



# BRIEFING PAPER

# UNDERSTANDING ETHIOPIA'S REGIONAL SECURITY AND FOREIGN POLICY AFTER 2018

DECEMBER 2022

## SUMMARY

- After nearly two decades of relative stability, Ethiopia's foreign policy has become more unpredictable, less coherent and more personalized.
- The war in Tigray has influenced relations with other states in the region, including Sudan, South Sudan, Kenya, Somalia and Djibouti, several of whom are asserting greater autonomy, or regional agendas that are independent of Addis Ababa.
- Ethiopia's close security alliance with Eritrea while necessary to sustain the war against the TPLF is deeply problematic for Addis's wider foreign policy. It has caused concerns in Djibouti, Mogadishu and Khartoum, all of which see view Eritrea's role in the region with deep suspicion.
- Addis's relations with Khartoum are at a low ebb. The key issues are around the border dispute over the Fashaga region and the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GERD), which have fed into Khartoum's involvement with the TPLF as well as with rebels in the Benishangul-Gumuz region.
- In Somalia, the departure of President Farmajo from power has prompted a re-think of Mogadishu's relationship with Addis Ababa. The new government of Hassan Sheikh Mohamud is currently testing out its strategic independence from Ethiopia, partly through its increasingly friendly relationship with Egypt.

- South Sudan is also building a fraternal relationship with Cairo, which seeks new friendships in the region to isolate Ethiopia diplomatically, enabling it to impose pressure on Addis over the GERD. Potential developments on border security related to the Gambella Region have so far not come to fruition.
- Kenya and Ethiopia are building a fruitful economic partnership, particularly around telecoms, power generation and port use. President Ruto's new government also seems to be seeking more involvement in peace and security issues, including the resolution of the Tigray conflict.
- Djibouti and Ethiopia remain economically interdependent with Djibouti port being of vital importance to the Ethiopian economy. Developments in Ethiopia's Afar Region, with the likely involvement of Eritrea, may concern President Guelleh, whose own Afari population are seeking greater representation in the Issa (Somali) dominated polity.

## BACKGROUND

For much of the last two years, Ethiopia has suffered from a devastating civil conflict between the Federal Government, regional security and militia forces on one side, and the Tigray People's Liberation Movement (TPLF) on the other. To make matters worse, the conflict, which has seen the mobilization of close to a million combatants, has not been limited to Ethiopia.<sup>1</sup> It has also dragged in Eritrea, which has mobilized its army to fight the TPLF within Ethiopia,<sup>2</sup> and to a lesser extent, Sudan.<sup>3</sup>

Despite the recent Cessation of Hostilities (CoH) Agreement between the TPLF and Federal Government, agreed in Pretoria in early November, the Tigray conflict arguably remains the single most important issue shaping Ethiopia's foreign policy and political economy today. The war has affected the reputation, credibility and capacity of Ethiopia's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and its military (Ethiopian National Defence Forces, ENDF), which remain the two core institutions of its foreign and regional security policy.

Since 2018, when Abiy Ahmed became Prime Minister and the Ethiopian People's

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1 Will Brown, Lucy Kassa and Zecharias Zelalem, 'How a new 'Great War of Africa' is raging under the cover of a media blackout', The Telegraph, 3 October 2022, <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/global-health/terror-and-security/how-tigrays-great-war-africa-raging-cover-media-blackout/>

2 'Eritrea's mass mobilisation amid Ethiopia civil war', BBC Tigrinya, 16 September 2022, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-62927781>

3 Mohammed Amin Yassine, 'Ethiopia Accuses Sudan of Supporting Tigray Rebels', Al-Awsat, 5 September 2021, <https://english.aawsat.com/home/article/3171886/ethiopia-accuses-sudan-supporting-tigray-rebels#:~:text=Sudan%20denied%20claims%20that%20it,Sudan%20in%20the%20Ethiopian%20crisis>

Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) was ejected from power after 27 years, decision-making around foreign policy has been erratic and unpredictable.<sup>4</sup> Ethiopia's neighbours are increasingly nervous about the trajectory in which the country is headed.

