HORN REVIEW
THE INSTITUTE OF REGIONAL AFFAIRS

The Prospect of an Eisenkot Government and Its Strategic Implications for Ethiopia



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Introduction

Israel's 27 October 2026 election has opened a path to a possible premiership for Gadi Eisenkot, while exposing a deeper contest over the country's political direction and regional priorities. Likud emerged as the largest individual party with 27 seats in the 120-member Knesset, followed by Eisenkot's Yashar with 21. The parliamentary arithmetic, however, has left the formation of a government dependent on negotiations among parties with sharply different positions on national identity, military service, religious authority and relations with Arab political representatives. President Isaac Herzog assigned Eisenkot the task of forming a government on 8 November, giving him 28 days, with a possible 14-day extension. As of 13 November, the negotiations remain unresolved.

The political transition carries consequences beyond Israel's domestic institutions. Eisenkot's military background and stated regional priorities suggest continuity in Israel's emphasis on military superiority, intelligence cooperation and deterrence, alongside a greater effort to connect security operations with diplomatic coordination and longer-term political arrangements. For Ethiopia, this prospect presents both opportunities and strategic complications.

Israel has publicly supported Ethiopia's efforts to secure maritime access and has developed extensive ties with Somaliland, which it formally recognized in December 2025. At the same time, an Eisenkot government could seek closer security cooperation with Egypt, whose positions on Somaliland, Red Sea governance and Nile water arrangements intersect with major Ethiopian interests. These developments raise questions about how a possible change in Israel's political leadership might influence its regional partnerships and shape the context in which Ethiopia pursues its strategic interests.

A Coalition Without a Common Political Program

The election produced three broad parliamentary groupings. The Netanyahu-aligned parties command 53 seats, comprising Likud with 27, Otzma Yehudit with seven, Religious Zionism and Zehut with six, Shas with six, and United Torah Judaism with seven. The four Jewish-led opposition parties supporting Eisenkot account for 48 seats. These comprise Yashar with 21, the BeYahad alliance of Naftali Bennett and Yair Lapid with 12, the Democrats led by Yair Golan with eight, and Avigdor Lieberman's Yisrael Beiteinu with seven. The two Arab political formations hold the remaining 19 seats, with the Joint List securing 11 and Mansour Abbas's Ra'am eight.[1]

The presidential consultations revealed the breadth of the parliamentary support behind Eisenkot's candidacy. The four Jewish-led opposition parties and both Arab lists recommended him, producing 67 recommendations.[2] Netanyahu received 46, while United Torah Judaism, with seven seats, declined to endorse either candidate. Herzog's decision to assign Eisenkot the task of forming a government reflected this parliamentary support. The 67 recommendations, however, represent backing for giving Eisenkot the

[1] Unit for Political Studies. "Israel's Knesset Elections: Results, Coalitions and Forming a Government." Arab Center for Research and Policy Studies, November 5, 2026.
[2] BBC News. "Israel's President Tasks Opposition Leader Eisenkot with Forming Government." November 7, 2026.

first opportunity to form an administration. They do not constitute a coalition agreement or establish that all the recommending parties intend to participate in his government.

The difficulty lies in converting an anti-Netanyahu electoral alignment into a governing program. Eisenkot's Yashar presents itself as a security-oriented centrist party committed to Israel as a Jewish and democratic state, the preservation of its military capabilities, stronger democratic institutions and the maintenance of regional peace agreements.[3] Bennett brings a national-conservative constituency shaped by religious Zionism and a hard security outlook, while Lapid connects their BeYahad alliance to secular liberal politics.[4] Golan's Democrats represent a Zionist center-left tradition with a stronger emphasis on judicial independence, civil equality and diplomatic engagement. Lieberman contributes a secular nationalist position, combining a forceful security policy with opposition to the political privileges of ultra-Orthodox institutions.[5]

The Arab parties add a distinct political dimension. The Joint List brings together Hadash, Ta'al and Balad, which differ in their ideological traditions but share an emphasis on Palestinian national rights, equality and opposition to the occupation. Their programs challenge aspects of Israel's exclusive Jewish-national definition of the state and call for greater recognition of the political and collective rights of Palestinian citizens.

Ra'am, led by Mansour Abbas, has pursued a more pragmatic approach to parliamentary participation, prioritizing improvements in housing, education, employment, infrastructure, municipal funding and public safety in Arab communities.[6] Its participation in Bennett and Lapid's 2021 government demonstrated the political importance of negotiating practical policy commitments through coalition arrangements. Ra'am also maintains positions on Palestinian statehood, the occupation and equality within Israel. The distinction between the two Arab formations therefore concerns their approaches to political participation and the priorities they place on achieving change, rather than a fundamental separation between local and national political concerns.

