

# Looming War in the Horn of Africa: Ethiopia's Quest for Access to the Red Sea

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## Introduction

The reception of the New Year by Ethiopia and Somaliland, a breakaway region of Somalia, by signing a memorandum of understanding, granting Addis Ababa access to the Red Sea was a shocking surprise to coastal neighbors in the Horn of Africa. It aroused warnings of the geopolitical upshots of this move and its impact on bilateral relations in the troubled Horn of Africa and on the security of the Red Sea and the Gulf of Aden.

Detailed negotiations to reach a formal agreement will be concluded in a month of signing the MoU. This move represents an important development in Ethiopia's endeavor to have direct access to the Red Sea and the repeated attempts by Somaliland, with its capital Hargeisa, since 1991, to obtain international recognition. However, the impact of the agreement on the security of the region, reactions of regional players, and the conflict between the Somali Central Authority and the separatist region over the unity and sovereignty of the country may add further complications to the fragile situation in Somalia.

Ethiopia lost direct access to the sea in 1993, when Eritrea gained independence after a three-decade war. Addis Ababa became the largest landlocked country in Africa. Its main trade route now runs along roads and a railway that link the capital, Addis Ababa, to a port in Djibouti, one of five neighbors with coastlines that include Somalia, Eritrea, Sudan and Kenya.

The signing of the MoU inflamed a new crisis in the Horn of Africa, the countries of which already face a security dilemma, civil wars and active armed groups. Ethiopia suffers from the effects of war in Tigray and is currently engaged in conflicts in the regions of Amhara and Oromia.

Sudan, its neighbor to the West, goes through the "worst humanitarian crisis," according to the United Nations. Conflict in Sudan has entered its tenth month and has resulted in the displacement of more than 7 million people. Similarly, Eritrea experiences a political and humanitarian crisis after the war years and the dictatorial rule of Asias Afwerki.

As for Somalia, despite improvements since 2012, most of the northern regions are controlled by Al-Shabaab (Al-Qaeda) or tribal militias, at a time when Mogadishu struggles to resolve issues with other regions to safeguard the sovereignty and unity of the country. Security of the Red Sea and the Gulf of Aden is already facing great challenges as a result of the Houthi rebels' escalation and transformation of the waterway into a theater for attacks on shipping.

In addition to the threat of the Houthis on the Asian side, the region faces many security, political and economic challenges: piracy off the Somali coast has been resumed greatly, [Al-Shabaab attacks](#) escalated, and competition for strategic ports on the Red Sea and the Gulf of Aden is on the rise, as demonstrated by the behavior of the UAE, Turkey, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and Iran. International tension was inflamed by the Russian war in Ukraine, US concerns about Chinese and Russian naval influence, and the US and Chinese military bases in Djibouti betray a regional and international security environment in which all actors seek to reposition themselves before the current fluctuations in international relations come to an end.

What does Ethiopia want to achieve by gaining access to the Red Sea at the present time? What impact will this move have on Somalia and on its relations to Ethiopia? How does the agreement affect the Horn of Africa, the security of the Red Sea, the Gulf of Aden and coastal countries?

## Imperial Ambitions

Ethiopia's demand for its historical right of direct access to the Red Sea is as old as the modern Ethiopian state itself. Usually, Ethiopian leaders, both past and present, refer in their talks about the Red Sea and the Nile to what they describe as the "historical right." Ethiopian leaders invoke the historical glory of the Abyssinian empire, which— they believe— once had ports and maritime navigation. [State-owned media affirm](#) that denying it a control of a port on the international waterway, when it was "the historically dominant [state] in the Red Sea region, has limited Ethiopia's geostrategic options in the Horn of Africa and beyond." So, in October, in his speech before the Parliament, Abiy Ahmed quoted a famous 19th century General, Ras Alula Engida: "the Red Sea is the natural boundary of Ethiopia!" However, this is an unreliable historical dialectic. At least, since the sixteenth century, Ethiopia has not been interested in establishing Red Sea ports or maritime trade.

