

A RENEWED EU STRATEGY FOR ERITREA, ETHIOPIA, HORN OF AFRICA AND RED SEA STABILITY

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Horn of Africa is entering a period of renewed geopolitical fragility. Relations between Eritrea and Ethiopia have deteriorated following the collapse of trust after the Tigray war, disputes over Red Sea access, and rising military tensions around the Eritrean port of Assab. At the same time, the European Union has strategic interests in regional peace, maritime security, migration management, trade corridors, and conflict prevention in the Red Sea basin.

This memorandum argues that the EU should pursue a pragmatic strategy centered on:

- Preventing renewed interstate war between Eritrea and Ethiopia;
- Supporting a structured reconciliation framework;
- Facilitating mutually beneficial economic integration;
- Promoting negotiated Ethiopian commercial access to Eritrean ports under Eritrean sovereignty;
- Anchoring regional cooperation within African Union-led diplomacy.

The EU should avoid securitized or coercive approaches and instead use infrastructure financing, trade incentives, diplomatic guarantees, and phased confidence-building measures.

I. Strategic Challenges Facing Eritrea

1. Geopolitical Isolation

Eritrea remains one of the most diplomatically isolated states in Africa. Relations with neighboring states fluctuate between tactical cooperation and confrontation. Its withdrawal from regional structures such as IGAD reflects long-standing mistrust toward multilateral institutions.

The Eritrean government views external pressure — whether from Western states, Ethiopia, or Gulf actors — through the lens of sovereignty preservation after a long independence struggle.

2. The Ethiopia-Eritrea Connundrum

Ethiopia and Eritrea share a complex history of federation, war, and uneasy peace, with current tensions driven by unresolved border disputes, maritime access questions, and shifting regional alliances.

Historical Background

Ethiopia and Eritrea were federated in 1952 under a UN resolution, which granted Eritrea autonomy while keeping it under Ethiopian sovereignty. This arrangement quickly became contentious as Ethiopia gradually reduced Eritrea's autonomy, culminating in the dissolution of the federation in 1962. That decision triggered a 30-year armed struggle for independence led by the Eritrean People's Liberation Front (EPLF). Eritrea eventually achieved de facto independence in 1991 and formal international recognition after a UN-supervised referendum in 1993.

Despite early post-independence cooperation, relations deteriorated over disputes involving trade, currency arrangements, and especially border demarcation. These tensions escalated into the Eritrean–Ethiopian War from 1998 to 2000, centered on contested areas such as Badme. The war caused tens of thousands of deaths and ended with the Algiers Agreement, which established a ceasefire and created a UN-backed boundary commission.

The **Algiers Agreement**, signed on 12 December 2000 by the governments of Eritrea and Ethiopia, marked the formal end of the 1998–2000 Eritrean-Ethiopian War, one of the deadliest interstate conflicts in post-Cold War Africa. More than a ceasefire arrangement, the agreement represented an ambitious attempt to replace military confrontation with a rules-based framework grounded in international law, arbitration, and accountability.

At its core, the agreement sought to transform a violent territorial dispute into a legal and diplomatic process. The parties committed themselves to a permanent cessation of hostilities and accepted the creation of independent mechanisms to address the conflict's underlying causes and consequences. Most notably, the agreement established the Eritrea-Ethiopia Boundary Commission under the auspices of the Permanent Court of Arbitration. The commission was tasked with delimiting and demarcating the border between the two states, and its decisions were explicitly designated as “final and binding.” This provision reflected a rare and significant commitment by both governments to accept international adjudication rather than pursue territorial claims through force.

The agreement also created the Eritrea-Ethiopia Claims Commission, which was mandated to assess claims arising from violations of international humanitarian law and other legal obligations during the war. Through this mechanism, both countries were able to seek compensation for damages suffered by their citizens and institutions. The inclusion of a claims process demonstrated an understanding that sustainable peace required not only ending violence but also addressing grievances and legal accountability.

Humanitarian concerns occupied an important place in the agreement. Both governments pledged to ensure humane treatment of each other's nationals, facilitate the release and repatriation of prisoners of war, and cooperate on matters affecting civilians displaced by the conflict. These provisions reflected broader international norms regarding post-conflict reconciliation and the protection of human rights.

Despite its strengths, the Algiers Agreement quickly encountered significant implementation challenges. The most contentious issue emerged from the Boundary Commission’s 2002 ruling, which awarded the disputed town of Badme—the symbolic flashpoint of the war—to Eritrea. While Eritrea insisted on immediate implementation of the decision, Ethiopia expressed reservations about aspects of the ruling and sought adjustments to the demarcation process. The resulting deadlock undermined the agreement’s effectiveness and gave rise to a prolonged period often described as “no war, no peace.” Although large-scale fighting did not resume, the border remained heavily militarized, diplomatic relations deteriorated, and mutual distrust persisted for nearly two decades.



ERITREA

THE ALGIERS AGREEMENT

ENDING WAR. PURSUING PEACE.




ETHIOPIA


Signed on **12 December 2000** in Algiers, Algeria, the Algiers Agreement formally ended the 1998–2000 Eritrean–Ethiopian War and created a framework for resolving disputes, addressing damages, and building a path to lasting peace.

THE WAR IN NUMBERS (1998–2000)

-  Tens of thousands dead
-  Hundreds of thousands displaced
-  Billions of dollars in economic losses



A PIVOTAL AGREEMENT



The agreement replaced war with dialogue, law, and international mechanisms to resolve one of Africa’s most dangerous conflicts.

SIGNED



12 DECEMBER 2000
Algiers, Algeria

CORE PROVISIONS OF THE ALGIERS AGREEMENT

1. CEASEFIRE

Both sides committed to a permanent cessation of hostilities and to resolving their disputes peacefully.

2. BOUNDARY COMMISSION

The Eritrea–Ethiopia Boundary Commission (EEBC) was established under the Permanent Court of Arbitration in The Hague. Its decision is “final and binding”.

In 2002, the EEBC awarded the town of Badme to Eritrea.

3. CLAIMS COMMISSION

The Eritrea–Ethiopia Claims Commission (EECC) would examine claims for damages and losses resulting from violations of international law during the war.

Both countries received compensation awards.


4. HUMANITARIAN PROVISIONS

The agreement mandated humane treatment of each other’s nationals, the release and repatriation of prisoners of war, and cooperation on humanitarian issues.