Eisenkot's conditions for political cooperation expose the ideological difficulties within this arrangement. His commitment to Israel's Jewish national character is already reflected in the 2018 Basic Law: **Israel as the Nation-State of the Jewish People**, which establishes Jewish national self-determination as a defining principle of the state.[7] The political dispute concerns the relationship between this constitutional framework, democratic equality and the collective rights of Arab citizens. The Joint List's political program places considerable emphasis on Palestinian national identity and equal civic and national rights, while Ra'am has shown greater willingness to negotiate within Israel's existing political institutions.

[3] Speakman Cordall, Simon. "The Anti-Netanyahu: Can Gadi Eisenkot Give the World a Different Israel?" Al Jazeera, November 8, 2026.
[4] Israel Policy Forum. "Election Blocs Explainer." October 2026.
[5] Sherman, Shimon. "Israel's Political Parties Explained: The Democrats." JNS, October 15, 2026.
[6] Lekhi, Raunaq. "Who Are Israel's Arab Parties, What They Want, Why They Matter." ThePrint, October 28, 2026.
[7] Eglash, Ruth. "Explainer: Gadi Eisenkot's Four Conditions for Forming Israel's Next Government." Jewish Times, November 9, 2026.

Eisenkot has also made the elimination of Hamas's military and governing capabilities a central condition of his security platform.[8] His proposed Service for All framework creates another potential source of conflict. The policy envisages military service for citizens required by the Israel Defense Forces and approved civilian-national service for those assigned other forms of public contribution. It therefore extends beyond compulsory military conscription. Arab parties may nevertheless object to a universal national-service obligation imposed within a state whose treatment of Palestinian citizens remains a central political dispute. The 2018 Basic Law and the proposed service framework consequently raise related questions about national identity, citizenship and the distribution of obligations.

Lieberman presents the most immediate obstacle to any government dependent on Arab parliamentary support. He has ruled out a minority administration reliant on the Joint List and Ra'am, including arrangements in which the Arab parties remain outside the cabinet but sustain the government through confidence votes.[9] Bennett's political record is more flexible. His 2021 government relied on Ra'am, establishing a precedent for cooperation with an Arab party in a Jewish-led administration.[10] The political environment following the Gaza war, however, has increased the electoral costs of such an arrangement. Lapid has been more receptive to Arab parliamentary participation, while Golan has argued that the opposition must overcome its divisions to replace Netanyahu. Eisenkot must therefore reconcile partners whose agreement on ending Netanyahu's premiership has yet to produce a common position on the role of Arab representatives in government.

The alternative is to negotiate with the ultra-Orthodox parties. Adding Shas's six seats and United Torah Judaism's seven to the 48-seat opposition grouping would produce a parliamentary majority of 61. This arrangement would reduce dependence on Arab parliamentary support and could appeal to Lieberman if it produced substantial reform of military-service exemptions. It would also create a difficult policy compromise for Eisenkot, Bennett, Lapid, Golan and Lieberman, all of whom have supported a more equitable distribution of national obligations.

Shas, led by Aryeh Deri, and United Torah Judaism, organized through its Agudat Yisrael and Degel HaTorah factions and their rabbinical leadership, have historically defended exemptions for yeshiva students.[11] The Israeli Supreme Court's June 2024 ruling established that the state lacked a legal basis for maintaining the blanket exemption system under the existing arrangements. The ruling intensified the dispute over the relationship between religious education, military conscription and equality in national service. Eisenkot's proposed framework offers scope for negotiation through differentiated civilian and military obligations, but the practical questions concern the scale and timing of implementation, exemption criteria, enforcement and the protection of religious education.

According to reports, Eisenkot and Lieberman agreed to explore discussions with Shas and United Torah Judaism over a possible compromise on the draft law.[12] Till mid-November, Eisenkot is still publicly

[8] BBC News. "Israel's President Tasks Opposition Leader Eisenkot with Forming Government." November 7, 2026.
[9] i24NEWS. "Liberman Softens Draft Law Stance in Bid to Break Coalition Deadlock."
[10] Sherman, Shimon. "Israel Votes: The Opposition's Paths to Power." JNS, October 26, 2026.
[11] Karmel, Ariela. "Deri Says Shas, Like UTJ, Won't Join Next Government without a Draft Exemption Law." The Times of Israel, October 14, 2026.
[12] Azulay, Moran. "Eisenkot's Path to Power Challenged as Liberman Rejects Minority Government Backed by Arab Parties." Ynetnews.

maintaining his commitment to Service for All, while Haredi leaders continued to seek substantial exemptions. The Haredi parties would have to accept a greater contribution to national service, while Eisenkot's partners would have to decide how much of their campaign commitments they could accommodate through transitional arrangements.