As well as the Tigray conflict, the 2018 rapprochement with Eritrea, which saw Abiy awarded a Nobel Peace Prize in 2020, ended up harming Ethiopia's relations with its other neighbours and undermined multilateralism in the region. Addis Ababa's subsequent attempts to create new regional security initiatives – for example, the so-called Tripartite Alliance with Asmara and Mogadishu – also failed, and effectively ended with former Somali President Mohamed Abdullahi 'Farmajo's' ejection from power in May 2022.<sup>5</sup> The Intergovernmental Authority of Development (IGAD) – for many years chaired by Ethiopia – was previously seen as an extension of Ethiopia's foreign policy, but is increasingly weakened and divided.

This has not always been the case. The current state of Ethiopia's foreign policy is a relatively recent phenomenon. After the EPRDF under Meles Zenawi came to power in 1991 following a long civil war and associated economic stagnation, the country experienced a lengthy period of political consolidation and economic growth. Addis Ababa began to play an increasingly important diplomatic role in the region, and beyond.<sup>6</sup> Meles, who saw himself as a foreign policy prime minister, personally oversaw and coordinated foreign relations and security policy.<sup>7</sup> His death left a power vacuum and foreign policy decision-making became more decentralized.

Despite political repression and gross human rights violations at home, Ethiopia's participation in UN peacekeeping missions made the Ethiopian army a major center of its foreign policy in the post-2012 Ethiopia. Other centres of foreign policy decision-making include the intelligence services, Office of the Prime Minister and the administrations of Ethiopia's regional states, which have often contradicted and undermined each other. After 2018, efforts to reverse this trend resulted in hyper-centralized and personalized foreign policy decision-making and implementation

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4 'The Crisis of Ethiopian Foreign Relations', ACCORD, 24 August 2021, <https://www.accord.org.za/conflict-trends/the-crisis-of-ethiopian-foreign-relations/>

5 Goitom Gebreluel, 'The tripartite alliance destabilising the Horn of Africa', Al Jazeera, 10 May 2021, <https://www.aljazeera.com/opinions/2021/5/10/the-tripartite-alliance-that-is-destabilising-the-horn-of-africa>

6 'Ethiopia: Remarkable Progress Over More Than a Decade', IMF Country Focus, 4 December 2018, <https://www.imf.org/en/News/Articles/2018/12/04/ha120418-ethiopia-remarkable-progress>

7 Alfredo Tjiurimo Hengari, 'Ethiopia's Foreign Policy one year after Meles Zenawi: An opportunity for transformation', South African Institute for International Affairs, 21 August 2013, <https://saiia.org.za/research/ethiopias-foreign-policy-one-year-after-meles-zenawi-an-opportunity-for-transformation/>



concentrated in the Office of the Prime Minister.

In this new foreign policy-making environment, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs has largely been sidelined and is left out of meaningful policy decisions. The shift to a more personalized foreign policy based on bilateral relations, coupled with the war in Tigray, has undermined Ethiopia's role and participation in multilateral fora and decision-making on global security, economic, development and environment-related platforms.<sup>8</sup> At the same time, accusations of gross human rights violations by the Ethiopian military during the Tigray war have raised serious questions about the force's suitability for future involvement in UN peacekeeping operations.<sup>9</sup>

## ETHIOPIA'S REGIONAL RELATIONS

Ethiopia's relations with the other countries in the Horn of Africa – Eritrea, Sudan, South Sudan, Somalia, Kenya and Djibouti – are shifting. After a period of relative stability from around 2000 – 2018, the political transition in Addis Ababa, followed by the Tigray war, have significantly changed Ethiopia's role in the region, particularly with respect to peace and security. Addis has become more dependent on Asmara – principally with respect to the Tigray war – and has seen a worrying deterioration in its relations with Khartoum. Kenya and Djibouti remain strategically important economic partners, while Somalia and South Sudan's flirtation with Egypt are a concern to Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed's government. Ethiopia's leadership of IGAD, which was a constant over the past two decades, has weakened, and the organization is significantly less important as a means to manage regional affairs. Reforming the IGAD secretariat and readmission of Eritrea could improve the efficiency and legitimacy of the regional bloc.

