

Ethiopia's Role in Horn of Africa Security: Regional Peacekeeping, Rising Tensions, and the Future of Somalia

*Ambassador General Bacha Debele,
Ethiopia's Ambassador to Kenya*

09 *Navigating Regional Stability:
Professor Brook's Insights on
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**JANUARY
2025**

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.



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Editor's Note



Welcome to the 10th edition of Horn Review, a milestone issue dedicated to providing incisive analyses on the evolving geopolitical dynamics of the Horn of Africa and its broader implications for global affairs. This edition offers a collection of expert insights, strategic assessments, and in-depth reflections on the region's pressing challenges and opportunities.

In our opening article, Ambassador General Bacha Debele examines Ethiopia's enduring role in promoting regional peace and security, particularly in Somalia. Tracing Ethiopia's commitment to global and regional peacekeeping, the article highlights its transition from direct military intervention to robust engagement under multilateral frameworks like AMISOM and ATMIS. The Ambassador also explores the complexities of Ethiopia's relationship with Somalia, exacerbated by agreements with Somaliland and Egypt's rising influence in the Horn. He underscores the urgency of sustained diplomatic efforts to counter instability and extremist threats while fostering long-term peace.

Next, Professor Brook Hailu delves into the intricate geopolitical landscape of the Horn of Africa, focusing on the Sudan crisis and Ethiopia's critical role in maintaining regional stability. His analysis underscores the destabilizing impact of external interventions, particularly Egypt's involvement in Sudan, and warns of the risks posed by extremist groups exploiting power vacuums. Highlighting Ethiopia's strategic importance and diplomatic initiatives, Professor Brook offers a nuanced perspective on how the region can navigate these challenges to secure lasting stability and prevent further fragmentation.

The escalating rivalry between Turkey and Israel in the Horn of Africa takes center stage in our third article, where we examine its profound implications for regional stability and international trade. The analysis contrasts Turkey's growing influence in Somalia and Ethiopia through military and economic partnerships with Israel's strategic focus on Somaliland and the Berbera port, a crucial maritime hub near the Bab el-Mandeb Strait. This rivalry has deepened regional divisions and heightened the risk of militarization along the Red Sea corridor, raising concerns over global security and trade. Ethiopia's pivotal role in navigating these dynamics adds a critical layer of complexity to the evolving geopolitical environment.

Other notable articles in this edition include “The Role of Strategic Intelligence (SI) in Ethiopia's National Security and Regional Stability” by Tadesse Biru Kersmo (PHD), and Strategic Horizons: Russia's Potential Military Base in Eritrea and Its Implications for Ethiopia, which explores the ramifications of a potential Russian military base in Eritrea on regional security. In The Downfall of Bashar al-Assad: Geopolitical Implications, Mahder Nesibu analyzes the collapse of the Assad regime in Syria and its broader impact on Middle Eastern geopolitics and power dynamics. Lastly, How the Horn of Africa is Preparing for Trump's Return to the White House assesses the potential consequences of a second Trump administration on the region's geopolitical landscape, security frameworks, and foreign policy priorities.

As we mark this milestone, Horn Review reaffirms its commitment to delivering thought-provoking and timely analyses that illuminate the complexities of the Horn of Africa's geopolitical realities. We trust this edition will provide valuable insights into the region's challenges, opportunities, and its critical role in shaping the global order.

Thank you for your continued engagement and support as we navigate these pivotal issues together.

Blen Mamo

Editor-in-Chief

Ethiopia's Role in Horn of Africa Security: Regional Peacekeeping, Rising Tensions, and the Future of Somalia

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The Horn of Africa region is marked by persistent conflicts, insecurity, and violent extremism. The region's fragile governance structures, ongoing intra- and interstate conflicts, ethnic tensions, environmental challenges, and economic instability have led to widespread human insecurity, spilling across borders and impacting both regional and international peace. Amidst these challenges, Ethiopia, the largest country in the Horn, has played a critical role in addressing security issues, emerging as a key contributor to regional peacekeeping operations.

The instability caused by violent internal conflicts within regional states has made security a paramount concern. The United Nations has launched fourteen peace support operations globally, seven of which are in Africa, with three specifically in the Horn of Africa. Similarly, the African Union has deployed six peace operations, with three focused on this region. Against this backdrop, ensuring security remains a key concern for the Horn of Africa.



Ethiopia's Peacekeeping History and Regional Influence

Ethiopia has historically taken a proactive approach to regional and international peacekeeping initiatives due to its central geographical position within the Horn of Africa. Surrounded by states that have experienced significant instability, Ethiopia's strategic location has compelled it to engage actively in peacekeeping and stabilization efforts. Notably, in the 1950s, Ethiopia contributed troops to the Korean War as part of a UN peacekeeping mission, marking its early commitment to global peace efforts.

Since then, the Ethiopian National Defence Force (ENDF) has made considerable contributions to conflict resolution and counterterrorism initiatives across Africa, particularly in Somalia.

Ethiopia's commitment to peacekeeping efforts, both globally and regionally, has been driven by its desire to maintain stability within the Horn of Africa, curb the spread of terrorism, and contribute to peacebuilding initiatives. One of Ethiopia's most significant peacekeeping roles has been its participation in Somalia, where it has taken part in various operations aimed at stabilizing the country and countering extremist groups such as Al-Shabaab.

Ethiopia's Role in Somalia: From Intervention to Peacekeeping

Ethiopia's military involvement in Somalia can be traced back to the early 2000s when the country became concerned about the growing threat posed by Islamist groups. In 2006, Al-Shabaab, an extremist group with ties to al-Qaeda, emerged as a powerful force in Somalia. The political vacuum left by the fall of Siad Barre and the fracturing of the country into various factions made Somalia a prime target for the rise of militant groups. Al-Shabaab's increasing influence near Ethiopia's borders raised significant security concerns for Addis Ababa.