A unity government presents a separate possibility. Netanyahu has called for a broad government of Zionist and Haredi parties under his own leadership.[13] A hypothetical administration combining Likud with Yashar, BeYahad, the Democrats and Yisrael Beiteinu would command 75 seats, but that calculation describes a possible parliamentary composition and not Netanyahu's stated proposal. It would require a fundamental change in the relationship between Netanyahu and the opposition leaders, particularly Eisenkot, whose campaign has centered on ending the incumbent prime minister's tenure. The unresolved coalition arithmetic therefore leaves Eisenkot with two difficult routes to a majority. He must either reconcile Arab parliamentary support with Lieberman's objections or negotiate with the ultra-Orthodox parties over the distribution of national service obligations.

The Military Outlook Behind Eisenkot's Politics

Understanding Eisenkot's political project requires examining the military experience that shaped his approach to Israeli power. He enlisted in the Golani Brigade in 1978 and advanced through operational and command positions, eventually serving as head of the Northern Command and deputy Chief of General Staff.[14] He became Israel's 21st Chief of General Staff in February 2015, succeeding Benny Gantz, and served until January 2019.[15] His tenure placed him at the center of Israel's confrontation with Hezbollah, Hamas and Iranian military networks in Syria. His professional relationship with Gantz subsequently extended into politics through their participation in the National Unity framework in 2022.

Both joined Netanyahu's emergency government following the Hamas-led attacks of 7 October 2023. Their participation reflected an effort to influence the conduct of the war during a national emergency. Their departure in June 2024 followed a widening disagreement over the government's management of the conflict and the absence of a credible political framework for Gaza after the fighting.[16] Gantz and Eisenkot supported the military campaign against Hamas while arguing that military operations required a defined political end state. Their concerns centered on the release of hostages, the future administration of Gaza and the political conditions needed to bring the conflict towards a sustainable conclusion.[17] Eisenkot's criticism exposed the gap between the government's military objectives and its capacity to translate battlefield operations into a coherent political outcome.

His military record also offers insight into the security doctrine he would bring to the premiership. Eisenkot is associated with the Dahiya Doctrine, following his 2008 public articulation of a policy of overwhelming military retaliation against areas and infrastructure used by an adversary to conduct attacks. The doctrine

[13] Berman, Lazar. "Netanyahu Says Open to Leading 'Unity Government' of Zionist and Haredi Parties, after Eisenkot Wins Mandate from Herzog." The Times of Israel, November 9, 2026.
[14] The Washington Institute for Near East Policy. "Gadi Eisenkot." Accessed November 13, 2026.
[15] Israel Defense Forces Editorial Team. "Meet the New IDF Chief of Staff: Lt. Gen. Gadi Eisenkot." February 17, 2015.
[16] Hendrix, Steve, Victoria Bisset, and Ruby Mellen. "Israel Formed a Unity Government. Who's in the New Emergency War Cabinet?" The Washington Post, October 12, 2023.
[17] Hendrix, Steve. "A Team of Bitter Rivals Is Making Israel's Most Crucial War Decisions." The Washington Post, April 20, 2024.

takes its name from the southern Beirut neighborhood of Dahiya, which suffered extensive destruction during the 2006 Lebanon War. Its underlying logic is to impose substantial costs on an adversary and restore deterrence through the application of superior force.[18] The doctrine has attracted serious legal and humanitarian criticism, particularly concerning civilian infrastructure, collective punishment and the obligations of distinction and proportionality under international humanitarian law.[19]

The Campaign Between the Wars, commonly known by its Hebrew acronym MABAM, represents a complementary approach to the use of force. It involves intelligence-led, often covert and limited operations intended to disrupt adversaries' military development before they acquire the capabilities to pose a more immediate threat. During Eisenkot's tenure as Chief of Staff, Israel expanded this approach, particularly against Iranian military installations and weapons-transfer networks in Syria.[20] His period in office also saw the development of the 2015 IDF Strategy document and the Gideon multi-year plan, which sought to strengthen intelligence, operational readiness and the military capabilities required to confront threats across several theatres.