### Reliance on Eritrea over Tigray war

Prior to the CoH Agreement signed in early November with the TPLF, the Ethiopian government had become increasingly dependent on the Eritrean military to fight the war in Tigray. Asmara has become Ethiopia's most important regional ally, but this is a relationship that is fraught with danger. Asmara has capitalized on Addis's declining influence in the region, and the ever-weakening power of IGAD, to assert itself as a major security and diplomatic player.<sup>10</sup>

The rapprochement between Ethiopia and Eritrea over the last three years

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8 Payton Knopf, 'Ethiopia's worsening crisis threatens regional, Mideast security', Al-Monitor, 11 January 2021, <https://www.al-monitor.com/originals/2021/01/ethiopia-crisis-mideast-security-gulf-eritrea-uae-tigray.html>

9 "'We will erase you from this land' Crimes against humanity and ethnic cleansing in Ethiopia's Western Tigray zone', Amnesty International, 6 April 2022, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2022/04/ethiopia-crimes-against-humanity-in-western-tigray-zone/>

10 'Afwerki's diplomatic blitz to mediate between Khartoum and Addis', Africa Intelligence, 27 January 2022, <https://www.africaintelligence.com/eastern-africa-and-the-horn/2022/01/27/afwerki-s-diplomatic-blitz-to-mediate-between-khartoum-and-addis,109729671-eve>

constitutes a radical shift in relations that had been virtually non-existent since the border conflict in 2000. After the period of active conflict, Ethiopia and Eritrea took very different trajectories. While Ethiopia's economy, army and influence expanded, Eritrea was sidelined, isolated and has seen an exodus of its youth seeking to escape compulsory military service and an economy in the doldrums.

Addis Ababa's post-rapprochement policy towards Eritrea was founded on an understanding that Asmara was the junior partner and Addis felt confident that it was in charge. However, attempts by the Ethiopian government to institutionalize port use, trade, investment, telecommunications and a visa regime gained little traction with Asmara.<sup>11</sup> The war in Tigray effectively reduced the relationship between the two counties to military and security cooperation.

Ethiopia lobbied for the lifting of UN sanctions on Eritrea and facilitated an increased diplomatic and security role of Asmara in the Horn.<sup>12</sup> However, attempts by Addis to convince its neighbour to rejoin IGAD failed.<sup>13</sup> The emergence of the so-called Tripartite Alliance between Eritrea, Ethiopia and Somalia (albeit short-lived), and the personalized, bilateral approach to foreign policy adopted by Addis and Asmara, has further undermined multilateral organizations and initiatives for peace and integration in the Horn.

Ethiopia's reliance on Eritrea extended to diplomacy. In the past few years, President Isaias Afwerki has made numerous attempts to mediate between Addis and Khartoum and Addis and Cairo on the border dispute and the GERD.<sup>14</sup> These initiatives make seasoned Ethiopian diplomats nervous: they worry that Eritrea could leverage the possibility of an Asmara-Khartoum-Cairo alliance in their bilateral relationship. There are also concerns that Eritrea could resume its tactic of hosting and arming Ethiopian insurgent groups.

The close military and intelligence cooperation between Eritrean security institutions and the Amhara regional security apparatus is also another area where the Ethiopian state is vulnerable to Asmara's influence. Differences around how to