On October 13, Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed said in a 45-minute speech, "The Nile and the Red Sea determine [Ethiopia's future](#). They will contribute either to its development or demise."

In July, he said that "Ethiopia will secure direct access to the port peacefully, or [by force if necessary](#)."

By [drawing lessons](#) from the controversy over the construction of the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam on the Nile, Abiy suggested that talks about the port on the Red Sea should not be banned. Addis Ababa's rhetoric became increasingly assertive, similar to that used by Ethiopian officials when discussing the construction of the Renaissance Dam. Official Ethiopian discourse swings between historical distortion and defending Addis Ababa's ownership of ports and its right to use force in the Horn of Africa.

This does not exclude Ethiopia's need of a marine outlet to get out of the landlocked state, or as Abiy Ahmed said, his government needed to find a way to release the 126 million people from their "geographical prison". Obviously, this is not the only goal of Abiy Ahmed, who raised the issue of a great nation state with great influence in the region since the Nile crisis. So, he has several objectives, which are summarized below.

- **Geo-political influence:** Through the agreement, Ethiopia gets access to a very strategic angle of the world, Bab al-Mandeb, where approximately 15% of global trade transits. Addis Ababa will not have a similar opportunity in the near future. This opportunity was facilitated by the chaos of current international politics in which everyone seeks to reposition themselves before the end of current fluctuations.
- **Economic growth:** Direct access to the Red Sea is crucial for economic growth and development in Ethiopia. Import and export companies face direct challenges that affect the country's competitiveness in global markets, and the costs of transporting goods from the port to the mainland through Djibouti are a great burden. Ethiopia relies on Djibouti for international trade, with more than 95% of its imports and exports passing through the Addis Ababa-Djibouti corridor, according to the World Bank. The remaining 5% transit passes through Somali ports. Services cost [USD2 million per day for transit](#), and nearly USD1.5 billion annually. This is approximately one fifth of the value of the foreign trade of Ethiopia. It is a cost, according to Abiy Ahmed, that is [unsustainable](#). In addition, relying on the ports of neighboring countries poses challenges, such as crowding, delay and high costs. Having its own port on the Red Sea would give Addis Ababa more control over its trade and logistics, which provides smoother and more efficient operations.

- **Energy and infrastructure:** Ethiopia's goal of having direct access to the Red Sea is linked to the hydroelectric energy project which aims to export power to the surrounding countries and those overlooking the Red Sea. The Red Sea region is also rich in energy resources, especially oil and natural gas. Countries such as Saudi Arabia, Egypt and Sudan have large oil reserves and play a decisive role in the global energy markets. Ethiopia wants to be part of investing in the energy sector.
- **Regional influence:** The deal will give Ethiopia the right to building facilities on the Gulf of Aden that can be used for 50 years as a military base and for commercial purposes. It will be able to reach the port through a corridor rented from Somaliland. One of Ahmed's objectives is that his country shall have an impact on the countries of the region and great regional influence. Therefore, it needs to be militarily influential in the Gulf of Aden and in the major military bases in the region. The Red Sea region is characterized by a complex network of political dynamics, including conflicts and coalitions. Joining these coalitions gives Addis Ababa a long-term impact in the region.

Therefore, through this agreement, [Addis Ababa is also trying](#) to join the Council of the Countries Overlooking the Red Sea and the Gulf of Aden, which was established in 2020, and includes Egypt, Sudan, Eritrea, Djibouti and Somalia on the African shore of the Red Sea and Saudi Arabia, Jordan and Yemen on the Asian shore.

Consequently, from a realistic perspective, pushing for gaining direct access to the Red Sea carries advantages for Ethiopia. It ends Ethiopia's dependence on its neighbors, boosts its economy, and enhances its security and position in the region. However, this agreement faces many challenges, including the legality of the agreement and the wide rejection by Ethiopia's neighbors and other countries in the region whose interests are associated with the Horn of Africa and the security of the Red Sea.