These doctrines reveal the continuity likely to characterize Eisenkot's security policy. He regards military superiority, intelligence collection, deterrence and preventive action as essential instruments of national security. His distinction from Netanyahu concerns the strategic management of those instruments and the political purposes they are expected to achieve. His military experience suggests that a change in Israeli leadership could produce a more structured relationship between operational planning, diplomatic engagement and the long-term management of regional threats.

His positions on the Palestinian question also indicate the limits of any anticipated political departure from Netanyahu's approach. Following 7 October, Eisenkot described the two-state solution as delusional, while arguing against formal annexation of the West Bank and criticizing settler violence and the proposed E1 settlement expansion.[21] His preferred framework places Palestinian civil autonomy under overriding Israeli security control. This position maintains a substantial distance from advocates of Palestinian sovereignty, even as it differs from the more expansive annexationist agenda pursued by elements of the Netanyahu coalition. An Eisenkot government would therefore be likely to combine a hard security approach with an effort to improve Israel's diplomatic standing and restore greater coherence to its political management of the conflict.

The controversy surrounding Eisenkot's candidacy also reflects the historical relationship between ethnic identity and electoral politics in Israel. In October 2026, Channel 14 presenter Yinon Magal referred to Eisenkot using a racist insult associated with his Moroccan-Mizrahi background.[22] The significance of the incident extends beyond the personal treatment of a political candidate, touching on divisions that have

[18] Institute for Middle East Understanding. "Explainer: The Dahiya Doctrine and Israel's Use of Disproportionate Force."
[19] United Nations Human Rights Council. Human Rights in Palestine and Other Occupied Arab Territories: Report of the United Nations Fact-Finding Mission on the Gaza Conflict. A/HRC/12/48, September 25, 2009.
[20] McAuliffe, Amy. "Israel's 'Campaign between the Wars': How Strategy to Contain Iran and Its Allies Risks Further Straining Ties with US." The Conversation, June 26, 2026. Updated June 29, 2026.
[21] ToI Staff. "Eisenkot Says Two-State Solution 'Delusional' Post-Oct. 7, but E1 Settlement Plan a 'Mistake.'" The Times of Israel, August 27, 2026.
[22] Jerusalem Post Staff. "Netanyahu: Magal's 'Monkey' Remark on Eisenkot Inappropriate, but Likud Voters Face Daily Insults." The Jerusalem Post, October 18, 2026.

historically shaped the distribution of political influence within Israeli society. Menachem Begin's successful mobilization of Mizrahi voters in the 1970s helped establish Likud's electoral appeal among communities that had experienced marginalization under the Ashkenazi-dominated Labor establishment.[23]

This historical relationship has remained an important element of Likud's political identity. Eisenkot's candidacy introduces a competing political dynamic. His Moroccan-Mizrahi background, combined with his standing as a former Chief of General Staff and his security-oriented political platform, gives him an alternative appeal within constituencies historically associated with Likud.

From Netanyahu's Regional Vision to Eisenkot's Security Framework

The difference between Netanyahu and Eisenkot is especially relevant to the relationship between Israeli military power and regional diplomacy. Netanyahu's foreign policy has sought to preserve Israel's strategic freedom of action, maintain a close partnership with Washington, contain Iranian influence and expand bilateral relationships with governments whose security and economic interests overlap with those of Israel.[24] The Abraham Accords provided an institutional foundation for this approach through the normalization of relations with the United Arab Emirates and Bahrain in 2020, followed by Morocco and Sudan's participation in the wider process. Netanyahu also pursued normalization with Saudi Arabia and sought to position Israel as a central link in emerging networks of trade, transport, energy and technological cooperation.

His September 2023 address to the United Nations General Assembly presented a proposed economic corridor connecting Asia and Europe through the UAE, Saudi Arabia, Jordan and Israel.[25] The initiative anticipated a wider regional infrastructure network in which Israeli ports, technology and commercial connections would support the movement of goods between the Gulf, the Mediterranean and European markets. The India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor subsequently became a central expression of this ambition.

On 18 October 2026, Netanyahu presented a national security document that gave his regional vision a more explicit security framework.[26] The document placed preventive military action, technological superiority and regional partnerships among the central pillars of Israeli national security. Its accompanying geopolitical map depicted an emerging regional competition between an Israeli-Emirati alignment and a countervailing grouping involving Türkiye, Egypt, Pakistan and Saudi Arabia. The map used the labels Hexagon Alliance and Sunni Diamond to distinguish the two proposed configurations.