5. INTERNATIONAL MONITORING




The UN Mission in Ethiopia and Eritrea (UNMEE) was deployed to monitor the ceasefire and establish a Temporary Security Zone (TSZ).

IMPLEMENTATION CHALLENGES


-  The main sticking point was the **2002** Boundary Commission ruling on **Badme** and surrounding areas.
-  Eritrea insisted on immediate implementation, while Ethiopia raised objections regarding the practical implementation of the decision.
-  The deadlock led to a prolonged period of “no war, no peace” (2002–2018): the border remained militarized, diplomatic relations were frozen, and trust remained low.
-  UN peacekeeping faced severe restrictions, limiting its effectiveness.

 **The agreement ended large-scale fighting, but not political tension.**

DEVELOPMENTS SINCE 2018

-  **2018**
Rapprochement between Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed and President Isaias Afwerki.
-  **9 JULY 2018**
The Joint Declaration of Peace and Friendship was signed in Asmara.
-  **2018–2019**
Diplomatic relations restored, borders opened, air links and communications resumed.
-  **2019**
Abiy Ahmed was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize for his role in the peace process.
-  **2020–2022**
The Tigray War and regional tensions created new challenges to sustaining peace.

WHY THE AGREEMENT MATTERS

-  It ended one of Africa’s deadliest wars.
-  It established a legal and peaceful framework for resolving disputes.
-  It set a precedent for the use of international arbitration in Africa.
-  It addressed both border issues and the human and material costs of war.

LEGACY



The Algiers Agreement is a landmark peace accord that shows both the power and the limits of legal solutions. It stopped a devastating war and created institutions for justice and dialogue. Its full promise depends on the continued political will of Eritrea and Ethiopia to turn agreements into lasting friendship.

“ The Algiers Agreement proved that peace is possible when law replaces war and when nations choose negotiation over confrontation. ”

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Nevertheless, the agreement's historical significance should not be underestimated. It successfully halted a devastating war and established a precedent for the peaceful settlement of interstate disputes through legal institutions. It also demonstrated both the possibilities and limitations of international arbitration in resolving deeply rooted territorial conflicts. The Algiers framework showed that legal decisions can provide clarity and legitimacy, but that lasting peace ultimately depends on political will and mutual acceptance of outcomes.

The agreement acquired renewed relevance in 2018, when Abiy Ahmed and Isaias Afwerki initiated a dramatic rapprochement and signed the Joint Declaration of Peace and Friendship between Eritrea and Ethiopia. By accepting the core principles of the Algiers framework and restoring diplomatic relations, the two leaders effectively revived a peace process that had long appeared stalled. Although subsequent regional conflicts, particularly the Tigray War, introduced new complexities into Eritrea–Ethiopia relations, the Algiers Agreement remains the foundational legal and diplomatic instrument governing the end of their border war.

Viewed in retrospect, the Algiers Agreement was not merely a ceasefire document but a sophisticated peace settlement that attempted to balance sovereignty, justice, and reconciliation. Its legacy lies both in its success in ending active warfare and in the lessons it offers about the challenges of translating legal agreements into durable political peace.¹

Executing on challenges of the Ethio-Eritrean peace framework:

1. Border Ruling Contested

Challenge: Border ruling contested

Execution: Phased demarcation and monitored transfer of territory

The most significant obstacle to implementing the Algiers Agreement emerged after the Boundary Commission awarded the disputed town of Badme to Eritrea in 2002. Although both parties had previously agreed that the Commission's decision would be final and binding, disagreements arose over how the ruling should be implemented on the ground. A phased demarcation process could have reduced resistance by separating legal recognition of the boundary from the practical transfer of administrative authority. International monitors could have supervised each stage of implementation, verified compliance, and provided reassurance to affected communities. Such an approach would have transformed a politically sensitive territorial transfer into a structured and transparent process, reducing the likelihood of renewed tensions.

2. Mutual Distrust

Challenge: Mutual distrust

Execution: Joint commissions and confidence-building measures

Decades of conflict, including the liberation struggle and the 1998–2000 war, left Eritrea and Ethiopia with deep political and military mistrust. Even after the signing of the Algiers Agreement, each side remained suspicious of the other's intentions, making cooperation

¹ https://www.files.ethz.ch/isn/125337/1392_Algers%20Agreement.pdf

difficult. To address this challenge, permanent joint commissions could have been established to facilitate communication on border management, trade, security, and humanitarian issues. Confidence-building measures such as regular military-to-military meetings, information sharing, cross-border economic projects, and cultural exchanges would have helped replace confrontation with cooperation. Sustained interaction at both governmental and community levels could have gradually rebuilt trust and strengthened commitment to peace.

3. Militarized Frontier

Challenge: Militarized frontier

Execution: Verified troop withdrawals and security guarantees

Following the war, the Ethiopia–Eritrea border became one of the most heavily militarized frontiers in Africa. Large troop deployments, military fortifications, and constant readiness for renewed conflict created an atmosphere of insecurity that undermined the peace process. A coordinated program of phased troop withdrawals, monitored by international observers, could have reduced the risk of accidental clashes and demonstrated compliance with the agreement. These withdrawals would have been most effective if accompanied by security guarantees from regional and international actors, ensuring that neither side perceived demilitarization as a strategic vulnerability. By lowering military tensions and increasing transparency, verified withdrawals could have helped transform the border from a zone of confrontation into one of stability.

Linking Theme

Together, these three challenges reveal a central lesson of the Algiers Agreement: legal decisions alone cannot secure lasting peace. Effective implementation requires mechanisms that address political realities, build confidence between former adversaries, and provide credible assurances that commitments will be honored. The absence of such mechanisms contributed significantly to the prolonged "no war, no peace" period that followed the agreement.

4. Peacekeeping Restrictions

Challenge: Peacekeeping restrictions

Execution: Full operational access for UN monitors

The effectiveness of the peace process depended heavily on the ability of international peacekeepers to monitor compliance with the Algiers Agreement. However, over time, restrictions imposed on the movement and activities of the United Nations Mission in Ethiopia and Eritrea (UNMEE) limited its capacity to verify troop positions, investigate incidents, and maintain confidence between the parties. Ensuring full operational access for UN personnel—including unrestricted movement, logistical support, and access to sensitive border areas—would have strengthened transparency and reduced opportunities for misunderstanding. A robust monitoring presence could have served as an impartial guarantor of compliance, providing early warning of potential disputes and helping prevent localized tensions from escalating into broader confrontations.

