Sudan have witnessed the rise of insurgent groups who have taken up arms against governments. The social and economic conditions in these regions are dire, with millions of displaced people, a shattered education system, and failing healthcare infrastructure. The severity of the crises in both Syria and the Horn of Africa suggests that rebels must transition from fighters to diplomats if they are to craft viable solutions for their war-torn societies.

In Syria's case, the need for dialogue has never been greater. Both the state and the rebel factions must acknowledge the immense suffering that their conflict has caused and engage in constructive discussions to find a resolution. The wounds of war are deep, but the question remains: who among these factions truly seeks to build a lasting peace, and who is more interested to rule over the ashes in war-torn states for personal gain?

*"The severity of the crises in both Syria and the Horn of Africa suggests that rebels must transition from fighters to diplomats if they are to craft viable solutions for their war-torn societies"*

As the Syrian conflict enters its next phase, the challenge for Hayat Tahrir al-Sham and other rebel groups is clear: the quest for state power must be balanced with the responsibility of nation-building. If they truly seek to protect the future of Syria, they must move beyond military victories and embrace the delicate art of governance, diplomacy, and compromise.



# A New Dawn in the Horn: Ethiopia and Somalia Embrace Dialogue Over Discord



**By Samiya Mohammed**  
**Researcher, Horn Review**

The Horn of Africa, long defined by conflict and instability, is on the cusp of a transformative shift. Ethiopia and Somalia, once entrenched in discord, are now prioritizing dialogue and cooperation, signaling a hopeful turn for the entire region. This evolving partnership between the two nations offers a beacon of hope for peace, prosperity, and regional stability.

Recently, Ethiopian Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed and Somali President Hassan Sheikh Mohamud met in Addis Ababa, marking a significant step towards a renewed bilateral relationship. Their discussions, culminating in a joint communiqué, focused on three key pillars: diplomatic engagement, security cooperation, and economic collaboration. Prime Minister Abiy's warm reception underscored the deep historical and cultural ties between Ethiopia and Somalia, setting the stage for a more unified approach to the region's challenges.



*President Hassan Sheikh Mohamud arriving at Bole International Airport, Addis Ababa*

A cornerstone of this renewed partnership was the agreement to restore full diplomatic representation in each other's capitals. This crucial move not only signifies a shift away from recent tensions but also aims to facilitate smoother communication, prompt resolution of emerging issues, and deeper mutual understanding.

The reestablishment of diplomatic ties will extend to multilateral platforms, where the two nations will work together to address shared concerns such as regional security, counterterrorism, economic development, and climate change, particularly within organizations like the African Union (AU) and the United Nations (UN).

*“Prime Minister Abiy's warm reception underscored the deep historical and cultural ties between Ethiopia and Somalia, setting the stage for a more unified approach to the region's challenges”*

This renewed focus on cooperation builds upon the foundation laid by the Ankara Declaration, a peace agreement brokered by Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan in December 2024. The Declaration provided a framework for addressing historical grievances and fostering mutual trust. Its spirit of reconciliation paved the way for Prime Minister Abiy and President Mohamud to focus on strengthening bilateral ties.

The rapprochement follows a period of strained relations, particularly surrounding Ethiopia's Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with Somaliland, and Somalia's concerns regarding the deployment of Egyptian troops in the African Union's AUSSOM mission. These issues highlighted the need for diplomatic intervention and underscored the importance of regional stability.



The leaders' commitment to dialogue and cooperation stems from a shared understanding that regional stability is inextricably linked to strong bilateral relationships based on trust and respect. Both leaders pledged to enhance cooperation between their respective security agencies, focusing on combating extremist threats that continue to destabilize the region. This cooperation will involve intelligence sharing, joint military operations, and capacity-building efforts aimed at curbing violent extremism.

In addition to security, Prime Minister Abiy and President Mohamud emphasized the importance of economic collaboration. Recognizing the region's economic potential, the two leaders agreed to expand infrastructure linkages to facilitate trade and foster mutual prosperity. Economic cooperation is particularly vital for Ethiopia, a landlocked nation, which views secure access to international waters as essential for its growth and integration into global markets. Prime Minister Abiy's approach to balancing this objective with respect for Somalia's territorial integrity has been a pivotal factor in this renewed partnership.