In response, Ethiopia, with the backing of the United States as part of the broader "war on terror," deployed troops into Somalia to combat Al-Shabaab and prevent the consolidation of power by the Islamic Courts Union (ICU). This intervention, led by Brig. Gen. Geberezgabier Alemseged, successfully dismantled the ICU by early 2007, showcasing Ethiopia's military capabilities and its commitment to countering regional security threats.

In the years that followed, Ethiopia's role evolved from direct military intervention to a more sustained peacekeeping and stabilization effort. Ethiopia became a key supporter of the Somali Transitional Federal Government (TFG), recognizing that strengthening this internationally recognized government was crucial to stabilizing Somalia and countering extremist factions.

Ethiopia's support extended beyond military operations, involving diplomatic, humanitarian, and infrastructure reconstruction initiatives. Ethiopia actively participated in the African Union peacekeeping mission, AMISOM (African Union Mission in Somalia), and its successor, ATMIS (African Union Transitional Mission in Somalia), offering military, political, and economic assistance to Somalia's recovery.

In 2014, Ethiopia formally joined AMISOM, contributing significantly to military operations aimed at securing government personnel and institutions, facilitating humanitarian access, and launching military operations against Al-Shabaab. In 2022, AMISOM transitioned to ATMIS, with 3,000 Ethiopian troops deployed under the new mandate to support state-building and political processes. However, despite these efforts, there has been a gap between the aspirations for peace and the realities on the ground, which led to the modification of the mission's objectives.

The Future of Ethiopia's Involvement in Somalia

As the mandate for ATMIS approaches its end in 2024, the Federal Government of Somalia has requested a new mission to replace it, the African Union Support and Stabilization Mission in Somalia (AUSSOM), which is set to begin in 2025. AUSSOM will focus on ongoing peace-building efforts, protecting Somali citizens, and combating Al-Shabaab. While Ethiopia's role in Somalia has been essential in ensuring the country's stability, recent developments have strained relations between Ethiopia and Somalia.

In particular, the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU)

between Ethiopia and Somaliland in early 2024 has drawn the ire of Somalia, which views the agreement as a violation of its territorial integrity. Somalia has demanded Ethiopia withdraw from the agreement and has refused to allow Ethiopian troops to participate in the upcoming AUSSOM mission. This situation has opened the door for Egypt to increase its influence in the region, as it seeks to counterbalance Ethiopia's growing regional power.

Egypt's Influence and Regional Tensions

Egypt's involvement in the Horn of Africa is primarily motivated by its concerns over the Nile River, which flows through several Horn countries. Egypt relies heavily on the Nile for its water supply and has long viewed Ethiopia's Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GERD) as a potential threat to its share of the river's waters. As a result, Egypt has engaged in efforts to undermine Ethiopia's regional influence, using its diplomatic and military ties with Somalia to counterbalance Ethiopia's growing power.

Egypt's alignment with Somalia in this context risks exacerbating tensions in the Horn of Africa. Egypt has provided military support and training to Somali security forces in an effort to bolster its position in the region.

However, Egypt's increased militarization and involvement in the Horn may lead to further escalation of conflicts, especially as Ethiopia seeks to secure its national interests in Somalia and the wider region. The situation is further complicated by the diplomatic efforts of Ethiopia and Somalia, with recent positive momentum seen in the Ankara Agreement, which promises to strengthen cooperation between the two countries.

Ethiopia's Strategic Role in Regional Security

Ethiopia's role in regional peacekeeping, particularly in Somalia, cannot be overstated. Its strategic location and military capabilities make it an indispensable player in the fight against terrorism and in maintaining stability within the Horn of Africa. Through its active participation in African Union peacekeeping missions, Ethiopia has contributed significantly to the stabilization of Somalia, including reducing Al-Shabaab's territorial control and supporting political processes that aim to create a stable Somali government.

However, Ethiopia's withdrawal from Somalia or any significant reduction in its peacekeeping presence would likely destabilize the region. Such a move would create a power vacuum, potentially leading to the resurgence of extremist organizations such as Al-Shabaab.

This would be detrimental not only to Somalia but also to Ethiopia's security, as Al-Shabaab poses a direct threat to both countries. Therefore, it is crucial that Ethiopia's peacekeeping role in Somalia continues to be supported, and that any disputes between Ethiopia and Somalia be resolved through diplomatic means to avoid regional instability.

A Path Forward for Somalia

Looking ahead, Somalia's future depends largely on its ability to balance national interests with regional security considerations. The expulsion of Ethiopian peacekeeping forces would likely destabilize Somalia and open the door for extremist factions to regain control of parts of the country. If the AUSSOM transition is not managed carefully, it could lead to further fragmentation of Somalia, giving Al-Shabaab the opportunity to seize power.

The most viable path forward is to foster cooperation between Somalia and its neighboring countries, including Ethiopia, and to engage in peaceful dialogue to address the underlying issues. This is especially crucial given the volatility of the Horn of Africa and the risk of further external interference. Somalia's political leadership must prioritize stability, security, and the protection of the nation's sovereignty, while recognizing Ethiopia's vital role in maintaining regional peace.

In conclusion, Ethiopia's contribution to regional peacekeeping and its strategic presence in Somalia are indispensable to the stability of the Horn of Africa. A careful and collaborative approach to regional security, particularly in resolving disputes between Ethiopia and Somalia, will be crucial for preventing further fragmentation and ensuring long-term peace and stability in the region.

Ambassador General Bacha Debele is a seasoned diplomat and military strategist, recognized for his leadership in regional security and Ethiopia's peacekeeping efforts. With decades of experience, he has played a key role in Ethiopia's shift from direct military intervention to multilateral peacekeeping, particularly in Somalia. Currently serving as Ethiopia's Ambassador to Kenya, he continues to be a pivotal figure in advancing Ethiopia's foreign policy and strengthening its diplomatic presence in the region.