Regarding Ahmed's domestic goals, signing the MoU with Somaliland appears to be a return to the former Ethiopian empire and may help divert attention from internal economic and military crises, at a time when support for Ahmed's government began to dwindle. His government disarmed a regional paramilitary force in the Amhara region in April, which caused him to lose the support of Ethiopian nationalists, who constitute an important support base for him. The peace agreement signed with the Tigray Liberation Front after a year of fighting has converted former supporters into critics. Raising the historical right of direct access to the Red Sea will impress the influential elite of the Amhara Ethnic Group, who [defend Greater Ethiopia](#) and change their anger into support in the upcoming elections.

## Legality of the agreement

Ethiopia benefits from international law in its arguments of gaining access to the seas, based on [the 1982 United Nations Convention](#) on the Law of the Sea, which gives the landlocked states the right of access to and from the sea and freedom of maritime transit. However, it is conditional on the agreements between the landlocked and coastal states overlooking the sea. According to the International Court of Justice, the general or customary law rules and obligations, by their very nature, must have equal force for all members of the international community. Yet, Somaliland is not a member state; a status enjoyed by Somalia. Addis Ababa's argument in favor of its recognition of Somaliland as an independent state can serve as a prelude to its attempt to pass the agreement and establish an advanced military base.

Ethiopia may rely on legal precedents before an international court. The agreement with the authorities of Somaliland will not be the first pact concluded by the separatist Somaliland region with an external party. There are [two agreements between Somaliland and official Emirati bodies](#); namely, Dubai Ports World (2016 and 2018), to operate a regional commercial and logistics center that includes developing a free economic zone project in Berbera Port. The UAE company maintained a share of 51% of the project, the first phase of which was completed in 2021, enabling the port to work with an operational capacity of 500,000 containers annually. The MoU may have been linked to an [Emirati approval](#) of the strong relations of the three parties and the benefits that Dubai Ports will gain in the event Berbera Port is transformed into a major corridor of Ethiopian trade, which is the largest economy of the Horn of Africa.

However, unlike its agreements with Abu Dhabi, Somaliland will not accept signing the agreement this time except with Addis Ababa's full recognition of its independence, a condition that will threaten the legality of the international agreement because Ethiopia will be committed to mobilize international support for a similar recognition of Somaliland to grant the agreement an international legal value.

## Somalia's Options

The signing of the MoU sparked an angry reaction by the authorities in Mogadishu. Somalia considers Somaliland an integral part of its territory. It described Ethiopia's actions as illegal and immediately summoned its ambassador from Addis Ababa. The Somali government described the agreement as "null and void" and requested the African Union and the United Nations Security Council to hold meetings to discuss this issue.



[On the following day](#) of signing of the MoU, President Hassan Sheikh Mahmoud gave a fiery speech before the Parliament, in which he pledged to defend the sovereignty of his country: "Somalia belongs to the Somalis," he asserted. "We will protect every inch of our holy land, and we will not tolerate attempts to give up any part of it," he added. However, Somalia does not have viable options for confrontation.

Somalia has been rocked by unrest for decades. However, since 2012, successive governments in Somalia have asserted state sovereignty in southern and central Somalia, while areas far from the central government are under the control of Al-Shabaab (Al-Qaeda) or tribal militias. The war against Al-Shabaab continues to falter, and the situation may get worse by the end of 2024 as the African Union Transition Mission in Somalia (ATMIS) is scheduled to pull out of the country. However, more countries have continued to deal with Somalia as a unified entity over the past decade. This is due to the talks between Somalia and Somaliland since 2012. Talks stopped in 2020, were resumed by [Ugandan mediation](#) in September 2023, and resumed again last December in Djibouti. The two parties signed an agreement on December 31, which included drawing a [roadmap to resume negotiations](#), but on the very next day, the MoU came to blow up all these efforts.