5. Humanitarian Grievances

Challenge: Humanitarian grievances

Execution: Compensation, repatriation, and community recovery programs

The war left deep humanitarian scars, including displaced populations, separated families, destroyed infrastructure, and widespread economic hardship. While the Claims Commission addressed legal compensation for damages, lasting peace required a broader strategy focused on human recovery and reconciliation. Comprehensive repatriation programs for displaced persons, compensation mechanisms for affected civilians, and investments in rebuilding schools, roads, health facilities, and local economies could have addressed the everyday consequences of conflict. Community-level recovery initiatives would also have helped reduce resentment and foster a sense that peace was delivering tangible benefits to ordinary citizens rather than remaining solely a diplomatic achievement.

6. Political Deadlock

Challenge: Political deadlock

Execution: Sustained diplomatic engagement and international mediation

One of the greatest weaknesses of the post-Algiers period was the absence of a sustained political process capable of resolving disputes that emerged during implementation. As disagreements over the border intensified, communication between the two governments deteriorated, leaving few channels through which tensions could be managed constructively. Regular high-level diplomatic meetings, supported by regional organizations and international mediators, could have helped maintain momentum and address emerging obstacles before they hardened into long-term stalemates. Continuous mediation would not have replaced the legal rulings established under the agreement, but it could have provided a political framework for implementing them. By keeping dialogue active and encouraging compromise, diplomatic engagement might have prevented the prolonged "no war, no peace" environment that characterized relations between Eritrea and Ethiopia for nearly two decades.

Synthesis

Taken together, these six implementation challenges demonstrate that peace agreements succeed not only because of what they prescribe, but because of how they are executed. The Algiers Agreement provided a strong legal foundation for ending the war, yet its implementation required effective monitoring, humanitarian recovery, trust-building, security guarantees, and sustained political engagement. The experience of Eritrea and Ethiopia illustrates a broader lesson in peacebuilding: ending violence is often the easiest step; transforming a ceasefire into a durable and cooperative peace is the far more demanding task.

Post-war relations and peace efforts

From 2000 to 2018, the two countries existed in a "no war, no peace" condition, marked by heavily militarized borders and minimal diplomatic contact. A major shift occurred in 2018 when Ethiopian Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed and Eritrean President Isaias Afwerki signed a peace agreement that reopened borders, restored diplomatic relations, and resumed flights.

However, this rapprochement was fragile. During the Tigray War (2020–2022), Eritrean forces fought alongside Ethiopian federal forces against the Tigray People’s Liberation Front (TPLF). While this created a temporary alignment of interests, Eritrea later felt excluded from the post-war political process, and mutual mistrust quickly resurfaced.

Current tensions

Several overlapping factors are driving renewed strain.

Maritime access is one of the most sensitive issues. Ethiopia is landlocked and has increasingly emphasized the need for access to the Red Sea, including historical references to ports such as Assab. Eritrea views any discussion of this kind as a potential challenge to its sovereignty and territorial integrity.

There are also mutual accusations of supporting armed groups. Ethiopia has accused Eritrea of backing insurgent movements in regions such as Tigray, Amhara, and Oromia, while Eritrea denies these claims and raises its own security concerns regarding Ethiopian instability along the border.

Regional alliances further complicate the picture. Eritrea has strengthened ties with countries such as Egypt and Saudi Arabia, while Ethiopia has deepened relations with actors including the United Arab Emirates and Turkey. These alignments are interpreted through a strategic competition lens, particularly around Red Sea influence.

Border militarization has also increased, especially near the Tigray frontier, raising concerns about potential escalation. Reports of intercepted arms shipments and Eritrea’s withdrawal from regional forums such as IGAD have contributed to growing distrust and reduced diplomatic communication.

Geopolitical significance

The Red Sea corridor is strategically important for global trade and military logistics. Control and influence over ports in the region affect not only Ethiopia and Eritrea but also external powers, including the United States and China, alongside Middle Eastern states with strong maritime interests. This makes local tensions part of a wider international strategic environment rather than a purely bilateral issue.

Potential scenarios

Analysts generally outline three broad trajectories. One is diplomatic de-escalation through renewed African Union or regional mediation, leading to confidence-building measures and reduced tensions. A second is intermittent cross-border clashes without full-scale war, driven by proxy activity and localized military incidents. A third, less likely but still possible scenario, is a broader multi-front conflict involving internal Ethiopian instability and external involvement, with severe regional consequences.

The Ethiopia–Eritrea relationship remains structurally fragile because it is shaped by unresolved historical grievances, competing interpretations of sovereignty, and overlapping

regional security rivalries. While full-scale war is not inevitable, the system is prone to repeated cycles of tension and partial stabilization. Sustained diplomacy, clearer security arrangements, and durable regional frameworks would be required to shift the relationship away from recurring instability.

The Ethiopia–Eritrea conundrum thus describes a persistent cycle of cooperation, conflict, and incomplete reconciliation between two deeply interconnected states. Their modern relationship is rooted in a shared revolutionary history, where Eritrean and Ethiopian liberation movements fought together against the Derg regime. This shared victory in 1991 created unusually close political and security ties between former allies who were suddenly turned into separate sovereign states after Eritrea’s independence in 1993. In the early post-independence years, relations appeared cooperative, with economic and logistical integration still functioning informally across borders.

However, this fragile arrangement was not supported by strong or durable institutions within Ethiopia or between the two states. Ethiopia’s post-revolution state-building process was heavily centralized and dominated by liberation-era elites, which limited the development of independent diplomatic, legal, and border-management institutions. As a result, interstate relations depended more on personal leadership dynamics and political trust than on stable rules or frameworks.

Tensions escalated into open war between 1998 and 2000, formally triggered by border disputes such as Badme, but driven more deeply by competing narratives of sovereignty, economic control, and post-war political authority. The conflict caused massive casualties and entrenched hostility between the two governments. Although the 2000 Algiers Agreement ended active fighting, it did not resolve the underlying disagreements in practice.