By Jalene Tesfaye

Interviewer: Professor Brook, thank you for joining us.

Professor Brook: Thank you for having me.

Interviewer: Egypt is hosting the second round of peace talks on the Sudan crisis. There are claims that Egypt is biased, favoring the Sudanese Army Forces (SAF) over the Rapid Support Forces (RSF), with some even alleging airstrikes. How does this affect Egypt's credibility as a mediator, and what can it do to ensure impartiality?

Professor Brook: Egypt's involvement in Sudan is historically significant due to their shared ties, especially regarding the Nile. Egypt has long supported the SAF, which has raised concerns of bias. To maintain credibility, Egypt must demonstrate neutrality and engage with both sides.

Navigating Regional Stability: Professor Brook's Insights on Ethiopia, Sudan, and the Horn of Africa

Its support for Al Burhan risks undermining its role as a mediator, especially with accusations of airstrikes. If Egypt seeks to stay impartial, it needs to reassess its support and avoid further escalation.

Interviewer: What about Ethiopia? What does Egypt's involvement mean for Ethiopia in terms of regional dynamics?

Professor Brook: Egypt's role is closely tied to its regional interest, particularly regarding the Nile. Ethiopia, which controls the Blue Nile and the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GERD), has a competing interest with Egypt over water security. Egypt's involvement in Sudan is partly about safeguarding its interests in the Nile, and this impacts Ethiopia as it seeks to maintain its sovereignty over the Nile's resources.

Interviewer: There are concerns that external actors are fueling the Sudan conflict.

Who are the main players involved, and how do their competing interests prolong the war?

Professor Brook: Key external players include Egypt, supporting the SAF, and the UAE, backing the RSF. Additionally, regional powers like Eritrea are involved, as well as global powers like Turkey and Russia. These external interests are prolonging the conflict by providing military and financial support to opposing sides, turning Sudan into a proxy battleground and making it harder to resolve the internal conflict.

Interviewer: Could the conflict have been resolved sooner without these external interventions?

Professor Brook: Yes, without foreign interference, Sudan might have found space for negotiation. The internal rivalry between the SAF and RSF was already a significant obstacle, but external involvement has escalated the conflict, making a resolution more difficult.

Interviewer: How has Ethiopia handled the Sudan crisis, and could it have done more?

Professor Brook: Ethiopia initially played a constructive role, particularly after Bashir's overthrow in 2019, proposing a peace plan that was accepted by all sides.

However, after the military took control again in 2021, Ethiopia's influence diminished. Despite this, Ethiopia's early efforts showed a genuine desire for stability in Sudan.

Ethiopia has historically supported Sudan in peace efforts, but the military's disruption changed things. Ethiopia's role has been significant, even with the challenges. It maintained an open-door policy for refugees and migrants, which showed goodwill. Ethiopia played a constructive role in 2019 and even sent the Prime Minister to Port Sudan last year.

Ethiopia's role should be highlighted. It has supported Sudanese stability and offered a neutral hand, despite the chaos. Ethiopia could have taken advantage of the situation, but instead, it maintained a constructive position, which has earned it respect in Sudan. The solution lies with the Sudanese themselves. External actors should not interfere; Sudanese must prioritize their national interests.

Interviewer: Could the conflict have been resolved sooner without external interference?

Professor Brook: Yes, it could have. The Sudanese allowed external forces to intervene, making it harder to reach a resolution. Without that interference, the conflict might have been contained or resolved sooner.

Interviewer: Moving on, the conflict has significant implications for Ethiopia, particularly with displacement and migration. What national security risks could Ethiopia face, such as militant infiltration or cross-border instability?

Professor Brook: The risk of extremism is high. As Sudan becomes more lawless, it creates power vacuums that extremist groups could exploit, similar to what we've seen in West Africa, especially in Mali, Niger, and Burkina Faso. Terrorist groups like Al-Qaeda and ISIS could find fertile ground. The Horn of Africa, including Ethiopia, Eritrea, and Egypt, is at risk as these groups could infiltrate from Sudan. The priority should be peace in Sudan to prevent such spillover.

Al-Qaeda and ISIS are the primary threats. While Al-Qaeda is older and focused on establishing networks in various regions, ISIS aims for aggressive territorial expansion and has already established itself in parts of Africa. These groups are ideologically different but are aligning to further their shared agenda, which is dangerous for regional stability.

Ethiopia can reclaim its role through strategic foreign policy and regional leadership. It has the largest economy and population in the region, along with significant geo-strategic positioning, particularly in the Red Sea area.

Despite its past challenges, Ethiopia's economic growth and military strength make it a crucial player. Under Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed's leadership, Ethiopia can play a critical role in fostering regional peace and cooperation.

Ethiopia has faced internal challenges, including the TPLF rebellion and the Hamara movement, while maintaining peace and unity. Despite these struggles, the government has focused on economic reforms, fiscal policies, and privatization. Ethiopia is now open for business, and its growing strength is reflected regionally. As the largest economy in the Horn of Africa, Ethiopia plays a central role in maintaining peace and stability. This is achieved through diplomatic means, not by force. Ethiopia's strong diplomatic core and global partnerships, such as with the EU, BRICS, and countries like France and the UAE, underscore its growing influence. Ethiopia has proven its commitment to peacekeeping in Somalia, South Sudan, and other African nations, earning trust from both African and international partners.

Ethiopia must continue assuming responsibility, particularly in the Red Sea region, and avoid allowing power vacuums that could destabilize the area. The country is a critical partner in regional peace efforts, as seen in Sudan, where Ethiopia is trusted to play a mediating role in negotiations.

Interviewer: Given this context, what foreign policy strategy would you recommend for Ethiopia to strengthen its credibility and capacity to promote peace?