*"The leaders' commitment to dialogue and cooperation stems from a shared understanding that regional stability is inextricably linked to strong bilateral relationships based on trust and respect"*

The Ankara Declaration continues to serve as a foundation for this new phase in Ethiopian-Somali relations. It reaffirmed both nations' commitment to regional stability, prioritizing cooperation over past disagreements. The technical negotiations envisioned by the Declaration will address key issues such as border security, trade facilitation, and infrastructure development. Among the most sensitive topics is Ethiopia's access to the sea, which remains a crucial long-term objective for the country. Potential joint ventures in port facilities and cross-border infrastructure could create significant economic benefits for both nations.

Ethiopia's quest for reliable sea access has been a longstanding strategic goal, essential for its economic development. This partnership with Somalia offers the opportunity to turn this ambition into a mutually beneficial reality, with shared infrastructure projects such as port facilities serving the interests of both countries.

The new chapter in Ethiopian-Somali relations provides a promising framework for collaborative development, transforming strategic objectives into opportunities for shared growth.

This high-level meeting between Prime Minister Abiy and President Mohamud marks a decisive turning point for the Horn of Africa. It shifts the focus from past tensions, including the MoU with Somaliland and the Egyptian troop deployment issues, towards a more constructive approach to regional cooperation. By prioritizing diplomatic engagement, enhanced security collaboration, and robust economic partnerships, Ethiopia and Somalia are laying the groundwork for a stable and prosperous future.

*"This high-level meeting between Prime Minister Abiy and President Mohamud shifts the focus from past tensions towards a more constructive approach to regional cooperation"*

The renewed emphasis on mutual trust and shared progress holds immense potential for overcoming the region's challenges. By focusing on strategic areas like security cooperation, economic integration, and infrastructure development, the two nations are creating a roadmap for a brighter future not just for themselves, but for the entire Horn of Africa. The potential for joint projects, such as the development of port facilities and cross-border trade infrastructure, highlights the possibility of turning Ethiopia's long-term strategic needs into opportunities that benefit both countries, fostering a more stable and prosperous region for generations to come.





# Somaliland's Strategic Gambit: A U.S. Base in Berbera and its Ripple Effect on the Horn of Africa

## *Horn Review Editorial*

In a move that could significantly alter the geopolitical dynamics of the Horn of Africa, Somaliland has expressed its readiness to host a U.S. military base in the port city of Berbera. This potential development is not merely a local issue; it holds profound regional implications, especially concerning security, trade, and the intricate balance of power within the Red Sea and the Gulf of Aden.

Strategically positioned on the Gulf of Aden, Berbera's location is of immense value. Its proximity to the Bab-el-Mandeb Strait, a critical maritime choke point linking the Red Sea and the Gulf of Aden, makes it a key asset for international trade routes between Europe and Asia. This prime location places Berbera at the heart of global commercial and military interests, prompting increased attention from major powers eager to secure a foothold in this vital region.



*Top Pentagon officials visiting Hargeisa to Discuss Berbera, 2022*

Somaliland's offer to host a U.S. military presence comes amidst Somalia's ongoing peacekeeping transitions and its gradual shift towards self-reliance in security matters. As Somalia continues to deal with a complex history of international intervention, Somaliland is positioning itself as an emerging player with a unique strategy to ensure its future.

Hosting a U.S. military base in Berbera is not a spontaneous gesture but a carefully calculated move aimed at bolstering Somaliland's international standing and securing economic and military benefits.

The increased military activity in Berbera, including the visit of U.S. AFRICOM officials in May 2022 and the subsequent presence of a U.S. military plane at the airport, signals growing interest in the region's strategic significance. This military engagement aligns with Somaliland's broader geopolitical ambitions, including its effort to solidify partnerships with powerful global players like the United States. The prospect of a U.S. military presence could also provide additional stability and security for the region, enabling Somalia to focus on internal challenges while the U.S. contributes to regional counterterrorism efforts.