An international boundary commission ruling in 2002 awarded disputed territories to Eritrea, but Ethiopia’s political system lacked either the institutional capacity or internal consensus to fully implement the decision. This gap between legal rulings and political execution reflected broader weaknesses in Ethiopia’s state institutions, where foreign policy, security, and federal politics were often shaped by ruling-party structures rather than autonomous state systems. The result was a prolonged “no war, no peace” period lasting nearly two decades.

During this time, both countries remained heavily militarized along the border, while diplomatic engagement was minimal and inconsistent. In 2018, Ethiopia under new leadership rapidly moved to normalize relations with Eritrea, reopening borders and restoring diplomatic ties in a highly personalized and fast-moving political process. While this breakthrough appeared transformative, it again relied more on executive decision-making than on institutionalized reconciliation mechanisms.

The fragility of this settlement became evident during Ethiopia’s internal war in Tigray (2020–2022), when Eritrea aligned militarily with the Ethiopian federal government against the TPLF. This alignment reflected older revolutionary-era alliances but also exposed how Ethiopia’s internal institutional fragmentation—particularly within its federal structure and security apparatus—continued to shape regional dynamics. The Ethiopian state’s difficulty in managing internal conflict in a coherent institutional manner spilled directly into its external relations.

After the Tigray peace agreement, Eritrea was largely excluded from the formal settlement process, which reintroduced mistrust and renewed strategic divergence. Underlying this instability are unresolved structural issues: disputed borders that remain politically sensitive, competing security doctrines, and growing tensions over Red Sea access and regional influence. At the same time, both states continue to be shaped by liberation-era political cultures, where legitimacy is closely tied to wartime history rather than institutional governance.

In this sense, the conundrum persists not only because of bilateral disputes, but also because of the uneven development and persistent weaknesses of Ethiopian state institutions, which have struggled to consistently translate legal agreements, political settlements, and regional strategy into durable, rule-based systems.

According to the article “Transcending the Ethio-Eritrean Conundrum: A Vision for a Better Tomorrow”, moving beyond the Ethiopia–Eritrea stalemate requires more than diplomatic normalization; it requires building a fundamentally new framework of cooperation that acknowledges both deep interdependence and entrenched mistrust. The author argues that Ethiopia and Eritrea are too historically, socially, and economically intertwined to behave like ordinary neighboring states, yet also too distinct in identity and political experience to be realistically unified in the near term²

The central proposal is therefore not immediate unification, but gradual supranational integration built on carefully designed institutions. This would begin with economic cooperation—such as customs coordination, trade integration, and potentially shared infrastructure use—while ensuring that both states perceive tangible benefits. Over time, this could evolve into broader frameworks covering security coordination, political dialogue, and cultural exchange, designed to reduce mistrust and prevent recurring cycles of conflict.

A key idea is that past attempts at peace have failed because they relied too heavily on political goodwill between leaders rather than durable institutions. Without rules-based mechanisms, agreements have remained fragile and reversible. The vision therefore emphasizes building structured, treaty-based systems that can survive leadership changes and domestic political shifts in either country.

The proposal also stresses security cooperation as essential, given both countries’ strong militarization and shared regional threats. Coordinated defense frameworks could help stabilize the Horn of Africa and reduce the risk of proxy conflicts or border escalations. Alongside this, cultural and social integration—through education, exchanges, and institutional cooperation—is seen as necessary to rebuild trust at the societal level after decades of hostility.

At the same time, the article recognizes major constraints: deep historical grievances, Eritrea’s strong sense of separate national identity, and Ethiopia’s political complexity and internal fragmentation. It argues that because neither full separation nor full political union is realistic,

² <https://eritrea-focus.org/transcending-the-ethio-eritrean-conundrum-a-vision-for-a-better-tomorrow/>).

the only sustainable path lies between the two—what it frames as a structured, incremental supranational partnership.

In essence, “transcending the conundrum” means escaping the repeated cycle of war and uneasy peace by replacing informal, personality-driven relations with long-term institutions that manage interdependence, reduce insecurity, and create predictable cooperation.



3. Militarization and Security Anxiety

The Eritrean political system is heavily securitized. National service, centralized governance, and military mobilization remain core state instruments. Renewed Ethiopian rhetoric about Red Sea access has intensified Eritrean fears regarding territorial integrity and sovereignty.

Asmara approaches any renewed discussion of Assab or Massawa with a deep, almost visceral sensitivity, because for Eritrea these ports are not merely logistical assets but symbols of statehood forged through war, sacrifice, and the long-awaited recognition of sovereignty in 1993 and reaffirmed in the 2000 Algiers Agreement. To reopen these questions is, from the Eritrean vantage point, to unsettle the very constitutional and historical foundations upon which the state rests. It evokes memories of contested borders, shifting alliances, and decades of existential insecurity. This is why even technical conversations about port access or regional connectivity are interpreted through a defensive lens: they touch the nerve centre of Eritrea's national narrative, its hard-won independence, and its enduring fear of external encroachment. This framing is frequently noted in analyses such as those by the European External Action Service.

Economically, Eritrea remains suspended between strategic potential and structural stagnation. Its Red Sea coastline is one of the most valuable maritime corridors in the world, yet the country's internal economic architecture has not been able to convert geography into sustained development. Infrastructure remains skeletal, industrial capacity shallow, and foreign investment constrained by political isolation and regulatory opacity. The financial system is only lightly connected to global markets, limiting credit, liquidity, and entrepreneurial dynamism. The persistent emigration of young Eritreans—one of the highest rates in the

region—hollows out the labour force and erodes the country's future productive base. Assab and Massawa, which could serve as regional gateways linking the Horn of Africa to global trade, instead stand as reminders of unrealised potential: underutilised, under-equipped, and overshadowed by the political anxieties that shape Eritrea's external posture.

The regional environment further sharpens Eritrea's sense of vulnerability. The Horn of Africa remains a theatre of overlapping crises: Sudan's conflict continues to fragment the state and destabilise its borders; the aftermath of the Tigray war leaves unresolved tensions that could reignite; Somalia and Ethiopia are locked in disputes that reverberate across the region; Gulf rivalries spill into the Red Sea corridor; and the militarisation of the Red Sea introduces new layers of strategic competition. In such a volatile setting, even minor disputes risk being amplified by external actors seeking leverage, transforming local frictions into proxy confrontations. Reporting such as *The Guardian* has highlighted how the Red Sea basin increasingly functions as a geopolitical hinge where Middle Eastern, African, and global powers test influence, project force, and compete for maritime dominance.