Professor Brook: Ethiopia must balance its internal development with its external responsibilities. Domestically, the country still faces challenges like insufficient infrastructure and services. However, Ethiopia's foreign policy should focus on safeguarding national interests, particularly gaining access to the sea. Ethiopia's quest for this right is supported by international law, and the country must pursue it peacefully, as declared by Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed. Ethiopia also needs to ensure its military and diplomatic strength to protect its interests and regional stability. Ethiopia's strategic partnerships with countries like China and Russia, and its role in protecting vulnerable states, make it a stabilizing force in the Horn of Africa. It should not shy away from this responsibility.

Interviewer: Could Sudan fragment further, potentially leading to the creation of new states, and how can the conflict be resolved?

Professor Brook: Yes, there is a risk of further fragmentation in Sudan. The country has already experienced the division with South Sudan in 2011. The ongoing conflict in Darfur and other regional tensions pose a real threat.

If Sudan's central government can maintain control, the fragmentation process may stop. However, if the government loses power, the country risks further division. The international community must support Sudan in maintaining unity, and Ethiopia's role in peace efforts is critical in preventing this fragmentation.

Interviewer: Is there a path forward for Sudan to ensure long-term stability?

Professor Brook: The path forward for Sudan lies in regaining central control and uniting the various factions. The international community must support this process. If Sudan's central government holds its ground, it can prevent fragmentation. The situation in Sudan is delicate, but with the right efforts and support, peace and stability can be restored.

Interviewer: Thank you, Professor, for your valuable insights.

Professor Brook: Thank you for having me. I appreciate the opportunity to share my perspective. Keep up the good work with your academic and media efforts.

Horn Review's Deputy Director Jalene Tesfaye sat down with Professor Brook Hailu Beshah to discuss the case of Sudan and issues shaping the Horn of Africa today. Professor Brook Hailu Beshah is an accomplished academic, diplomat, and media expert with extensive experience in political science, international relations, and strategic communication. He has taught at prestigious institutions like Ohio University and George Washington University, while also serving as Ethiopia's Deputy Permanent Representative to the United Nations and Deputy Ambassador to the U.S. and UNESCO.

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Escalating Tensions Between Israel and Turkey: Implications for the Horn of Africa and International Trade

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Tensions between Israel and Turkey have significantly deepened in recent years, driven by their contrasting positions on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and their competing geopolitical ambitions across the Middle East and Africa. Nowhere is this rivalry more apparent than in the Horn of Africa, a region of immense strategic importance. As both nations expand their influence through military and diplomatic means, their competing geopolitical interests and subsequent actions are reshaping the political and security landscape, with profound implications for regional stability and global trade.

Turkey has emerged as a key player in the Horn of Africa, building alliances through extensive defense agreements and development projects. In Somalia, Turkey has established a strong presence, constructing a military base in Mogadishu and providing Somali forces with arms and

training. Similarly, its relationship with Ethiopia has grown, underscored by defense agreements involving arms sales and capacity-building efforts. Turkey's actions align with its broader strategy to expand influence in East Africa and secure access to critical maritime routes.

In contrast, Israel has focused its efforts on Somaliland, a self-declared independent region in northern Somalia. Reports indicate that Israel is seeking access to military and naval facilities at the Berbera port, a strategic location near the Bab el-Mandeb Strait, one of the world's most vital maritime chokepoints. In exchange, Israel has reportedly agreed to provide arms and military training to Somaliland, reflecting its intent to counter Iranian influence in Yemen and Turkey's influence in the Horn region, and safeguard its maritime interests in the Red Sea.

Israel and Turkey's Footprints in the Horn of Africa: A Focus on Ethiopia and Somalia

Turkey's involvement in Somalia has been particularly notable. Its military base in Mogadishu is a key element of its defense cooperation with the Somali government. This partnership is critical for Somalia's efforts to combat terrorism and build its security infrastructure. Meanwhile, Turkey's defense agreements with Ethiopia have bolstered Addis Ababa's military capabilities during a time of regional conflict and tension, further solidifying Ankara's role as a trusted ally in the Horn.

Turkey has actively promoted regional collaboration, exemplified by the Ankara Declaration signed between Ethiopia and Somalia in early 2024. The declaration aims to ease tensions between the neighboring nations, which were triggered by Ethiopia's signing of a memorandum of understanding over port usage with Somaliland. This Ankara Declaration emphasizes defense, counterterrorism and development cooperation among both nations, with Turkey acting as a key partner. These initiatives demonstrate Turkey's commitment to playing a central role in shaping the region's security dynamics.

While Turkey has focused on building relationships with recognized governments, Israel has turned to Somaliland as a partner for its strategic objectives.

Berbera port, located in Somaliland, is central to Israel's plans. Positioned near the Bab el-Mandeb Strait, the port provides access to one of the most important maritime routes for global trade. Israel's reported pursuit of a military and naval presence there underscores its desire to enhance its regional influence and protect its trade routes.

However, Somaliland's dealings with foreign powers, including Ethiopia, Israel and the UAE, have fueled disagreements with Mogadishu, which sees these moves as illegitimate. The Somali government, which does not recognize Somaliland's independence, views these agreements as a direct challenge to its sovereignty. This dispute over Berbera port has brought the long-standing tensions between Somalia and Somaliland into sharper focus, reflecting the broader geopolitical contest in the Horn and highlighting the risks of external actors exacerbating local tensions. The prospect of Israel establishing a military presence in Somaliland has only added to the complexities, further straining relations between the two entities.

This rivalry is not just a regional issue; it has significant implications for broader global security.

The Horn of Africa's proximity to the Red Sea and the Bab el-Mandeb Strait makes it a strategic corridor for global trade.

Any instability stemming from disputes over the Red Sea corridor or the growing tension between Turkey and Israel in the Middle East could have far-reaching consequences for regional security and international shipping. A notable example is the Yemeni Houthi military attack, which temporarily blocked the Red Sea and Gulf corridors.