The graphic originated in research published by the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung on 19 May 2026, credited to Marc Saxer and Marcus Schneider. It offered an interpretation of possible regional alignments and strategic

[23] Posen Library. "Menahem Begin's Speech and the Mizrahi Turn to Likud." Accessed November 10, 2026.
[24] Mansour, Mohammad. "Netanyahu's New Security Doctrine: Regional Strategy or Election Ploy?" Al Jazeera, October 19, 2026.
[25] Netanyahu, Benjamin. "PM Netanyahu's Address to the UN General Assembly." Prime Minister's Office, Government of Israel, September 22, 2023.
[26] Mansour, Mohammad. "Netanyahu's New Security Doctrine: Regional Strategy or Election Ploy?" *Al Jazeera*, October 19, 2026.

competition.[27] Its appearance in Netanyahu's October presentation gave the framework greater political prominence, particularly its depiction of Israel and the UAE as the core of one alignment and the inclusion of Ethiopia and Somaliland among countries friendly to that grouping. Egypt appeared within the competing configuration alongside Turkey, Pakistan and Saudi Arabia.

Eisenkot's prospective approach would retain military superiority as a central national security objective while placing greater emphasis on strategic coordination, institutional planning and diplomatic engagement. His criticism of Netanyahu has focused on the failure to connect military operations with a credible political end state, particularly in Gaza, and on the widening gap between Israeli and American strategic priorities. He has advocated a comprehensive regional initiative with Washington that links developments in Gaza, Lebanon, Syria and the confrontation with Iran to a wider security and diplomatic framework.[28]

Eisenkot has also proposed a NATO-like arrangement among moderate Sunni states, with Israel contributing intelligence, surveillance, early-warning capabilities and defensive systems.[29] The proposal reflects his preference for connecting Israel's technological and military advantages to a broader regional structure. It remains a political vision requiring the agreement of participating governments, and its eventual composition and institutional form would depend on negotiations with regional partners. His emphasis on strengthening the peace agreements with Egypt and Jordan, deepening relations with the Abraham Accords countries and expanding Israel's regional partnerships nevertheless provides a strong indication of the priorities he would bring to government.[30]

The positions of his prospective coalition partners reinforce this general orientation while revealing differences in diplomatic emphasis. Bennett has advocated removing Turkish and Qatari influence from postwar Gaza and replacing their roles with greater Egyptian involvement.[31] He has also described the UAE as a strategic ally, particularly following Iranian attacks on Emirati territory in May 2026.[32] These positions reflect his preference for a regional security framework centered on cooperation with selected Arab governments, particularly Egypt and the UAE, while restricting the involvement of Turkey and Qatar in Gaza's future arrangements.

Lapid places greater emphasis on institutionalized regional diplomacy and economic integration. He has identified Egypt and the UAE as central partners in Israel's regional policy [33]and supported renewed engagement with the India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor, the Negev Forum and the I2U2 framework involving India, Israel, the UAE and the United States.[34] He has also made Saudi-Israeli normalization a strategic objective, linking economic integration with a common approach towards Iran.

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[27] Saxer, Marc, and Marcus Schneider. "Map: Geopolitical Alliances in the Middle East." Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, May 19, 2026.
[28] Karmel, Ariela, and Lazar Berman. "Eisenkot Says Netanyahu Refusing to Give Him Security Briefings, Asks AG to Intervene." The Times of Israel, November 12, 2026.
[29] Harici. "Eisenkot Ties Syria Pact to Withdrawal of Russian and Turkish Forces." October 7, 2026.
[30] Schneider, Tal. "Bereaved by War, Determined to Heal, Protect and Revive Israel: Gadi Eisenkot's Prime Ministerial Mission." The Times of Israel, October 6, 2026.
[31] Sokol, Sam. "Bennett: Israel Should Attack Iran to Retaliate for Hezbollah Assaults." The Times of Israel, August 19, 2026.
[32] Berman, Lazar. "Bennett: Iran's Attacks on UAE Mean It Is Resuming War against Allies of US, Israel." The Times of Israel, May 4, 2026.
[33] Colodro, Gabriel. "Lapid Lays Out 6-Point Plan to Rebuild Israel's Foreign Relations." The Media Line, August 20, 2026.
[34] Afterman, Gedaliah, N. Janardhan, Mohammed Baharoon, and Afshin Molavi. "Minilateralism and I2U2: Refining Realpolitik." Anwar Gargash Diplomatic Academy, September 25, 2023.