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- 11 Susan Stigant and Michael V. Phelan, 'A Year After the Ethiopia-Eritrea Peace Deal, What Is the Impact?' United States Institute of Peace, 29 August 2019, <https://www.usip.org/publications/2019/08/year-after-ethiopia-eritrea-peace-deal-what-impact>
  - 12 Michelle Nichols, 'U.N. Security Council removes Eritrea sanctions after years', Reuters, 14 November 2018, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-eritrea-sanctions-un-idUSKCN1NJ28P>
  - 13 Daniel Mumbere, 'Eritrea will rejoin, it's just a matter of time: IGAD Secretary General', AfricaNews, 13 September 2018, <https://www.africanews.com/2018/09/13/eritrea-will-rejoin-us-it-s-just-a-a-matter-of-time-igad-secretary-general>
  - 14 Barham Abdel-Monem, 'Eritrean president visits Sudan for dam mediation', Anadolu Agency, 4 May 2021, <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/africa/eritrean-president-visits-sudan-for-dam-mediation/2229207>



end the Tigray conflict, and regional competition between Abiy and Isaias, could result in a standoff that might lead to a violent confrontation. This is an even greater concern following the CoH with the TPLF, in which Ethiopia committed to securing its own borders through the Ethiopian military, implicitly agreeing to the exit of Eritrean forces from Tigray and neighbouring regions.

#### Addis and Khartoum tussle over border and GERD

Ethiopia and Sudan have a long history of proxy wars. Beginning in the 1960's, the two countries have hosted, trained and armed political and armed movements whose aim was to overthrow their own governments. However, between 2000 and 2018 the two counties enjoyed a lengthy period of fairly stable relations, which enabled more effective economic and security cooperation. This resulted in several shared platforms to regularly discuss and resolve security and political issues and promote trade and investment.

Since 2018, political transitions in both countries saw the dismantling of these institutions and changes of priorities. Relations have subsequently deteriorated. Disagreements over the filling and operation of the GERD, the construction of which Khartoum supported, have worsened relations.<sup>15</sup> Khartoum's original support for the GERD was a crucial diplomatic victory for Ethiopia that consolidated the regional and international legitimacy and relevance of the project.

The escalation of the border conflict over the Fashaga region, which had previously been managed fairly effectively, is a running sore in relations between Addis and Khartoum. It has resulted in the deaths of security personnel on each side.<sup>16</sup> Sudan sees the issue as an agenda owned and promoted by Amhara nationalist movements and is reportedly displeased with the political, diplomatic and security establishment that deals with the issue from the Ethiopia side. The fact that Ethiopia's foreign minister, intelligence chief and ambassador in Khartoum are all Amharas is seen by Sudan as hampering progress with efforts to find a solution to the contested territory.

Addis Ababa also believes that Khartoum has been providing support to the TPLF and other rebels in the Benishangul-Gumuz region – the location of the GERD –

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15 'Trump comment on 'blowing up' Nile Dam angers Ethiopia, BBC, 24 October 2020, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-54674313>

16 In June 2022, Sudan accused Ethiopia of executing several Sudanese soldiers in Al-Fashaga. 'Sudan accuses Ethiopia of executing Sudanese soldiers', Al Jazeera, 27 June 2022, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2022/6/27/sudan-accuses-ethiopia-of-executing-sudanese-soldiers>

which borders Sudan's conflict-affected Blue Nile state.<sup>17</sup> In return, Sudan has repeatedly accused Ethiopia of supporting the Sudan People's Liberation Movement – North (SPLM-N), which operates in the state.<sup>18</sup> In 2021, Sudan requested that the UN remove the Ethiopian peacekeeping forces from Abyei, which it judged to be a security threat on its border with South Sudan.<sup>19</sup>

Despite the deteriorating political and diplomatic relations, the people-to-people relationships between Sudan and Ethiopia continue to be used by both to de-escalate tensions. However, continued violence, political uncertainties, regional alliances and economic hardships are likely to undermine efforts to resolve disagreements over the border and the GERD between the two countries.