Security Risks and the Future of the Horn of Africa

The escalating rivalry between Israel and Turkey in the Horn of Africa reflects their broader geopolitical ambitions and diverging strategies. It poses considerable risks for an already fragile region. As both countries engage in military, economic, and diplomatic maneuvers to expand their influence, they exacerbate existing tensions, particularly between Somalia and Somaliland. The competition over Berbera port, combined with military engagements, has led to deeper regional divisions.

Ethiopia's complex diplomatic balancing act further complicates this situation, as its alliances with both Turkey and Israel contribute to the volatility in the Horn of Africa. Moreover, the militarization of the Bab el-Mandeb Strait and the broader Red Sea corridor is a growing concern, especially given the increasing presence of foreign military bases in Djibouti and beyond. The Red Sea is one of the most critical maritime routes for global trade,

and the presence of foreign powers like Turkey and Israel increases the risks of militarization and potential confrontations. Any disruption in this vital trade corridor could have far-reaching economic consequences, affecting shipping routes and global trade flows.

The actions of Turkey and Israel, coupled with Ethiopia's complex relationships with both, are reshaping the security environment of the region. As both powers push to expand their influence, Ethiopia's diplomatic balancing act, its involvement in Somali-Somaliland tensions, and its strategic partnerships with Israel, Turkey, and the UAE will play a key role in determining the future stability of the region.

While Turkey's growing partnerships with Somalia and Ethiopia and Israel's focus on Somaliland are reshaping regional dynamics, Ethiopia's complex positioning adds an additional layer of complexity to this geopolitical puzzle. The disputes over Berbera port and military access, the military buildup in the Red Sea, and Ethiopia's delicate diplomacy with Somalia, and a complex web of alliances with Israel, Turkey, and the UAE will have significant implications in terms of determining the Horn's security environment.

The Horn of Africa stands at the crossroads of regional and global security challenges, with potential repercussions for stability, trade, and governance across the Red Sea and Gulf regions.

The Role of Strategic Intelligence (SI) in Ethiopia's National Security and Regional Stability

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Ethiopia's strategic importance in the Horn of Africa is multifaceted. Geopolitically, its central location and proximity to the Red Sea allow it to influence neighbouring countries and play a key role in regional stability and security. Economically, Ethiopia is a major hub for trade and investment, with significant infrastructure projects like the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GERD) impacting the region. Its economic policies and growth have a substantial effect on the Horn of Africa. Additionally, Ethiopia is crucial in security and counter-terrorism efforts, particularly against groups like al-Shabaab in Somalia. Its diplomatic engagements, such as ongoing efforts to gain access and establish a presence at the sea and manage regional water resources, highlight its role in regional diplomacy and economic integration.

These factors collectively underscore Ethiopia's pivotal role in shaping the political, economic, and security landscape of the Horn of Africa.

Strategic intelligence (SI) refers to a type of intelligence required to “achieving the overarching objectives of ... governments” (MacDowell, 2001, p. 10). It is “required for the formulation of policy and plans at ... national or international levels” (ibid 2001, p. 10). SI plays a crucial role in public policy by providing policymakers with the necessary information to make informed decisions (Gookins, 2008). It involves the collection, analysis, and synthesis of information to identify threats, risks, and opportunities that can impact national security, economic stability, and social well-being.

This type of intelligence helps in understanding long-term trends and potential future scenarios, enabling governments to develop proactive strategies and policies. By delivering timely and accurate intelligence, SI helps policymakers anticipate and mitigate potential crises or seize opportunities.

It enables the effective allocation of resources to enhance national security and overall well-being.

It fosters interagency collaboration, ensuring that various government departments are aligned in their efforts to address complex challenges and capitalise on opportunities. In Ethiopia, SI is crucial for national security and regional stability. It provides timely and accurate information to counter internal conflicts, external threats, and emerging challenges, as well as to anticipate opportunities. This enables informed decision-making and proactive measures to safeguard the nation's interests and promote peace in the Horn of Africa. This brief article examines the Strategic Intelligence challenges that the author believes are faced by Ethiopian intelligence authorities and provides a few recommendations.

Current Challenges in Ethiopia's Strategic Intelligence

Ethiopia faces a complex array of security challenges that significantly impact its SI operations.

These challenges are multi-layered, involving internal conflicts, external pressures, terrorism, technological threats, and socio-economic challenges.

Internal Conflicts. Ethiopia's internal security landscape is marked by persistent ethnic tensions and insurgencies. The conflict in the Tigray region, which began in November 2020, has been particularly destabilising. While the Pretoria Agreement has significantly reduced open conflict in Tigray, the conflict continues to evolve in different forms. The conflicts in Amhara and Oromia continue to claim the lives of citizens, disrupt the smooth functioning of the government, and destroy substantial resources. Regions such as Afar and Somali have also experienced sporadic violence and ethnic clashes, further complicating the internal security situation. Various types of organised crimes, including human trafficking, illicit arms trade, and contraband, continue to disrupt the peace and stability of the population. These civil unrests have not only caused a humanitarian crisis but also strained the country's intelligence resources.

External Pressures. Ethiopia's strategic position in the Horn of Africa exposes it to a range of external threats and opportunities. The country shares borders with several volatile states, including Somalia, Sudan, and South Sudan, each grappling with internal conflicts and security issues that can spill over into Ethiopia. There are also unresolved issues with Eritrea. Additionally, ongoing tensions with Egypt and Sudan over the GERD project pose significant geopolitical challenges.

Furthermore, Ethiopia's ambition to gain access and establish a presence at the sea creates unease among neighbouring countries. The Horn of Africa is a region characterised by political volatility and security challenges.