On the other hand, the Somaliland region, which failed to obtain any international recognition since 1991, has obtained an implicit recognition by Addis Ababa. Full recognition could be a precursor to similar moves by other African countries. Getting a stake in the Ethiopian Airlines, which is the largest airline in Africa, is also an important economic opportunity for Hargeisa. Nevertheless, this region suffers greatly, as Muse Bihe Abdi, who came to power in late 2017, has overstayed in power beyond his term limits and lost legitimacy among his tribe. His government operates without the recognition of the opposition in the country. A leading opposition party, Waddani Party, calls for elections by the end of 2024. Abdi's government is also facing a major challenge in the Sool region and its capital, [Las Anod](#) (East), where his [army was expelled](#) by the Dhulbahante clan—the largest clan of Somaliland—which rejects secession and decided to remain under the authority of the federal state. This war, which continued for most of 2023, revealed the [black side of the rule](#) of Somaliland.

Bihe Abdi lost much of his [popularity among his clan](#) due to the Las Anod war, which did not receive great support from the clan, as the war overburdened the economy and resulted in thousands of casualties. This means that Bihe and Abiy Ahmed, signed the MoU when they faced great internal challenges that put their political future at stake.

Therefore, the government in Mogadishu cannot accept the recognition of the Somaliland by Ethiopia, which Somalia has cooperated with since 2006 in fighting Al-Shabaab. It will have many options:

**1. Severing ties:** Mogadishu has already withdrawn its ambassador from Addis Ababa, but an official recognition of Somalia by Ethiopia may lead to severing diplomatic ties. In 2020, when Kenya announced plans to open a consulate in Somaliland, Somalia severed diplomatic relations. This would lead to a deterioration of diplomatic relations.

**2. Resorting to regional and international forums:** The Somali Foreign Ministry immediately asked African and Arab entities and the Security Council to pressure Addis Ababa to end the MoU and affirm the country's sovereignty and unity.

Decision maker in Mogadishu can exploit the African Union's adherence to the first three principles to embarrass Ethiopia, which hosts the Union, and mobilize the support of African countries. The first three principles of the Organization of African Unity emphasize the equal sovereignty of member countries and respecting the sovereignty and territorial integrity of each country. It focuses on respecting the existing borders at the time of achieving national independence on the principle of *uti possidetis juris* of 1964. It can also use its membership in the Group of East African Community (EAC), which Mogadishu joined in late 2023, to pressure Ethiopia to withdraw from the agreement. It seems that it has already started using its membership of the [Non-Aligned Movement](#) to obtain greater international support for its point of view.

**3. Supporting the federal state:** Obviously, the citizens of Somaliland are not aligned behind the secessionist project. The Dhulbahante clan has resisted the dominance of Somaliland since its regions were controlled militarily in 2007. It seeks to establish its own entity that is affiliated with the federal state with its center in Mogadishu. These demands, however, have been met with categorical rejection by Hargeisa.

**4. Expulsion of Ethiopian troops:** Any Ethiopian political move related to Somaliland can lead to dangerous escalation by Mogadishu; i.e., expelling thousands of Ethiopian troops participating in the ATMIS to fight Al-Shabaab in Somalia. This may inflame a war along the long border line between the two countries.

**5. Invoking Somali nationalism:** Political actors in Mogadishu can mobilize the society against Ethiopia through invoking Somali nationalism, which dates back to the time of independence, and which proved a great force in facing the external threat and war against Ethiopia in Ogaden (1977). Moreover, Somalia can also utilize Addis Ababa's association in Somali mentality with major dangers, which [Somalis usually sum up](#) as dividing Somalia forever by recognizing Somaliland and creating Ethiopian military base on Somali territory. Somaliland had announced its separation with military and logistical support from Ethiopia to Somaliland Liberation Movement since 1981, and [entered into military confrontations](#) with the regime of President Mohamed Siad Berri. With the fall of the Berri regime in 1991, the movement declared independence in the region.

**6. Resorting to a joint defense treaty:** Somalia can resort to signing a joint defense treaty with countries in the region, including influential countries in the Horn of Africa that possess military bases, including a Turkish military base on Somali territory, and other countries overlooking the Red Sea, such as the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, as well as investing Egyptian and Eritrean anger at the threats of Abiy Ahmed. It can also enter into international agreements to combat terrorism with the United States, for example, to enforce its sovereignty on Somaliland and deter Eritrean encroachments.