#### Djibouti retains economic importance

Relations between Ethiopia and Djibouti, which were substantially shaped by the Ethio-Eritrea war (1998 – 2000), are cool, but remain stable. The war shifted Ethiopia's port dependence from Eritrea to Djibouti and increased the Ethio-Djibouti security and the diplomatic alliance against Eritrea. In 2009, Ethiopia and Djibouti co-sponsored a successful UN sanctions regime against Asmara for its involvement in Somalia.<sup>20</sup>

Ethiopia's 2018 rapprochement with Asmara was done with little or no consultation with Djibouti, which still considers Eritrea to be a major security threat. Djibouti viewed the improved relations between Addis and Asmara nervously. However, economic and infrastructure ties remain strong: Djibouti imports agricultural products, water and electricity from Ethiopia, while Djibouti port remains Ethiopia's major access to the sea, despite plans and early efforts to diversify, including through Somaliland (Berbera), which have not been straightforward.<sup>21</sup>

One of the unintended consequences of the Tigray war and the numerous conflicts

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- 17 'Ethiopia Accuses Sudan of Supporting Tigray Rebels', Al-Awsat, 5 September 2021, <https://english.aawsat.com/home/article/3171886/ethiopia-accuses-sudan-supporting-tigray-rebels>; 'Sudan denies Ethiopian accusations of supporting rebel forces', Xinhua, 13 September 2021, [http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2021-12/13/c\\_1310368573.htm](http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2021-12/13/c_1310368573.htm)
  - 18 Mawahib Abdallatif, 'Khartoum Accuses Ethiopia of Arming Rebels', The East African, 11 March 2021, <https://allafrica.com/stories/202103120120.html>
  - 19 'UN to withdraw Ethiopian peacekeepers on Sudan's request: Khartoum', Ahram Online, 24 August 2021, <https://english.ahram.org.eg/NewsContent/2/8/419723/World/Region/UN-to-withdraw-Ethiopian-peacekeepers-on-Sudans-re.aspx>
  - 20 'Security Council Imposes Sanctions on Eritrea over Its Role in Somalia, Refusal to Withdraw Troops Following Conflict with Djibouti', United Nations, 23 December 2009, <https://press.un.org/en/2009/sc9833.doc.htm>
  - 21 'Ethiopia loses its 19pc stake in Berbera port: Somaliland minister', The East African, 11 June 2022, <https://www.theeastafrican.co.ke/tea/rest-of-africa/ethiopia-stake-in-port-of-berbera-3845366>

across Ethiopia is the legitimization and expansion of regional security institutions. Thousands of members of the Afar regional special forces and police took part in the Tigray war. This has improved the visibility and autonomy of the Afar regional state, and legitimized the expansion of the size and capabilities of the Afar regional security forces. These trends are also changing the dynamics of the Afar-Issa boundary conflict. Djibouti, which has 35 per cent Afar minority is nervous about the lasting legacy of these conflicts for the Afar region and its implications for the Afar-Issa relations in Ethiopia and Djibouti. On 7 October 2022, Djibouti claimed that an Afar armed movement – Front for the Restoration of Unity and Democracy – killed seven of its soldiers at a military base in Garabtisan. The attack, and others in future, might lead an escalation of tensions with Eritrea, which Djibouti suspects supports the group, and also impacts relations with Ethiopia.

### [Somalia asserts its autonomy from Addis Ababa](#)

Ethiopia's relations with the new government in Mogadishu, led by President Hassan Sheikh Mohamud, got off to a difficult start. Addis's support for former Somali President Farmajo's failed attempt to illegally extend his rule offended the federal regions and a political and security establishment in Mogadishu which returned to power in May 2022.<sup>22</sup> Subsequently, Hassan Sheikh's visit to Egypt in July 2022, which included a joint press conference with President Sisi, was met with anger in Addis. A comment by President Sisi concerning the 'danger of unilateral policies when it comes to implementing projects on international rivers', which Hassan Sheikh was perceived to have implicitly endorsed, was seen as a provocation in Addis.<sup>23</sup> The significance of this was underlined by the fact that the Federal Government of Somalia (FGS) later released a statement asserting its neutrality on the issue.<sup>24</sup> In another diplomatic faux pas, in September 2022 Ethiopia's Ministry of Foreign Affairs released a statement noting that a programme on Somalia aired by the Ethiopian Broadcasting Cooperation (EBC), which claimed that Hassan Sheikh

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22 'Abiy alliance takes a hit after Farmajo defeat in Somalia', Africa Intelligence, 18 May 2022, <https://www.africaintelligence.com/eastern-africa-and-the-horn/2022/05/18/abiy-alliance-takes-a-hit-after-farmajo-defeat-in-somalia.109785547-art>