Ethiopia's SI operations also involve cooperation with regional organisations such as the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD). These collaborations aim to address common security challenges, including terrorism, piracy, and cross-border conflicts (Mulugeta, 2024). The strategic location of the Horn of Africa attracts global powers, many of which already have military bases in Djibouti, Somalia, and Sudan. Major world powers have vested interests in the region's politics, directly or indirectly influencing the conflicts. To date, the United States, the United Kingdom, the European Union, the African Union, Russia, and China have all appointed special envoys to the Horn of Africa.

Terrorism. The threat of terrorism remains a critical concern for Ethiopia. The presence of extremist groups such as Al-Shabaab, Houthis, the ISIS, Clan Militias and Pirate Groups in Somalia and Yemen poses a direct threat to Ethiopian security.

These groups have the capability to conduct cross-border attacks and have previously targeted Ethiopian interests.

Cybersecurity Threats. As Ethiopia continues to modernise and integrate technology into its infrastructure, the risk of cyber threats has increased. Cybersecurity is a growing concern, with potential threats ranging from cyber espionage to attacks on critical infrastructure. The intelligence agencies must develop robust cyber defence mechanisms to protect against these emerging threats.

Economic and Social Challenges. Ethiopia's economic instability also impacts its security environment. High inflation rates, unemployment, and poverty contribute to social unrest and can be exploited by insurgent groups.

Prospects in Ethiopia's Strategic Intelligence

To enhance Ethiopia's SI capabilities, several key areas could be improved:

- 1. Staff.** The Department of SI should be staffed with the nation's brightest minds and multi-disciplinary professionals. The importance of the staff as the key determinant of both efficiency and effectiveness cannot be overstated.

The department's staff should be depoliticised and professionalised to ensure a diverse range of expertise and perspectives, enhancing the department's ability to address complex challenges effectively.

2. Training. The department should revisit its training programmes, placing greater emphasis on both qualitative and quantitative forecasting techniques. The service must develop scientific methods, rather than relying on speculation, to anticipate security threats and identify opportunities in advance. This approach will enable the department to provide the government with informed advice on mitigating risks and seizing opportunities.

3. Collaboration. The department should collaborate with other knowledge centres in the country, such as universities, research centres, and think tanks. In this rapidly changing world, it is the collective effort of all research and knowledge centres that will ensure the government and society are not caught by surprise.

4. Local Wisdom. Efforts should be made to learn from the traditions of various communities (nations and nationalities) in how they gather, process, and analyse information crucial to their survival. There is much to be learned from the mosaic of Ethiopian traditions.

SI can benefit from understanding both the strengths and weaknesses of traditional methods. Cultural appropriateness is an asset for SI, as customary and traditional methods often have their strengths.

By addressing these areas, Ethiopia can significantly strengthen its SI framework, ensuring better preparedness and response to both internal and external security challenges, as well as enhancing its ability to seize opportunities.

Conclusion

SI involves gathering, processing, analysing, and distributing information essential for developing policies on both national and international levels. Ethiopia currently faces numerous internal and external security challenges. However, it can significantly strengthen its SI framework, enhancing its readiness and response to these threats, while also improving its ability to seize opportunities. Immediate attention should be given to four key areas: staffing, training, collaboration, and incorporating local wisdom.

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Strategic Horizons: Russia's Potential Military Base in Eritrea and Its Implications for Ethiopia

By Horn Review Editorial

After 13 years of conflict, Syrian rebels have successfully ousted Bashar al-Assad's regime in a dramatic 10-day campaign. With Damascus now under rebel control, Assad has sought refuge in Russia, marking a turning point that could have far-reaching implications for Russia's military strategy in the Middle East.

Assad's government has long been a cornerstone of Russian influence in the region, providing Moscow with a vital ally and strategic access to the Tartus naval base in Syria. However, with anti-Assad forces now in power, Russian forces stationed in Syria may face heightened hostility, jeopardizing their safety and operational capabilities. In response, Russia might consider relocating or supplementing its presence elsewhere in the region, with Eritrea emerging as a plausible alternative.

Eritrea's location along the Red Sea provides access to a critical maritime artery connecting the Indian Ocean to the Mediterranean via the Suez Canal.

Establishing a base there would enable Russia to safeguard vital sea routes, enhance its naval presence, and counterbalance Western and Chinese influence

The Eritrean government, known for its non-aligned stance, has demonstrated a willingness to cooperate with Russia, as evidenced by Moscow's recent shipment of free grain in recognition of Eritrea's support at the United Nations. This growing rapport could ease negotiations for a military base.

A base in Eritrea aligns with Russia's broader strategy to expand its influence in Africa. Over the past few years, Moscow has deepened ties across the continent through security agreements, resource investments, and diplomatic initiatives. A presence in Eritrea would bolster Russia's standing as a key player in African geopolitics. Moscow could also frame its presence as a stabilizing force in the Bab al-Mandab region, which has experienced significant turmoil, thereby gaining legitimacy and fostering cooperation with local governments.

However, a Russian military presence in Eritrea could present significant challenges for Ethiopia. Historically, Ethiopia and Eritrea have shared a fraught relationship marked by border conflicts and political rivalry.

A strengthened Eritrea, backed by a powerful ally like Russia, could embolden Asmara to adopt a more assertive posture, potentially reigniting tensions. Ethiopia's aspirations for access to the Red Sea—a lifeline for its growing economy—might also be hindered. This is particularly concerning given Ethiopia's reliance on Djibouti for port access and its recent agreements with Somaliland to lease port facilities, moves that have already strained relations with Somalia.

As a key U.S. ally, Saudi Arabia would likely view a Russian military base in Eritrea with concern. The Red Sea is a strategic corridor for Saudi Arabia, essential for securing its oil exports and maintaining its regional dominance. Increased Russian presence could challenge both Saudi and U.S. interests, potentially leading Riyadh to reassess its security strategies in the Horn of Africa. Saudi Arabia's alignment with the U.S. against Russian expansionism could further polarize the region, complicating Ethiopia's own diplomatic balancing act between Western and non-aligned powers.