## Ethiopia's options

Ethiopia has two main options: either persuading Somalia, or one of the countries of the region, or declaring war. In October, Somalia and the Horn of Africa rejected an [appeal from Ethiopia](#) to enter into negotiations with the aim of granting it the right of access to a port on the Red Sea. Mogadishu says that while it is "[highly committed](#)" to enhancing peace, security, trade and economic integration in the region, it is not interested in providing access to a strategic asset, such as a port. The same attitude is adopted by the rest of coastal East African countries.

Rejection was even intensified the fact that, in 2021, Addis Ababa disclosed [plans to build](#) a military base on the Red Sea. [If concluded, the new deal will grant Ethiopia](#) the right to construct facilities on the Gulf of Aden that can be used as a military base and for commercial purposes for 50 years. It will be able to access the base via a corridor rented from Somaliland. After Abiy Ahmed's speech in the Parliament, the Ministry of Peace issued a [draft document](#) confirming Ethiopia's strategic and economic interests in the Red Sea. The document titled "The National Authority of Ethiopia: Principles and Content," indicates that Ethiopia must secure its rights to use the Nile and the sea, as these water bodies are linked to the existence of the nation.

Abiy Ahmed stated that the demands of Ethiopia to have direct access to the Red Sea and a military base can be met through peaceful negotiations with its neighbors. He believed that it is better to discuss the matter now instead of risking a future armed conflict. However, he said that he was ready to use force if talks failed: "If this is not achieved by other means, war is the means," said an [Ethiopian official](#). This supremacist tone angered Ethiopia's neighbors.

Abiy Ahmed may push for recognition of Somaliland and ignore regional pressure and the anger in Mogadishu. However, this is also risky for Ethiopia. If the agreement falters, Addis Ababa will not be able to reverse the recognition. Consequently, it will have no other option but to resort to force, which is quite difficult in light of the current difficult conditions in the country, which has come out of a two-year civil war in which hundreds of thousands were killed and the economy dropped from one of the best African economies to the quagmire of failure to pay International Monetary Fund loans.

The option to use force is more difficult for Abiy Ahmed, who faces huge internal opposition from armed groups and political actors in Tigray, in the [Amhara regions](#) and even among the Oromo (the ethnic group to which he belongs). Moreover, the [Ethiopian state is essentially bankrupt](#) due to the long war in Tigray in the north. In 2022, Ethiopia lost its stakes in the Berbera Corridor because it [did not contribute financially](#) to the rehabilitation of the port as agreed in 2016. Addis Ababa could not even finance building a marine force, even if it was able to access the sea via Somaliland.

Abiy Ahmed risks a widespread anger by his neighbors. This agreement will have a domino effect in the countries of the Horn of Africa and on the security of the Red Sea in particular.

## Impact on the Horn of Africa and the Red Sea

The Horn of Africa is synonymous with the struggles over land. Africa is also not alien to disputes on maritime lines. For example, South Africa and Namibia dispute the ownership of the Orange River, with each claiming its ownership of the river. This means raising the concerns of their neighbors and coastal countries overlooking the Red Sea. Some of the effects are as follows:

- **Increasing extremism and the influence of Al-Shabaab:** Foreign invasion and occupation of Islamic lands has always been used by extremist groups as a justification for fighting and often helped them mobilize widespread support. Immediately after Ethiopia announced the agreement, Al-Shabaab (a faction of al-Qaeda) announced that Addis Ababa "will not be able to seize one inch of Somali water," calling on the Somalis to "liberate the country" and engage in a "religious war" against Ethiopia, a development which threatens to push the crisis towards a dangerous edge. During the Ethiopian military intervention in 2006, Al-Shabaab supported the inefficient federal government and called for the defeat of the Islamic Courts Union. For its part, Ethiopia, which is considered the historical enemy of Somalia, [fed](#) Al-Shabaab, which benefited from the troubled political history between Somalia and Ethiopia to mobilize and recruit fighters.