Asmara's defensiveness over Assab and Massawa deepens when viewed through the longer arc of Eritrea's political psychology. The state was born from a liberation struggle that fused territory, identity, and sovereignty into a single, indivisible narrative; thus, any external reference to its ports is interpreted not as a neutral observation but as a potential reopening of wounds Eritrea considers definitively closed. The ports are woven into the mythology of national endurance: they symbolise the coastline defended at immense human cost, the maritime frontier that affirmed Eritrea's separateness, and the geopolitical asset that neighbouring states once contested. This is why even diplomatic language about "regional access" or "shared infrastructure" triggers a reflexive tightening in Asmara's posture. It is not the content of the proposals that alarms Eritrea, but the precedent they might set—an erosion, however subtle, of the principle that its sovereignty is non-negotiable. Analyses by institutions such as the European External Action Service often underline this sensitivity, noting how Eritrea reads regional initiatives through the prism of historical encirclement.

Economically, the country remains trapped in a paradox: a coastline of extraordinary strategic value paired with an internal system that struggles to mobilise its advantages. The infrastructure deficit is not merely physical but institutional—roads, power grids, and port facilities lag behind regional standards, but so do regulatory frameworks, investment guarantees, and mechanisms for financial intermediation. The state's preference for autarkic control limits the inflow of capital and technology, while the exodus of young Eritreans steadily erodes the human capital base required for industrial take-off. The result is an economy that survives rather than expands, where Assab and Massawa function as symbols of potential rather than engines of growth. Their underutilisation reflects a deeper structural hesitation: to open them fully would require a degree of economic and political permeability that Eritrea has long resisted.

The regional environment magnifies these internal dilemmas. The Horn of Africa remains a mosaic of unresolved conflicts, shifting alliances, and external interventions. Sudan's fragmentation creates a corridor of instability stretching from the Sahel to the Red Sea; the post-Tigray landscape leaves Ethiopia internally unsettled and regionally assertive; Somalia and Ethiopia's disputes reverberate across security architectures; and Gulf states project

influence across the Red Sea with increasing assertiveness. The militarisation of the Red Sea—through naval deployments, base construction, and strategic partnerships—adds yet another layer of complexity. In such a setting, Eritrea perceives itself as both exposed and indispensable: exposed because instability can spill across borders with little warning, indispensable because its coastline sits at the crossroads of global maritime competition. Reporting such as *The Guardian* has highlighted how the Red Sea basin has become a geopolitical hinge where African, Middle Eastern, and global powers test influence and recalibrate their strategies.

4. The Red Sea

The Red Sea is a semi-enclosed, strategically significant international sea route that functions as a critical corridor for global shipping and energy transport. It is defined primarily by its geographic position between Africa and the Arabian Peninsula and by its dependence on two governing chokepoints that regulate maritime access and throughput capacity.

To the north, it connects through the Suez Canal, which links it directly to the Mediterranean Sea and, by extension, European maritime trade systems. To the south, it is bounded by the Bab el-Mandeb Strait, which provides access to the Gulf of Aden and onward into the wider Indian Ocean basin. This dual-chokepoint structure means the Red Sea is often classified in maritime security and logistics frameworks as a high-sensitivity bottleneck corridor, where disruption at either end can significantly affect intercontinental trade flows.

From a hydrographic and oceanographic perspective, it is classified as a restricted-exchange marine basin characterized by elevated evaporation rates, minimal freshwater inflow, and resulting hypersaline and thermally stratified water masses. These conditions are typical of semi-enclosed seas with limited circulation, where environmental variability is strongly shaped by constrained water exchange with adjacent ocean systems.

In geopolitical and maritime governance terminology, the Red Sea is frequently designated as a high-risk shipping lane and strategic energy transit corridor. This reflects its disproportionate importance in global oil, liquefied natural gas, and container shipping routes between Europe, Asia, and East Africa, as well as its exposure to regional instability and asymmetric maritime threats that require continuous multinational monitoring and naval presence.

When compared to other global chokepoints such as the Strait of Hormuz, the Malacca Strait, and the Panama Canal, the Red Sea–Suez–Bab el-Mandeb system exhibits a comparable or in some dimensions higher level of systemic sensitivity due to its linear dependency on two sequential chokepoints rather than a single control point. This creates a compounded vulnerability structure: unlike the Malacca Strait, which is primarily a single maritime constriction, or the Panama Canal, which is a managed artificial passage, the Red Sea corridor is embedded in a regional conflict-prone environment while also being partially dependent on an artificial canal system at its northern exit. In bureaucratic risk terminology, this elevates its classification as a “multi-node critical maritime bottleneck,” where disruption risk is both geographically distributed and operationally cascading across global supply chains.

Functionally, it is therefore described as a trans-regional maritime artery and a linkage zone within the broader Mediterranean–Indian Ocean system, serving as a structural conduit for

global trade continuity and energy transport resilience, while simultaneously ranking among the most strategically sensitive chokepoint corridors in the world maritime system.

The relationship between the Horn of Africa and the Red Sea is fundamentally defined by geography, chokepoint control, and coastal-state positioning along one of the world's most strategically compressed maritime corridors.

The Horn of Africa forms the southern and southwestern maritime boundary of the Red Sea–Gulf of Aden system. It is the African landmass that physically “faces” the Arabian Peninsula across the narrowest maritime separation point in the region, the Bab el-Mandeb Strait. This strait effectively links the Red Sea to the Indian Ocean via the Gulf of Aden and makes the Horn of Africa a direct gatekeeper region for global shipping moving between the Mediterranean and the Indo-Pacific.

Within this system, Eritrea occupies one of the most strategically sensitive coastal positions on the entire Red Sea. It controls a long stretch of the southern Red Sea shoreline and sits adjacent to the Bab el-Mandeb approach corridor, giving it proximity to one of the world's key maritime chokepoints. This places Eritrea within the immediate operational geography of Red Sea shipping security and naval monitoring routes.

Sudan lies further north along the western Red Sea coast. Its coastline provides additional access points to Red Sea shipping lanes, and its position contributes to the continuity of the western maritime margin between the Horn and Egypt. In structural terms, Sudan forms a mid-coastal buffer zone between the southern Horn of Africa littoral and the northern Suez-linked maritime system.