The ongoing conflict in Sudan has already destabilized the region, and a Russian base in neighboring Eritrea could exacerbate these tensions.

Sudan's factions might seek external alliances, with some potentially aligning with Russia in exchange for military or financial support.

Conversely, a Russian presence could embolden other regional actors, increasing the complexity of Sudan's fragile political landscape.

The strengthening alliance between Eritrea, Egypt, and Somalia poses a direct challenge to Ethiopia's regional influence. Egypt's military cooperation with Somalia, coupled with its growing ties to Eritrea, is viewed by Ethiopia as part of Cairo's broader strategy to counter Ethiopia in disputes over the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GERD). The recent summit in Asmara, where leaders from these three nations pledged to bolster security ties, underscores a regional alignment that could counter Ethiopian interests. This alliance, if further militarized, could limit Ethiopia's ability to project power and safeguard its interests in the Horn of Africa.

Establishing a military base in Eritrea would not come without challenges for Russia. Eritrea's relationships with its neighbors, particularly Ethiopia and Djibouti, remain fraught with historical disputes and unresolved tensions. A Russian base could exacerbate these rivalries and potentially destabilize the already fragile Horn of Africa. Eritrea's authoritarian regime and poor human rights record could also undermine Russia's ability to present its presence as a stabilizing force, attracting criticism from the international community and complicating relations with other African nations.

The potential establishment of a Russian military base in Eritrea reflects Moscow's efforts to adapt to shifting geopolitical realities. While it offers strategic benefits, including enhanced access to the Red Sea and a stronger foothold in Africa, the risks—both regional and international—are substantial. For Ethiopia, the stakes are high. The presence of a major military power in Eritrea could complicate its economic aspirations, regional security goals, and relationships with key allies. Proactive diplomacy and strategic planning will be essential to navigate this evolving landscape and safeguard Ethiopia's interests in a rapidly changing Horn of Africa.

THE DOWNFALL OF BASHAR AL-ASSAD: GEOPOLITICAL IMPLICATIONS

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After 13 years of civil war, Syrian rebels have overthrown Bashar al-Assad's regime in a swift 10-day campaign. Damascus has fallen to the coalition of rebel groups led by Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS), signaling the end of Assad's 24-year rule. Now taking refuge in Russia, Assad's departure represents a seismic shift with both regional and global implications.

On December 8, HTS declared the liberation of Syria. With Russia heavily engaged in its war in Ukraine, Assad's forces were unable to mount significant resistance. However, Moscow's reaction has been notably calm. This suggests that Russia may pivot toward negotiating with the new power structure to retain its strategic military bases, particularly its naval facility in Tartus, which secures Russia's access to the Mediterranean.

Turkiye has welcomed the developments in Syria.

The Turkish-backed Syrian National Army (SNA), a key faction in the rebel coalition, has achieved one of Ankara's central goals: eliminating Assad, a staunch opponent of Turkish interests. With Assad gone, Turkiye is now in a stronger position to target Kurdish separatist groups in Syria, particularly the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF). Ankara regards the SDF, led by the YPG, as an extension of the PKK, its long-standing Kurdish separatist adversary. Furthermore, Turkiye's plans to resettle Syrian refugees within the country are likely to gain momentum.

Despite these gains, Turkey's ambitions may face obstacles due to American support for the SDF. The SDF was instrumental in the U.S.-led fight against the Islamic State (IS) and continues to receive U.S. backing. With approximately 900 U.S. troops still in Syria, Washington will likely intensify support for the SDF to

prevent an IS resurgence and to influence Syria's post-Assad future. This dynamic sets the stage for potential friction between the U.S. and Turkey, both NATO allies but with conflicting goals in Syria.

The fall of Assad also has significant implications for Iran and its regional network of allies. Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has attributed Assad's downfall to the weakening of Hezbollah, which has faced sustained Israeli military action. Iran, which relies on both Assad's government and Hezbollah to maintain its influence in the region, now faces a strategic setback. This marks a significant victory for the Saudi-Emirati bloc, which has long sought to counter Iran's influence.

As Iran's "Axis of Resistance" weakens, the Saudi-Emirati coalition is likely to consolidate its gains in the region. This shift may also impact Iran's other proxies, such as the Houthis in Yemen, who are engaged in a protracted conflict with a Saudi-led coalition. Reduced Iranian support for the Houthis could tilt the balance of power in Yemen in favor of Saudi Arabia and its allies, further diminishing Tehran's regional influence.

Domestically, Syria faces an uncertain future. The vacuum left by Assad's forces presents challenges for the rebel coalition and other interested parties.

Establishing a stable government and maintaining security in a deeply fragmented country will be daunting tasks. Preventing the reemergence of the Islamic State is another critical priority. However, the central role of HTS in the rebel coalition raises concerns. With its origins in al-Qaeda, the possibility of Islamist ideologies shaping Syria's new government cannot be dismissed.

The collapse of Assad's regime marks a new chapter for Syria and the broader region. While it opens opportunities for some, it also introduces risks and uncertainties, particularly regarding governance, security, and the balance of power in the Middle East. For regional and global actors, the coming months will be crucial in shaping Syria's trajectory and managing its far-reaching implications.

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How the Horn of Africa is Preparing for Trump's Return to the White House

By Horn Review Editorial

Donald J. Trump's electoral victory and his return to the presidency have sparked mixed reactions globally. While his initial presidency garnered mixed assessments, there are significant uncertainties about what his second term—often dubbed "Trump 2.0"—will mean for both the United States and the world. One of the central questions revolves around the future of U.S. foreign policy, particularly whether it will signal the end of the U.S.-led liberal order, a retreat from multilateralism, or a shift towards isolationism. His stance on NATO, for instance, raised concerns that his second term could mark a decline in U.S. hegemonic power, particularly in Europe.