Therefore, the MoU constitutes a winning card for Al-Shabaab, which faces a serious test of survival coupled with a large-scale campaign launched by the Somali government. The movement will likely use it to recruit fighters and enhance feelings that are deep-rooted in the Ethiopian military intervention in Somalia and its perceived role as a "[crusader occupation force in Islamic lands](#)." The movement is not content with recruiting the Somalis, but rather recruits Muslims in most countries of the Horn of Africa, including Muslims in Ethiopia [where it has local branches](#). This means increasing its strength and accepting it in the areas under its control and influence in neighboring countries.

The increasing influence and strength of Al-Shabaab enhances the presence of al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula in Yemen, especially as [relations between the two organizations increased significantly in the past few years](#).

- **Ethiopia's relations with Eritrea:** After Ethiopia's talk of a port on the Red Sea, it is predicted that it will be the Eritrean Assab Port, which was previously part of the former Ethiopian empire and has a special symbolic value for Ethiopian nationalists. In 2018, Abiy Ahmed managed to end a two-decade war [in a deal the particulars of which were not disclosed](#), but it was believed that it included Addis Ababa's access to harbors in return for evacuating of the lands that it had occupied for three decades. Abiy Ahmed won the Nobel Peace Prize the following year, but he launched a civil war on the Tigray Front. Eritrean troops joined the foray because of Afwerki's long dislike of the Tigray. However, the two men disagreed later when Abiy [Ahmed signed](#) an agreement with the Tigray and ended the civil war. Each of them saw the other as a threat to his influence in the region. Sources close to each of them say the two men are [preparing for war](#). Therefore, Asmara appears to be concerned about Addis Ababa's access to any naval bases. The Eritrean regime was always seeking to keep [Ethiopia landlocked](#). With the current imperial dreams of Abiy Ahmed's government, Asmara is more concerned, and since last November has deployed troops along the border.
- **Egypt:** Though to a lesser extent than Eritrea, Egypt is also concerned about Ethiopia's large maritime presence in the Red Sea and the Gulf of Aden. Moreover, the countries of the Horn of Africa are a strategic depth for Egypt, and the main ports of Somalia were historically within the Egyptian commercial sphere. Therefore, [Cairo](#) announced that it would not tolerate any violation of the security of Somali territory. [Ethiopia is involved in a long-term conflict with Egypt](#) and Sudan over using the Nile water.
- **Djibouti:** Addis Ababa's direct access to the sea will have a negative impact on Djibouti, which receives about \$1.5 billion annually in return for Addis Ababa's use of its ports. This is a large income for the poor country, and losing it could lead to the instability of President Ismail Omar Guelleh, who has benefited from this cash flow for more than two decades of assuming office. Therefore, after the MoU was disclosed, [Guelleh scolded the Ethiopian ambassador](#) for hiding the details of the negotiations with Somaliland.
- **Red Sea Security:** The outbreak of conflict in the Horn of Africa will be a nightmare for all international powers concerned with the security of the Red Sea and the Gulf of Aden, especially as this maritime zone is already facing great challenges as the Houthi rebels in Yemen transformed the waterway to a theater of attacks.

They said they would prevent Israeli shipping in support of Gaza. However, many attacks have targeted non-Israeli ships, prompting major shipping companies to reroute their vessels. Moreover, marine piracy attacks rose to unprecedented levels after they had almost disappeared in the past few years.

Failure to contain tension between Mogadishu and Addis Ababa will lead to war and regional lineup. [Somalia will reject](#) any mediation unless Ethiopia withdraws from the agreement with the Somaliland region. If Addis Ababa proceeds to conclude an agreement to reinforce and formalize the MoU, Mogadishu will search for regional and international support, including military support. It may be noted that there is a Turkish military base on its territory.

The situation in the Horn of Africa has an overlapping impact that goes beyond the countries overlooking the Red Sea, especially in relation to human trafficking, marine piracy and illegal immigration. The countries of the Horn of Africa are also the largest strategic depth of the countries of the Arabian Peninsula, whose national security is linked to the security of this region.