Ethiopia does not have direct access to the Red Sea but is geographically and strategically tied to it through historical, economic, and logistical dependence on neighboring ports—primarily through Eritrea and Djibouti. In regional maritime terms, Ethiopia is often described as a “hinterland state” of the Red Sea system, where access to global shipping lanes is mediated through coastal neighbors.

At the northern end of the system, Egypt holds a structurally decisive position because it controls the Suez Canal, the northern outlet of the Red Sea. This gives Egypt administrative and operational influence over one of the two primary chokepoints governing Red Sea maritime flow, effectively linking Red Sea traffic to the Mediterranean and global Atlantic-facing routes.

On the eastern side of the wider Horn of Africa system, Somalia does not border the Red Sea directly but occupies the southern perimeter of the adjacent Gulf of Aden. Through its long coastline facing the Arabian Sea, Somalia is strategically tied to the Red Sea system via the Bab el-Mandeb maritime corridor. This places Somalia within the broader security and trade envelope of the Red Sea–Indian Ocean transition zone, particularly in terms of shipping security dynamics and maritime traffic moving toward or away from the strait.

Overall, the Horn of Africa functions as the southern geographic anchor of the Red Sea maritime system, while Egypt anchors the northern exit. Eritrea and Sudan form the primary western coastal interface with the sea, Ethiopia operates as an inland dependent stakeholder within the system, and Somalia shapes the adjacent maritime-security environment through its

control of the Gulf of Aden approaches. Together, they form an interconnected geopolitical and maritime structure centered on one of the world's most critical chokepoint-driven sea lanes.

5. Why the EU Has Strategic Interests in Eritrea and Ethiopia

The European Union has increasingly strengthened its strategic attention toward the Horn of Africa due to a combination of security, economic, and geopolitical factors. The region sits at one of the world's most important maritime crossroads, linking the Red Sea to the Gulf of Aden and onward to the Indian Ocean. A major driver of EU interest is the need to ensure Red Sea maritime security, as this corridor carries a significant share of global trade between Europe and Asia.

Any disruption in this shipping lane, whether from piracy or regional conflict, directly affects European supply chains and energy imports. Migration management is another key priority, as instability in the Horn of Africa contributes to irregular migration flows toward Europe. The EU seeks to address root causes of migration by supporting development, governance, and stability in origin countries. Counterterrorism concerns also play a central role, particularly due to the presence of extremist groups operating in parts of Somalia and neighboring states. These groups pose risks not only locally but also to broader international security networks. Trade route protection is essential because European economies depend on uninterrupted access to Asian markets through these maritime passages.

The Horn of Africa also serves as a logistical bridge for global shipping companies and naval operations. Energy transit is another strategic factor, as oil and liquefied natural gas shipments from the Middle East pass near this region. The EU is therefore invested in maintaining safe and predictable energy flows through adjacent waters. Climate change and environmental stress further intensify instability in the region, increasing the risk of conflict over resources. As a result, the EU supports climate resilience and sustainable development programs in vulnerable communities. Diplomatic engagement has expanded through partnerships with regional organizations such as the African Union and IGAD. Security missions and naval operations have also been deployed to deter piracy and protect commercial vessels.

Humanitarian aid remains a core component of EU involvement, especially in response to droughts and food insecurity. The EU also invests in capacity-building for local security forces to improve regional stability. Economic cooperation initiatives aim to strengthen trade ties and create employment opportunities for young populations. Overall, the EU views the Horn of Africa as a strategically vital region where security, migration, and economic interests are deeply interconnected.

The EU already maintains substantial partnerships with Ethiopia through development financing, governance support, and post-conflict reconstruction initiatives. ([International Partnerships](#)) The EU also previously supported Eritrea-Ethiopia connectivity projects after the 2018 rapprochement, including transport corridors linking Ethiopia to Eritrean ports³

³ ([European External Action Service](#))

A renewed war between Eritrea and Ethiopia would:

- destabilize the entire Horn,
- disrupt Red Sea commerce,
- worsen humanitarian crises,
- increase migration toward Europe,
- and undermine EU investments across East Africa.

Pragmatic and mutually beneficial relations between the EU and Eritrea would likely focus on practical cooperation rather than deep political alignment. The main areas would probably include migration management, Red Sea maritime security, anti-smuggling efforts, infrastructure and energy development, humanitarian access, and regional stability in the Horn of Africa.

For the EU, Eritrea matters because of its strategic location along the Red Sea near major global shipping routes. For Eritrea, improved ties with Europe could reduce diplomatic isolation, attract investment, create economic opportunities, and diversify partnerships beyond reliance on Gulf countries, China, or Russia.

The central difficulty is political. The EU places strong emphasis on human rights, indefinite national service, accountability for wartime abuses, and rule of law. Eritrea's government places greater emphasis on sovereignty, regime security, and resistance to outside political pressure. A pragmatic relationship would therefore probably mean selective cooperation in limited areas while major disagreements remain unresolved.

Regarding the question of what interests were served by Eritrea's intervention in northern Ethiopia during the Tigray war, most analysts interpret the intervention as being driven by security and strategic calculations rather than simple territorial expansion. Eritrea's leadership viewed the Tigray People's Liberation Front as its main long-term security threat because the TPLF had dominated Ethiopian politics after the 1998–2000 Eritrea-Ethiopia border war. Weakening the TPLF militarily and politically was therefore seen by Eritrea as a way to improve regime security and reduce future threats.

The intervention also reflected the temporary political alignment between Eritrean president Isaias Afwerki and Ethiopian prime minister Abiy Ahmed after their 2018 peace agreement. Both governments saw the TPLF as a common adversary at that time.

Historical rivalry also mattered. Relations between Eritrea's leadership and the TPLF had been marked for decades by mistrust, ideological competition, war, and unresolved grievances dating back to the liberation era and the later border conflict. Some analysts also argue that Eritrea sought greater regional influence by becoming directly involved in the conflict, thereby increasing its leverage over developments inside Ethiopia and across the Horn of Africa.

At the same time, many observers believe the war ultimately harmed all sides by intensifying humanitarian suffering, destabilizing the region, worsening international isolation, and creating long-term hostility that could fuel future conflict between Eritrea and Ethiopia.