His positions on Turkey and Qatar remain critical, although his preference for managing tensions with Ankara leaves greater room for diplomatic engagement.

Golan's regional thinking similarly connects security cooperation with diplomatic recovery. He has advocated strengthening partnerships with moderate regional governments, weakening Iranian influence and converting military achievements into political gains. The peace agreements with Egypt and Jordan and the relationships established through the Abraham Accords form important components of this approach. His emphasis on restoring Israel's international standing may also encourage greater attention to the diplomatic consequences of Israeli policy towards African countries and regional institutions.

Lieberman's contribution is more explicitly security-centered. His September 2026 proposal for the West Bank envisaged Jordanian responsibility for public order and civilian administration in Areas A and B, while Israel retained security responsibility throughout the territory.[35] The proposal reflects his preference for regional arrangements that preserve Israeli security control and assign neighboring governments specific administrative responsibilities. His positions on Iran and Hezbollah reinforce this orientation.

Taken together, the positions of Eisenkot and his prospective coalition partners suggest substantial agreement on strengthening Israel's military capabilities, containing Iranian influence and cultivating relationships with selected Arab governments. Their differences concern the political arrangements required to sustain these relationships, the roles of Egypt, Türkiye and Qatar, and the balance between military pressure and diplomatic engagement. An Eisenkot government could therefore retain significant elements of Netanyahu's regional architecture while seeking to implement them through more coordinated political and security institutions. For Ethiopia, the implications depend on how these priorities interact with the competing interests of states across the Red Sea and the Horn of Africa.

Ethiopia, Somaliland and the Contest over Regional Alignment

The relationship between Ethiopia and Israel provides an important basis for assessing the implications of this transition. The two countries established consular relations in 1956 and full diplomatic relations in 1961. Relations were interrupted following the 1973 Arab-Israeli War and restored in 1989.[36] Subsequent decades brought cooperation in agriculture, irrigation, healthcare, technology, investment and security, alongside recurring high-level political engagement.

Netanyahu's 2016 visit to Ethiopia, the first by a serving Israeli prime minister,[37] gave the relationship renewed political visibility. Prime Minister Hailemariam Desalegn visited Israel in 2017,[38] President Reuven Rivlin travelled to Ethiopia in 2018, and Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed visited Israel in 2019. President Isaac Herzog's visit to Addis Ababa in February 2026, during which he met President Taye Atske Selassie and Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed,[39] further demonstrated the institutional continuity of the

[35] Levaton, Stav, and ToI Staff. "Liberman Proposes Jordan Control Parts of West Bank, Drawing Right-Wing Rebuke." The Times of Israel, September 23, 2026.
[36] Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Israel. "Bilateral Relations." Embassy of Israel in Ethiopia. Accessed November 13, 2026.
[37] Prime Minister's Office, Government of Israel. [Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's Visit to Ethiopia], July 2016.
[38] Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Israel. "Bilateral Relations." Embassy of Israel in Ethiopia. Accessed November 13, 2026.
[39] Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Israel. "President Isaac Herzog to Make Official Visit to Ethiopia." February 22, 2026.

relationship. The discussions addressed cooperation in agriculture, innovation, healthcare and security, providing a foundation for continued bilateral engagement.

Ethiopia's maritime ambitions have added a more direct strategic dimension to this relationship. In September 2026, Israeli Ambassador to Ethiopia Avraham Neguise publicly expressed support for Ethiopia's efforts to secure sea access, describing Israel's position as established policy. He linked Ethiopia's maritime aspirations to economic development, sovereignty and regional security. His comments, reported by the Ethiopian News Agency,[40] gave public expression to Israel's interest in Ethiopia's geographical position and the strategic importance of secure commercial routes across the Red Sea.

The maritime question has become more complicated following Israel's recognition of Somaliland which was accompanied by plans to expand cooperation in agriculture, health, technology and the economy. Israel's decision created a new diplomatic reality in the Horn of Africa, particularly because Somalia and the African Union continue to regard Somaliland as part of the Federal Republic of Somalia and reject unilateral recognition of its independence.

The relationship between Ethiopia and Somaliland had already become a major regional issue following the memorandum of understanding signed on 1 January 2024. Ethiopia presented the memorandum as a framework for negotiations over maritime access and the development of a strategic partnership. The agreement generated strong opposition from Mogadishu, which regarded the arrangement as a challenge to Somalia's territorial integrity. Its detailed terms have remained contested, while its implementation has been complicated by the subsequent diplomatic process between Ethiopia and Somalia.