Simultaneously, Somaliland's deepening cooperation with Ethiopia, especially through a significant Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) granting Ethiopia access to the Red Sea via Berbera, adds another layer of complexity to the situation. Ethiopia, a landlocked nation, views Berbera as a vital economic lifeline, facilitating trade and access to global markets. In exchange for providing this strategic access, Somaliland hopes to gain much-needed international recognition for its sovereignty, a goal it has long pursued but never achieved.

This emerging partnership between Somaliland and the U.S. presents Ethiopia with a complex dilemma. On one hand, Ethiopia greatly benefits from secure access to the Red Sea, a critical economic artery. On the other hand, the presence of a U.S. military base in Berbera, coupled with Somaliland's growing international relationships, could bolster Somaliland's aspirations for independence—a move that could significantly strain Ethiopia's already delicate relations with Somalia, which staunchly opposes Somaliland's secession.



***“As Somalia continues to deal with a complex history of international intervention, Somaliland is positioning itself as an emerging player with a unique strategy to ensure its future”***

Ethiopia’s challenge is to carefully balance its strategic interests in securing access to the Red Sea with the need to maintain positive relations with Somalia and preserve regional stability. Ethiopia must navigate the diplomatic terrain with astuteness, ensuring that its access to Berbera does not inadvertently lead to destabilizing regional dynamics or alienate Somalia, its key partner in the broader Horn of Africa.

At the heart of Somaliland’s offer to host a U.S. military base is its relentless pursuit of international recognition. By aligning with powerful nations like the U.S. and positioning itself as a key player in regional security, Somaliland seeks to demonstrate its viability as a sovereign state. Its strategic initiatives, including military cooperation and economic partnerships, reflect its determination to secure a place in the international community, independent of Somalia’s claims. The potential U.S. military base in Berbera is a critical development that could reshape the geopolitical landscape of the Horn of Africa. As global powers vie for influence in this strategically vital region, the impact of Somaliland’s growing role will reverberate throughout the Horn. Ethiopia, with its vital stake in the region’s stability and its reliance on Berbera, will need to closely monitor developments and adapt its strategy to ensure its long-term interests are preserved.

***“At the heart of Somaliland’s offer to host a U.S. military base is its relentless pursuit of international recognition. Hosting a U.S. military base in Berbera is not a spontaneous gesture but a carefully calculated move aimed at bolstering Somaliland’s international standing and securing economic and military benefits”***

Furthermore, while Somalia’s federal government may view the prospect of a U.S.-Somaliland agreement with suspicion, particularly due to the implications for its territorial integrity, there could be opportunities for cooperation. Both nations share the goal of countering terrorism and fostering regional stability, and a nuanced, cooperative approach might yield common ground in the future.

The potential establishment of a U.S. military base in Berbera represents a pivotal moment for the Horn of Africa. Its far-reaching implications touch on everything from regional security and economic trade to broader geopolitical alliances. For Ethiopia, the stakes are particularly high, as it navigates a complex web of regional interests and alliances while seeking to secure its access to the Red Sea and safeguard regional stability.

Ultimately, the trajectory of this development will depend on the careful calibration of strategic interests, regional power dynamics, and international partnerships. Ethiopia, with its strong diplomatic capabilities and regional influence, has the potential to harness the opportunities presented by a U.S. presence in Berbera, while mitigating the risks of increased instability. The future of the Horn of Africa will be shaped by astute diplomatic engagement and proactive strategies that prioritize both national and regional prosperity.

# Strategic Influence and Economic Expansion: The Gulf States' Growing Role in the Horn of Africa

*By Surafel Tesfaye,  
Researcher at Horn Review*

The Horn of Africa, a region shaped by both internal challenges and external interests, has become an increasingly important arena for Gulf states aiming to extend their geopolitical influence. Through a combination of economic investments, spanning trade, infrastructure, and agriculture, Gulf powers such as the United Arab Emirates (UAE), Saudi Arabia, and Qatar have forged a complex web of relationships that are transforming the region's economic and political landscape. Located along critical maritime trade routes, including the Red Sea and Gulf of Aden, the Horn of Africa holds undeniable strategic value. Its proximity to key international shipping lanes enhances its importance for global trade and security, making it a vital point of interest for the Gulf states. These nations, with their deep historical ties to the region, have increasingly turned to economic investments as a means of securing their strategic objectives.