6. A can do EU Approach would encompass

If the EU actually had a full, unconstrained “toolkit” and wanted to help resolve the Ethiopia–Eritrea “unfinished business,” the core problem it would need to solve is not a lack of ideas but a lack of leverage, trust, and coherent entry points into a highly militarized and externally influenced regional system. So the question becomes what a *coherent EU strategy would look like if it were optimized for conflict resolution rather than incremental crisis management*.

At the center, the EU would first need to stop treating Ethiopia and Eritrea as separate diplomatic files and instead explicitly frame the issue as a single regional security architecture problem in the Horn of Africa. The unresolved border issue, the legacy of the 1998–2000 war, the militarization of borderlands, and the spillover from internal Ethiopian conflicts all function as one interconnected system. A serious EU approach would therefore begin with a unified “Horn Peace Framework” rather than bilateral diplomacy.

In operational terms, the EU’s most important contribution would be to create structured conditional interdependence rather than isolated incentives. Right now, aid and engagement are fragmented, so neither state feels sustained pressure or reward for compliance. A more effective model would link EU development financing, trade preferences, and security cooperation to clearly sequenced benchmarks agreed jointly with the African Union and the United Nations. These benchmarks would not be maximalist political conditions like full democratization, but narrow, verifiable steps such as sustained cessation of cross-border military positioning, reopening of secure communication channels, and institutionalized border incident mechanisms. The key is sequencing: small verified compliance would unlock incremental benefits, while violations would automatically suspend specific benefits without collapsing the entire framework.

The EU would also need to invest heavily in what is effectively a neutral conflict infrastructure. This includes independent border monitoring, not necessarily peacekeepers, but technically enabled observation mechanisms combining satellite monitoring, third-party verification teams, and AU-led field presence supported financially and logistically by the EU. The current system lacks credible verification, which allows both sides to interpret ambiguity in their favor. Reducing that ambiguity is more important than adding new agreements.

A further requirement would be sustained diplomatic insulation of the conflict from proxy escalation dynamics. One of the biggest complications in the Horn is that external actors—regional Gulf states, Egypt, and others—shape incentives for confrontation or alignment shifts. An effective EU approach would involve coordinated diplomacy with these external actors to reduce incentives for escalation, even if full alignment is impossible. This is less about exclusion and more about reducing “conflict monetization,” where regional actors benefit strategically from instability.

On the Ethiopian side, any EU framework would need to account for internal fragmentation. Ethiopia is not a unitary actor in practice; federal-regional tensions and post-conflict

restructuring directly affect its external behavior. The EU would therefore need to integrate internal stabilization support—particularly for border regions—into its external peace strategy. Without this, external agreements will not hold because implementation capacity is internally constrained.

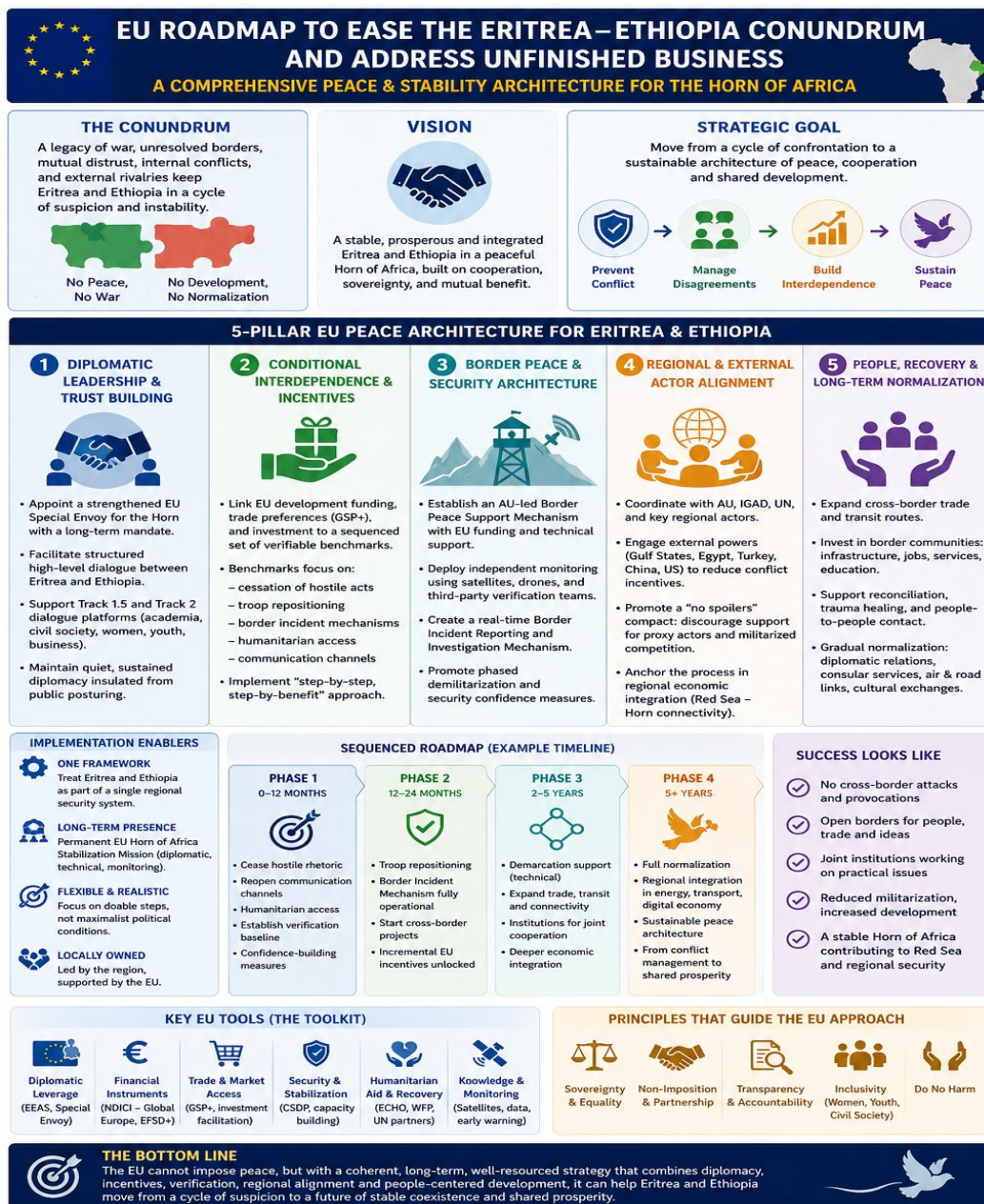
On the Eritrean side, the core issue is isolation and securitized governance. The EU's leverage here is limited, but in a full toolkit scenario it would rely on calibrated normalization incentives: phased reintegration into regional trade and diplomatic frameworks in exchange for verifiable demilitarization steps along the border and structured engagement in joint mechanisms. The logic would be gradual reintegration rather than sudden transformation. A crucial missing element in current real-world policy, which a “full toolkit EU” would correct, is long-term presence. The Horn conflict has repeatedly shown that short diplomatic bursts followed by disengagement produce relapse into tension. An effective strategy would require a permanent EU Horn of Africa stabilization mission combining diplomacy, technical monitoring, and sustained political engagement over decades, not electoral cycles.