Israel's support for Ethiopia's maritime ambitions and its recognition of Somaliland therefore involve related but distinct diplomatic questions. The Israeli government has established formal relations with Hargeisa, while publicly supporting Ethiopia's search for sea access. An Eisenkot government would inherit both positions and would have to manage their implications for its relationships with Ethiopia, Somaliland and Mogadishu. The issue would extend beyond preserving bilateral cooperation. It would concern Israel's capacity to accommodate competing regional interests within a maritime environment where access, sovereignty and security are increasingly interconnected.

The regional map associated with Netanyahu's October national security presentation adds another dimension to this calculation. Ethiopia and Somaliland appeared among the countries and territories identified as friendly to the Israeli-Emirati alignment, while Egypt appeared within the competing grouping alongside Turkey, Pakistan and Saudi Arabia. Their inclusion reflects the strategic importance of the Horn and the Red Sea in Israeli regional thinking. Ethiopia contributes continental scale, political influence and access to a wider East African hinterland. Somaliland occupies a strategically significant position along the Gulf of Aden, close to the maritime approaches to Bab el-Mandeb. Their respective geographical positions offer different advantages within the wider security environment surrounding the Red Sea.

The map's significance lies in the attention it gives to the Horn as part of a wider regional system. Its categories, however, remain interpretive. Ethiopia's inclusion among states considered friendly to Israel

[40] Ethiopian News Agency. "Israel Reaffirms Strong Backing for Ethiopia's Red Sea Access Quest." September 10, 2026.

and the UAE does not establish a formal security commitment, just as Egypt's placement in the competing grouping does not determine the direction of its relations with Israel. These relationships will continue to reflect bilateral interests, regional rivalries and the political calculations of individual governments. For Ethiopia, the central concern is how its maritime aspirations and security interests will be accommodated as Israel develops its relationships across the region.

Egypt and the Competing Principles of Red Sea Order

Egypt's regional engagement has become especially relevant to Ethiopia because of Cairo's expanding relationships in the Horn of Africa and its interest in the governance of the Red Sea. On 23 January 2025, Egypt and Somalia elevated their bilateral relationship to a strategic partnership, building on the military cooperation protocol signed on 14 August 2024. Their agreement provides for military assistance, training, equipment, information exchange and cooperation against terrorism.[41] It also identifies the security of Somalia's land and maritime borders as areas for expanded cooperation. The partnership gives Egypt a more substantial role in Somali security affairs.

Cairo's engagement with Somalia forms part of a wider diplomatic effort involving Eritrea and Sudan. These relationships reflect several overlapping interests, including regional security, Red Sea navigation, the Nile Basin and the political future of Somalia. Their convergence acquired greater institutional visibility at the quadrilateral summit convened by President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi in New Alamein on 4 October 2026, bringing together the leaders of Egypt, Eritrea, Somalia and Sudan. The summit established a recurring consultation mechanism and issued a joint declaration addressing sovereignty, regional security, maritime governance and transboundary water issues.[42]

The El Alamein Joint Declaration contains provisions with direct implications for Ethiopia. The participants reaffirmed Somalia's sovereignty and territorial integrity and rejected recognition or support for Somaliland. They also affirmed freedom of navigation while declaring that governance of the Red Sea falls within the exclusive responsibility of its littoral states. On transboundary rivers, including the Nile, the declaration emphasized the principles of avoiding significant harm, prior notification, consultation and consensus. It also rejected unilateral measures affecting the existing water uses of the two downstream Nile states.

The declaration provides a common platform for the four governments to coordinate their positions on several issues central to Ethiopia's foreign policy. Its provisions on Somaliland intersect with the dispute over recognition and the unresolved Ethiopian-Somaliland memorandum. Its position on Red Sea governance raises questions about the participation of landlocked countries whose economies and security depend on access to maritime trade routes. Its language on the Nile reflects the continuing disagreement between Ethiopia and the downstream states over water management and the distribution of benefits and risks within the basin.

[41] Presidency of the Arab Republic of Egypt. "Joint Political Declaration to Elevate Relations between Egypt and Somalia to Strategic Partnership." January 23, 2025.
[42] Daily News Egypt. "Alamein Declaration: Egypt, Eritrea, Sudan and Somalia Forge Unified Front on Red Sea Governance, State Sovereignty and Nile Rights." October 4, 2026.