A cornerstone of Gulf influence is port infrastructure. The UAE, through DP World, has played a transformative role, notably with its \$442 million investment in Berbera Port in Somaliland. This development, paired with the creation of the Berbera Economic Zone and the Berbera Corridor linking Somaliland to Ethiopia, has redefined regional trade dynamics. These initiatives not only enhance economic activity but also firmly establish the UAE as a central player in regional logistics and trade, positioning it as a hub in the Horn's growing economy. Saudi Arabia, too, has focused on port development, particularly along the Red Sea. With investments in Djibouti's facilities and new projects in Sudan, Saudi Arabia has solidified its position as a key actor in the region's maritime infrastructure.



This is further emphasized by its role in the establishment of the Council of Arab and African Coastal States of the Red Sea and Gulf of Aden, a move that seeks to frame Saudi Arabia as a primary guardian of the region's security and economic stability.



*Berbera Port, Somaliland*

In addition to port investments, Gulf states are deeply involved in the agricultural sector, which serves as another avenue to exert influence. Saudi Arabia's King Abdullah Initiative for Saudi Agricultural Investment Abroad has driven large-scale farming projects in Sudan and Ethiopia, focusing on essential crops such as wheat and rice. These investments not only ensure food security for the Gulf states but also create economic interdependencies with the host nations, fostering deeper political ties. The UAE has similarly advanced agricultural interests, with its company Al Dahra making significant investments in Sudan. By developing irrigation systems, infrastructure, and contract farming, the UAE is not only securing its food supply chain but also fostering stronger bilateral relations. These investments have a dual purpose, meeting the Gulf's growing food needs while simultaneously boosting the economies of the host nations.



***“The UAE, through DP World, has played a transformative role, notably with its \$442 million investment in Berbera Port in Somaliland. This development, paired with the creation of the Berbera Economic Zone and the Berbera Corridor linking Somaliland to Ethiopia, has redefined regional trade dynamics...firmly establishing the UAE as a hub in the Horn’s growing economy.”***

Financial aid remains another crucial lever of influence. The Gulf states have used financial support to cement political loyalty, with Saudi Arabia making deposits into Sudan’s Central Bank and the UAE offering stabilization packages for Somalia. These direct financial contributions have bolstered the economies of recipient countries, ensuring Gulf states have a seat at the table when it comes to regional political matters. The Gulf’s involvement extends beyond aid, with investments flowing into real estate, banking, and infrastructure, all supported by sovereign wealth funds that guarantee sustained engagement in the region’s transformation. Beyond economic investments, Gulf states have increasingly taken on roles as diplomatic power brokers in the Horn of Africa. Their involvement in conflict mediation, such as in the Sudan-Ethiopia border dispute and Somalia’s internal divisions, highlights their growing influence as stabilizing forces. Furthermore, the UAE’s military presence in Eritrea and Saudi Arabia’s strategic positioning of troops in Djibouti reflect the security dimension of their investments. Anti-piracy initiatives and joint naval exercises demonstrate a shared commitment to ensuring maritime security in the region, underscoring the Gulf’s vested interest in the stability of the Horn as a means of protecting vital trade routes.

***“In addition to port investments, Gulf states are deeply involved in the agricultural sector, which serves as another avenue to exert influence. These investments not only ensure food security for the Gulf states but also create economic interdependencies with the host nations, fostering deeper political ties”***

However, this growing involvement is not without its challenges. Local communities in the Horn have expressed resistance to land appropriation, environmental degradation, and labor exploitation. As Gulf states continue to invest in the region, they must navigate the complexities of balancing their economic interests with the social and environmental concerns of host countries.

Moreover, the increasing competition for influence in the region, particularly from global powers such as the U.S., China, and Russia, adds a layer of complexity to the Gulf’s ambitions.