23 'Al-Sisi, Somali President discuss GERD dispute, Red Sea security', Daily News Egypt, 25 July 2022, <https://dailynewsegypt.com/2022/07/25/al-sisi-somali-president-discuss-gerd-dispute-red-sea-security/>

24 'Somalia maintains neutral position on Nile dam dispute: Spokesman', Anadolu Agency, 27 July 2022, <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/africa/somalia-maintains-neutral-position-on-nile-dam-dispute-spokesman/2647369>



was a supporter of the TPLF, does not represent the views of the government.<sup>25</sup> The two incidents demonstrate the fragility of relations between the two capitals.

When Hassan Sheikh visited Addis Ababa at the end of September 2022 he tried to address the growing rift between the two capitals. A joint communique released on 30 September called upon the UN Security Council (UNSC) 'to consider the request of the Federal Governments of Somalia for the lifting of the arms embargo imposed on the country for more than 30 years.'<sup>26</sup>

However, alleged demands by Abiy for the removal of the head of the National Intelligence and Security Agency, Mahad Salad,<sup>27</sup> who is considered close to the Egyptian state and intelligence apparatus, was rejected by Hassan Sheikh. Abiy also allegedly requested the replacement of the National Security Advisor Hussein Sheikh Moalim,<sup>28</sup> who is considered a TPLF sympathizer by the foreign relations and intelligence establishment in Addis Ababa. The fact that these alleged demands were rejected may signal that Mogadishu is more able to assert its autonomy from Addis in its foreign and domestic policy. Ethiopia, while grappling with its own internal crises and wielding much less regional power than previously, doesn't have the resources or diplomatic leverage to assert its interests as confidently.

Recent months have seen an increase in cooperation between Egyptian and Somali intelligence agencies.<sup>29</sup> Members of the Somali National Intelligence and Security Services are now being trained in Egypt. Cairo is also providing weapons, technologies and airlift for the different security agencies of the Somali state. These developments are viewed with great concern by Addis and could undermine relations further. Hassan Sheikh's aggressive military campaign against al-Shabaab could have provided grounds to enhance cooperation. However, Mogadishu may

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25 The segment concluded that 'certain members of the president Hassan Sheik Mohamud's government may derail efforts to improve relations between Somalia and Ethiopia.' 'Ethiopia Apologizes for Its TV Report About Somalia Relations', Shabelle Media Network, 8 September 2022, <https://allafrica.com/stories/202209080164.html>; 'Ethiopia disavows state media report doubting Somalia President for "strong relationship with TPLF"', Addis Standard, 8 September 2022, <https://addisstandard.com/news-ethiopia-disavows-state-media-report-doubting-somalia-president-for-strong-relationship-with-tplf>

26 'Ethiopia, Somalia call on UNSC to lift Somalia arms embargo', Addis Standard, 30 September 2022, <https://addisstandard.com/news-alert-ethiopia-somalia-call-on-unscto-lift-somalia-arms-embargo/>

27 'Somalia President appoints a new intelligence chief', Horn Diplomat, 26 May 2022, <https://www.horndiplomat.com/2022/05/26/somalia-president-appoints-a-new-intelligence-chief/>

28 'President Hassan Sheikh appoints new National Security Advisor', Goobjoog News, 24 May 2022, <https://goobjoog.com/english/president-hassan-sheikh-appoints-new-national-security-advisor/>

29 'Egypt Pledges Support to Somalia in Facing Challenges', Shabelle Media Network, 10 September 2022, <https://allafrica.com/stories/202209120171.html>

want to keep the relationship at a low level as it attempts to discredit the Islamic foundations of al-Shabaab and seeks to increase support from Somali nationalists.