Egypt's relationship with Israel adds a further complication. The 1979 peace treaty continues to provide the formal foundation for bilateral relations and security coordination, yet the two governments hold increasingly different perceptions of regional military developments. Netanyahu has questioned Egypt's expanding military capabilities and raised concerns about military infrastructure in Sinai in relation to the security arrangements established by the treaty.[43] Israeli officials have argued that expanded airfield runways and underground facilities in Sinai could provide Egypt with military capabilities extending beyond the limitations established under the peace treaty. Netanyahu's reported appeal to Washington, following unsuccessful direct discussions with Cairo, reflects Israeli concerns that these developments could alter the military balance in the peninsula and weaken the security arrangements underpinning the bilateral agreement.

These exchanges demonstrate the tension between the institutional foundations of Egyptian-Israeli peace and the strategic anxieties shaping the relationship. Cairo regards its military capabilities as central to national sovereignty and regional stability, while Israeli leaders remain attentive to changes in the regional military balance. Egypt's inclusion in the Sunni Diamond framework should therefore be understood alongside its continuing peace treaty with Israel and the security relationship that survives the political tensions between them.

An Eisenkot government could give this relationship renewed institutional attention. His commitment to strengthening Israel's peace agreements with Egypt and Jordan and expanding security cooperation among moderate regional states would provide Cairo with a significant place in his prospective regional architecture. Egypt could use that position to advance its preferred approach to Red Sea governance, including its insistence that littoral states retain primary authority over maritime security arrangements. The implications for Ethiopia would depend on the extent to which such arrangements recognize its interests specially in the Red Sea.

The positions of Eisenkot's prospective coalition partners reinforce the possibility of closer Israeli-Egyptian coordination. Bennett's support for a larger Egyptian role in postwar Gaza, Lapid's emphasis on institutionalized regional cooperation and Golan's interest in strengthening existing peace agreements all provide political foundations for engagement with Cairo. Lieberman's security-centered approach also favors arrangements that preserve Israel's operational advantages. Their differences concern the diplomatic methods and political conditions through which such cooperation should develop. For Ethiopia, the combined effect could be a more active Israeli relationship with Egypt at a time when the two countries' positions on Somaliland, maritime governance and the Nile remain sharply divergent.

This possibility creates a strategic challenge for Addis Ababa. Israel could seek to preserve its relationship with Ethiopia while deepening cooperation with Egypt and maintaining its formal ties with Somaliland. Each relationship serves different purposes within Israel's regional outlook, yet their interests can come into conflict over maritime access, sovereignty and regional governance. The central issue for Ethiopia is therefore the place it will occupy within the emerging diplomatic and security arrangements around the Red Sea.

[43] Sıo, Mohammad. "Israeli Prime Minister Asks US to Pressure Egypt to Reduce Sinai Troop Buildup: Report." Anadolu Agency, September 21, 2025. Updated September 22, 2025.

Strategic Implications for Ethiopia

Against this regional configuration, Ethiopia should approach a possible Eisenkot government with a clearly articulated strategic proposition that protects its independent foreign policy while demonstrating the value of a deeper bilateral partnership. Should Eisenkot succeed in forming a government, its constituent parties, despite their ideological differences across the center, national-conservative right and center-left, could bring a broadly security-oriented outlook shaped by their respective political and military experiences.

This orientation could create an opportunity for Ethiopia to present its continental weight, demographic scale and capacity to contribute to the stability of the southern approaches to Bab el-Mandeb as structural assets that would give any Israeli regional security framework greater operational depth beyond the immediate littoral. By framing cooperation around convergent requirements for maritime domain awareness, the disruption of non-state armed actors and the protection of commercial traffic, Ethiopia can demonstrate how its participation would translate shared regional security interests into practical and enduring arrangements while strengthening the foundations of bilateral cooperation beyond the tenure of any single Israeli administration.

Should such a government take shape, Ethiopia should seek to institutionalize this proposition through sustained political and security channels that can withstand changes in Israeli coalition composition and possible shifts in Israel's regional relationships, including closer coordination with Egypt and greater engagement with Saudi Arabia. Where regional partners advance Red Sea governance arrangements based on exclusive littoral formulas, Ethiopia should assert its legitimate interests as the region's largest landlocked state and advocate an inclusive framework that recognizes the economic and security interests of countries dependent on maritime access. Continuous high-level dialogue, focused intelligence and maritime consultations, and joint technology programs could embed Ethiopia-Israel cooperation in institutional frameworks capable of outlasting any single administration. Through this approach, Ethiopia can strengthen recognition of its maritime aspirations and regional role as enduring considerations in the strategic calculations surrounding the Red Sea, rather than interests contingent on changing political alignments.