- **Dynamics of influence in the Horn of Africa:** The region is already replete with security challenges, including piracy, illegal trafficking in persons, terrorism, and competition for strategic ports. Moreover, China, the United States and European countries have military bases in Djibouti. The UAE, Turkey, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Iran and Russia are competing to secure ports on the Red Sea coast and influence in the Horn of Africa. The advent of Ethiopia to this complex scene will complicate the situation further.
- **International interests:** The ambition of restoring the Ethiopian empire is reminiscent of the Russian war in Ukraine. It seems that Abiy Ahmed is inspired by this experience in a context of international chaos that seems to make achieving these aspirations feasible. The US is sympathetic with Addis Ababa's move, despite US and EU statements of respecting Somalia's territorial integrity. The White House wants to steer policies in East Africa to serve its goal of mitigating China's influence. With a share of about 40%, East Africa is the most important destination of Chinese investments in Africa as part of the Belt and Road Initiative, with the bulk of those investments in Ethiopia and Djibouti. Rerouting shipping is likely to influence Chinese investments.

## Resolving conflict

There are no readily available solutions to settle the complex conflict that involves Somalia, Somaliland and Ethiopia. If Somalia resorted to imposing its sovereignty by force in Somaliland, the situation will slip out of control. The same applies to Addis Ababa. Similarly, political actors in Hargeisa should not be carried away by the short-term gains of recognition and economic gains while ignoring the bigger long-term consequences that have to do with their relations with Mogadishu and Addis Ababa, and steering clear of transforming their lands into areas of political and perhaps military strife later on.

As for Ethiopia, it would be wise for Addis Ababa to avoid the imperial adventure that was revived by the Russian incursions in Ukraine. Addis Ababa shall realize that access to the sea is far better achieved through diplomacy than through entering into a destructive war in the midst of internal crisis represented by the exhausted economy and external anger of the neighbors because it will risk all the gains that had been obtained over years of improving its relations with its neighbors in Djibouti, Somalia and finally in Eritrea. Ethiopia's regional ambitions may revive old alliances and create new regional ones to curb Addis Ababa's recklessness. The means of access to the sea that were used in the Renaissance Dam crisis are now exposed and are inapplicable again.

Horn of Africa: The effects of the current crisis will reach the borders of most countries, including Uganda and Kenya. Mediation to end the current crisis and push towards economic integration in East Africa away from military and political aspirations can boost stability in the region and bring external investment.

The impact of the Horn of Africa on the Gulf states and Yemen is great. The strategic depth and the national security of the Horn of Africa directly affect these countries and the security of the Red Sea and the Gulf of Aden in general. Vitalizing the role of the Council of Countries Overlooking the Red Sea and the Gulf of Aden, which was established in 2020, will be more appropriate than solutions proposed and mediated by the eastern and western camps.



## Margins:

Ras Alula was a war general during the reign of emperors Johannes IV (1871-1889) and Meneik II (1889-1911), and an example of the apex of Ethiopia's ambitions for domination. He fought wars in Eritrea and the Sudan to achieve the imperial dream of controlling the Red Sea coast. For his letters to English and Italian generals and his views of the need to restore Abyssinian domination in the Red Sea, see Haggai Erlicfi's [Political Biography of Ras Alula 1875-1897 \(published 1973\)](#). The emperors relied on an imagined image of the Ethiopian or Abyssinian empire concocted before the European occupation of Africa. For example, the emperors relied on the *Kebre Neget*, a fourteenth century manuscript, used as a source of legitimacy and sovereignty by Ethiopian leaders. It is the source of the legend of Ethiopian kings, their genealogical allegations and that the Emperor of Ethiopia ruled over all the lands from Jerusalem to western India. Regional Abyssinian territory was also portrayed as extending to the coast of the Indian Ocean in the current northern Mozambique and reached the Atlantic Ocean, north of Angola.



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