Relations between Ethiopia and Somalia will likely continue to fluctuate between functional, ambivalent and hostile in the years to come. The close relations between Abiy and Hassan Sheikh's predecessor, President Farmajo, which sidelined the federal states, is over. During this period, Abiy made an attempt to facilitate peace between Mogadishu and Hargeisa, which was met with displeasure in Somaliland as an initiative that disregarded historical and legal issues.<sup>30</sup> The close relations between Abiy and Farmajo also created unease in the relationship between Ethiopia and Somaliland. The June 2022 decision by the Somaliland government to terminate the 19 per cent share that the Ethiopian government had in the port of Berbera was one indicator of this.<sup>31</sup>

#### Kenya and Ethiopia build an economic partnership

Over the last few decades, the relationship between Ethiopia and Kenya has generally been stable. Through different regimes and leaders, the two countries have been able to identify, articulate and cooperate on their long-term shared strategic interests. However, the post-2018 period saw unprecedented tensions develop between Addis Ababa and Nairobi. One reason for this was Ethiopia's shift in approach to Somalia under Abiy, and also its general disregard for multilateral approaches to regional issues. In Somalia, several stand-offs between Kenyan and Ethiopian troops – particularly in Jubbaland – could have escalated into conflict.<sup>32</sup>

However, with the victory of Abiy's fellow evangelical, former vice-president William Ruto, in this year's presidential election, relations between Ethiopia and Kenya may be entering a more fruitful and cooperative period. In early October, Ruto visited Ethiopia for his first foreign trip as President to attend the launch of the Kenyan telecoms company Safaricom in Ethiopia – awarded the first license for a private telecoms company to operate in Ethiopia after the sector was liberalized. Ruto's trip was seen as being fairly fruitful, and on top of the launch, they reached an agreement for the export of Ethiopian wheat to Kenya.

Economic ties between the two countries, which survived the upheaval of the last

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30 'Farmajo Meets With Muse Bihi in Addis Ababa', Shabelle Media Network, 11 February 2020, <https://allafrica.com/stories/202002120133.html>

31 'Ethiopia loses its 19pc stake in Berbera port: Somaliland minister', The East African, 11 Jun 2022, <https://www.theeastafrican.co.ke/tea/rest-of-africa/ethiopia-stake-in-port-of-berbera-3845366>

32 'Ending the Dangerous Standoff in Southern Somalia', International Crisis Group, 14 July 2020, <https://www.crisisgroup.org/africa/horn-africa/somalia/b158-ending-dangerous-standoff-southern-somalia>

three years, remain strong. During Kenyatta's presidency, numerous agreements were reached on energy, infrastructure and trade and there are several different areas in which mutual cooperation will benefit both countries. For example, Kenya wants to increase the amount of electricity it imports from Ethiopia,<sup>33</sup> and is also keen to develop the upgraded Lamu port as an alternative Indian Ocean access route to southern Ethiopia.

On the peace and security front, the fact that the outgoing president Uhuru Kenyatta played a key role in the recently agreed Cessation of Hostilities Agreement with the TPLF may bode well for productive relations in this sphere. Kenyatta's appointment as Kenya's envoy to the Horn of Africa and Great Lakes region suggests that he may be an asset to President Ruto in regional diplomacy, particularly in relations between Nairobi and Addis.

### South Sudan flirts with Cairo

In recent years, South Sudan has become an increasingly important partner for Ethiopia, particularly as relations have worsened between Addis Ababa and Khartoum. In the past year, the head of South Sudan's military, and also the chiefs of intelligence and police, have visited Addis Ababa at different times, signing wide-ranging security and military cooperation agreements.<sup>34</sup> Some observers see the parade of agreements between Juba and Addis as little more than a publicity stunt whereby Ethiopia tries to project regional security leadership and Juba enjoys the attention.