During his first term, Trump's foreign policy was unpredictable and transactional, particularly regarding the Middle East. While he promised to de-escalate tensions between Ukraine and Russia, his approach to the region remained unclear, especially concerning the ongoing Gaza conflict, Israel-Iran relations, and Iran's nuclear program. Trump's approach has similarly cast a shadow over Africa, where his foreign policy toward the continent was characterized by an absence of strategic clarity.

His transactional diplomacy left African nations questioning the direction of U.S.-Africa relations in his second term.

For the Horn of Africa, a region of immense strategic importance due to its location near critical maritime trade routes, the question remains whether Trump's policies will be a continuation of his first term's priorities or a shift in strategy. Given his previous record of engagement, which often lacked coherence, the Horn of Africa finds itself in a complex geopolitical environment, balancing multiple external relationships.

U.S. Approach to the Horn of Africa

The Horn of Africa, a region central to global trade, particularly through the Gulf of Aden and the Red Sea, faces numerous challenges that have undermined its potential for sustained peace and prosperity. Conflicts rooted in territorial disputes, nationalism, and political violence, compounded by severe economic crises, have prevented the region from achieving stable development. Despite these challenges, the United States has been actively engaged in the region, primarily focusing on counter-terrorism efforts.

Historically, U.S. policy in the Horn has been shaped by the need to contain terrorism and maintain security in key maritime routes. After the September 11 attacks, U.S. engagement was redirected to counter the spread of extremist ideologies and groups like al-Shabaab. As part of this strategy, the U.S. strengthened its alliances with Ethiopia and Djibouti, positioning the Horn as a key region for counterterrorism operations. However, U.S. policy towards the region has often been criticized for being narrow and focused primarily on security concerns, neglecting broader developmental and humanitarian issues that are equally important for the region's long-term stability.

The future of U.S. policy in the Horn of Africa under Trump 2.0 remains uncertain. There are concerns that, following his "America First" policy, Trump may reduce U.S. financial aid to the region, impacting crucial sectors like climate finance and humanitarian assistance, areas in which the Horn is in dire need of support. Additionally, the possible expiration of the African Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA) next year could negatively affect trade relations, especially given the region's current economic struggles. These developments would put the Horn of Africa in a precarious position, especially in the face of growing challenges.

Security Alliances and Implications

The security alliance between the U.S. and Horn of Africa countries is another key area where Trump's second term could have significant consequences. During his first presidency, Trump proposed the withdrawal of U.S. military forces from Somalia, a country engaged in a prolonged struggle against the terrorist group al-Shabaab. This move, while aligned with his "America First" strategy, highlighted a lack of understanding of the region's complexities and long-term needs.

In his second term, it is likely that Trump will maintain a security-focused approach, reinforcing alliances with Ethiopia and other Horn countries in the fight against extremism. However, the uncertainty surrounding U.S. military engagement and its implications for regional security remains a concern.

The Somali government's recent moves, such as threatening the withdrawal of Ethiopian troops and seeking new security arrangements with Egypt, could further complicate the region's security dynamics. U.S. involvement in managing these tensions, especially regarding Ethiopia's role in the region, will be critical to maintaining stability.

Bilateral Relations and Strategic Partnerships

Ethiopia is one of the key players in the Horn and has long enjoyed strong diplomatic and strategic ties with the United States. These relations, which span economic cooperation, trade, and counterterrorism efforts, are unlikely to change significantly under Trump 2.0. Ethiopia has served as an anchor state for the U.S. in the fight against terrorism, particularly in the post-9/11 era. Its importance to U.S. interests in the Horn, especially given its geographic and strategic positioning, ensures that the relationship will continue to thrive despite the transactional nature of U.S. foreign policy.

Moreover, Ethiopia's relations with other regional powers, such as Turkey, Israel, and the UAE, add another layer of complexity to its diplomatic landscape. Turkey has a growing presence in Somalia and Ethiopia, while Israel has developed strategic ties with Somaliland. The UAE's involvement in Somaliland further complicates the situation, especially as the Horn countries navigate competing international interests. Ethiopia's ability to manage these relationships diplomatically will be crucial, as its growing ties with these powers could influence U.S. policy in the region.

One of the most significant potential changes in U.S. policy could be the recognition of Somaliland as an independent state.

This move, which has been rumored during Trump's first term, would be a major shift in U.S. foreign policy and could strain relations with Somalia, which does not recognize Somaliland's sovereignty. Given Ethiopia's close ties with both Somalia and Somaliland, the U.S. will need to tread carefully to avoid exacerbating tensions in the region.

Similarly, Sudan's ongoing internal security crisis and its transition to a civilian-led government will likely remain a focus for Trump in his second term. Following the removal of Omar al-Bashir and Sudan's subsequent normalization of relations with Israel, the U.S. removed Sudan from its list of state sponsors of terrorism, marking a significant diplomatic achievement. Trump's administration may seek to leverage its influence to help Sudan navigate its current political turmoil, avoiding military intervention but possibly pushing for a peace initiative.

Despite the various scenarios outlined above, it remains uncertain what Trump 2.0 will mean for the Horn of Africa. The region's leaders will need to remain agile, preparing for the potential risks and opportunities presented by a U.S. administration that may favor transactional diplomacy.

The Horn's strategic importance, both in terms of security and economic growth, requires U.S. policy to balance short-term

gains with long-term stability and prosperity.

For the Horn of Africa, the key will be to foster mutually beneficial relationships with the U.S. while addressing the region's internal challenges. While U.S. policy may remain focused on counterterrorism and security concerns, the Horn countries have an opportunity to steer the dialogue toward sustainable development, trade, and regional cooperation. The future of U.S.-Horn relations hinges on how well these nations can navigate the complexities of global geopolitics and manage their internal dynamics.



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Bole Atlas, Addis Ababa

Read our previous issues on our
website : www.hornreview.org

Price: ETB 100.00

Published by Demera Media
and Communications PLC
Addis Ababa, Ethiopia