To mitigate these challenges and secure long-term gains, Gulf states are diversifying their investments. They are expanding into sectors like technology, renewable energy, and multilateral frameworks designed to formalize Horn-Gulf economic integration. These efforts signal an evolution in Gulf involvement, but it is important to note that these investments come with conditions that often align more with Gulf interests than those of the host nations. From an economic perspective, the Horn of Africa stands to gain significantly from the infrastructure development, financial support, and technological advancements offered by Gulf states. These investments hold the promise of boosting economic growth and alleviating poverty, creating opportunities for long-term development. However, the political implications cannot be ignored. As the Gulf continues to deepen its ties to the region, the Horn must carefully consider the potential for these investments to be used as tools of political leverage.

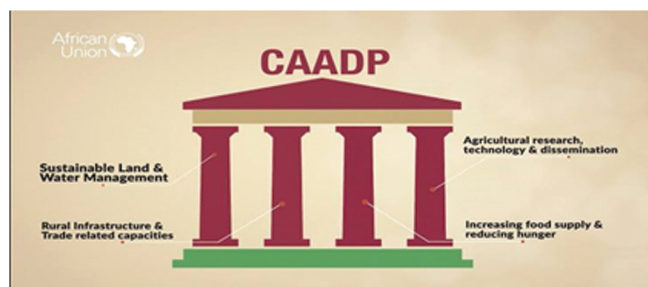
In conclusion, the Gulf states’ economic investments are reshaping the political and economic landscape of the Horn of Africa. These investments open avenues for growth while creating new dependencies, local resistance, and heightened international competition. As the Gulf states continue to assert their influence, the Horn of Africa remains a critical arena for geopolitical maneuvering and economic expansion. Striking a balance between these dynamics will be essential to ensuring sustainable development and regional stability in the years to come.



***By Mahder Nesibu,  
Researcher, Horn Review***

## CAADP's Transformative Role in Shaping Agriculture and Economic Growth in Ethiopia and the Horn of Africa

The Comprehensive Africa Agriculture Development Programme (CAADP), launched in 2003 under the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD), represents a bold vision for transforming Africa's agricultural sector and fostering sustainable economic growth. The program's primary objectives include enhancing food security, alleviating poverty, and boosting economic growth through agriculture-led development. With its ambitious targets of 6% annual agricultural growth and the commitment to allocate 10% of national budgets to agriculture, CAADP has become a cornerstone of Africa's strategy for agricultural transformation. These goals were further solidified by the 2014 Malabo Declaration, which introduced additional objectives, such as eradicating hunger, reducing poverty by half, and strengthening resilience to climate change.



For Ethiopia, a country that has long viewed agriculture as a fundamental driver of its economy, CAADP's goals align closely with national priorities. The Ethiopian government's Agricultural Development-Led Industrialization (ADLI) strategy mirrors many of CAADP's principles, emphasizing agriculture's role in driving economic development, reducing poverty, and achieving food security.

Ethiopia has been an active participant in implementing CAADP's framework, making significant progress in increasing its agricultural budget allocation and achieving substantial growth in the sector. Despite challenges, Ethiopia's commitment to agriculture as a vehicle for economic development has been evident in its adoption of modern farming techniques and large-scale irrigation projects.

The program's impact in Ethiopia is notable in several key areas. First, CAADP has supported the country in its pursuit of food independence, encouraging the modernization of agricultural practices through the introduction of new technologies. Ethiopia's increased investment in irrigation, which is a central tenet of CAADP, has helped improve agricultural productivity and mitigate the risks of droughts and climate change. These efforts are particularly critical for Ethiopia, given the country's vulnerability to climate shocks, which have historically affected agricultural output and food security.

Climate resilience is another area where CAADP has made a significant contribution. The program's focus on climate-smart agriculture has encouraged Ethiopia to implement sustainable farming practices, ensuring long-term agricultural productivity and environmental sustainability. This aligns with Ethiopia's broader strategy of integrating climate change adaptation into its national development agenda.







**X** @HornReview  
**in** Horn Review  
**f** @Horn Review  
**ig** @horn\_review  
**envelope** info@hornreview.org  
**location** Behind Sapphire Addis Hotel,  
 Bole Atlas, Addis Ababa

Read our previous issues on our  
 website : [www.hornreview.org](http://www.hornreview.org)

Price: ETB 100.00

Published by Demera Media  
 and Communications PLC  
 Addis Ababa, Ethiopia