This being said, there are areas where security cooperation could prove fruitful. For example, Ethiopia's Gambella region, which borders South Sudan's Upper Nile and Jonglei states, is vulnerable to cross-border cattle raiding from South Sudanese communities (particularly the Murle), something that can only be addressed through the involvement of authorities on both sides of the border. However, weak state capacity, proliferation of armed actors and other security priorities are hampering any progress being made. Addis Ababa is also concerned about increased Egyptian influence in Juba, which sees South Sudan as a potential supporter in its efforts to slow, or limit the development of the GERD.<sup>35</sup>

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33 Kenya and Ethiopia signed Power Purchase Agreement (PPA), Horn of Africa Initiative, 2 August 2022, <https://hoainitiative.org/kenya-and-ethiopia-signed-power-purchase-agreement-ppa/>

34 'Ethiopia, South Sudan Sign Security Agreement To Prevent Terrorism, Organized Crimes', Fana Broadcasting, 17 August 2022, <https://www.fanabc.com/english/ethiopia-south-sudan-sign-security-agreement-to-prevent-terrorism-organized-crimes/>

35 'Sisi meets with South Sudan's presidential advisor on security affairs', Egypt Independent, 25 August 2022, <https://egyptindependent.com/sisi-meets-with-south-sudans-presidential-advisor-on-security-affairs/>

The Tigray war, insecurity and economic challenges in Ethiopia have stalled infrastructure projects to improve links between the two countries. On 22 September 2022, South Sudan's Vice-President, Taban Deng Gai, and Ethiopia's Minister of Finance, Ahmed Shide, reached and revised agreements on road infrastructure, energy, telecommunications and water transportation. Juba, which wants to reduce its dependence on Kenya's ports, sees these projects as vital to improving its access to Djibouti port via Ethiopia.<sup>36</sup>

## **ETHIOPIA, IGAD AND THE DECLINE IN MULTILATERALISM**

For most of the past two decades, IGAD was considered to be little more than an extension of Ethiopia's foreign policy. Now, many observers think that the body is dying a slow death. The possibility of reforming IGAD, so that it functions as a regional bloc with a wider political and security mandate, is in serious crisis. One reason for this is because IGAD is effectively no longer able to discuss major security developments and conflicts in its member states. This was underlined in late 2020, soon after the war in Ethiopia's north started, when Addis rejected its internal affairs being on IGAD's agenda and allegedly threatened to leave the organization if the Tigray war was discussed. The current chair of IGAD, Sudan, has also refused efforts to have its own political and security crises scrutinized. Djibouti, which is next in line to chair IGAD, is no longer enthusiastic to take on the role and there are signs it may seek to forfeit its upcoming term for fear of becoming involved in potentially difficult diplomatic situations.

Violence and instability, widening differences among member states, bilateral and ad hoc security cooperation, foreign interventions and a weak IGAD secretariat are undermining multilateralism in the Horn. These changes are happening at the time when the Horn, the Red Sea and the Gulf of Aden are witnessing unprecedented changes and competition. Great power rivalry, competition between emerging and middle powers, and differences between neighbours are further fragmenting the region and undermining the possibility of a common security agenda. Drought, locust invasion, the Covid-19 pandemic, war in Ukraine and the global economic slowdown are also increasing the vulnerability of the region to a corrupted and short-term style of diplomacy driven by cash inducements, particularly from the Gulf. The IGAD Red Sea and Gulf of Aden Task Force, created in 2019 to facilitate a common regional position on geopolitical and security developments in the region, isn't functional. For Ethiopia, whose foreign policy was rooted in multilateral mechanisms, these global and regional developments could further undermine its regional leverage and standing.

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36 'S. Sudan, Ethiopia agree on joint project to link with Djibouti port', Sudan Tribune, 23 September 2022, <https://sudantribune.com/article264464/>

Ethiopia's regional foreign and security policy is at a critical juncture. The resolution of the Tigray war and Eritrea's response to it will be the primary factor determining its prospects in the near future. The progress and path of the transitions in Sudan and Somalia will also influence regional cooperation. Improving the capacity of IGAD could provide a regional platform for Ethiopia to resolve tensions with its neighbours. There have been some recent positive developments, including improved relations between Addis Ababa, Khartoum and Nairobi; the CoH with the TPLF; a reduced political and security role for Eritrea in Ethiopia after the Tigray war; and possible cooperation with Mogadishu in the fight against al-Shabaab. These developments, if they continue, could help revive Ethiopia's regional relations and, at the same time, facilitate discussions to reform and strengthen IGAD.



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