Finally, the EU would need to redefine success itself. Instead of aiming for a final “resolution” of Ethiopia–Eritrea relations, which may be unrealistic in the short term, the operational goal would be conflict normalization: stable management of disagreement without militarization, predictable border behavior, and institutionalized communication channels that prevent escalation.

So in summary, if the EU had full capacity, it would not “solve” the Ethiopia–Eritrea conundrum in a one-off settlement sense. It would build a layered system of conditional interdependence, credible verification, regional insulation from external spoilers, and long-term institutional presence. The main shift is from trying to broker peace agreements to engineering a durable conflict management architecture that makes renewed war structurally unattractive and practically difficult.

The diagram models the Ethiopia–Eritrea problem as a coupled instability system, not two separate bilateral disputes. Its core assumption is that conflict persists due to feedback loops between distrust, militarization, and weak institutions.

Figure



The EU is positioned as an external stabilizer introducing control variables into the system. “Diplomatic leadership” functions as the coordination node, reducing signaling noise between actors. “Conditional interdependence” acts like an incentive function, where benefits increase with compliance. This creates a quasi-calculus: cooperation leads to increased aid flow, while escalation leads to reduced access. “Border security architecture” reduces variance in border incidents by adding monitoring constraints. Monitoring converts uncertain events into observable, verifiable data points, lowering misperception risk.

“Regional and external alignment” addresses exogenous variables from Gulf states, China, the US, and AU actors. This step attempts to reduce external shock inputs that destabilize the system equilibrium. “People and recovery” introduces long-run reconstruction variables that

stabilize preferences over time. This shifts payoffs from short-term militarized gains to long-term developmental utility. The system logic is sequential: stabilize, verify, incentivize, integrate, normalize. Each phase acts as a state transition function, moving the region from conflict equilibrium toward cooperation equilibrium. The timeline represents a discounted time model where benefits accumulate slowly but compound. Early phases reduce entropy by lowering uncertainty, misinformation, and escalation risk. Middle phases increase institutional density through rules, channels, and monitoring bodies. Later phases maximize network connectivity through trade, mobility, and shared infrastructure.

The underlying calculus is a cost–benefit rebalancing of war versus peace under which actors continually weigh the expected costs and benefits of conflict versus cooperation. The overarching interest is to upholding energy supply lines and merchant traffic in the Red Sea, and to partner up with Egypt as a choke-point extension node for choke point stabilisation in anticipation of KSA and Egypt taking up naval leadership in the Red Sea, and to provide the conditions for constructive Ethiopian leadership in the Horn of Africa.

7. The Central Strategic Question: Ethiopian Access to the Red Sea

Ethiopia’s Structural Challenge

Ethiopia is the world’s most populous landlocked country. Since Eritrean independence, Ethiopia has depended heavily on Djibouti for maritime access.

Ethiopian leaders increasingly frame Red Sea access as a long-term national strategic necessity.

However, attempts to frame access in nationalist or territorial terms have alarmed Eritrea and increased risks of conflict.

Eritrea’s Core Concern

Eritrea’s primary concern is sovereignty.

Commercial cooperation is potentially negotiable. Military access or foreign basing rights are not. Public discussions suggesting Ethiopian claims over Assab have deepened Eritrean mistrust.

Therefore, any durable arrangement must clearly establish:

- full Eritrean ownership of ports,
- non-militarization,
- legally binding guarantees,
- and reciprocal economic benefits.

8. A Proposed EU Strategy

A. Launch an EU-Supported Horn of Africa Reconciliation Initiative

The European Union should support the establishment of a structured, African Union–led reconciliation initiative designed to strengthen long-term stability across the Horn of Africa. This framework should bring together Eritrea, Ethiopia, Djibouti, Somalia, and the African Union in a sustained diplomatic platform. The initiative must prioritize structured dialogue rather than ad hoc crisis management. It should aim to reduce mistrust and prevent recurring cycles of regional tension. A central objective would be the creation of predictable and institutionalized channels of communication. These channels should focus on border confidence-building measures and early-warning mechanisms for conflict prevention. Economic integration should be treated as a core pillar of peacebuilding. Transit cooperation must be expanded to ensure predictable movement of goods and services across borders. Non-aggression commitments should be formalized to reduce strategic uncertainty. The EU should carefully avoid any perception of external imposition or geopolitical interference. Instead, it should position itself as a facilitator of dialogue and cooperation. Its role should emphasize financial support for peacebuilding initiatives. It should also act as a guarantor of agreed frameworks where appropriate. Technical facilitation, including logistics and institutional expertise, should be another key EU contribution. The legitimacy of the initiative must remain anchored in African leadership and ownership. This approach would enhance trust among regional stakeholders. It would also strengthen the credibility of the African Union as a central mediator. Over time, this initiative could evolve into a permanent regional cooperation architecture.

B. Promote a “Commercial Access Without Sovereignty Transfer” Model

The European Union should encourage a pragmatic and internationally grounded framework for maritime access negotiations in the region. This model would clearly distinguish between sovereign territorial control and commercial economic access. It should support long-term Ethiopian commercial access to key maritime outlets such as Assab and Massawa. At the same time, it must reaffirm Eritrean sovereignty in an unequivocal and non-negotiable manner. This dual structure is essential for reducing political sensitivities. It also ensures that economic cooperation does not translate into territorial disputes. Possible mechanisms could include long-term commercial leasing arrangements governed by international law. Joint customs and logistics zones could also be established to facilitate cross-border trade. Special economic corridors may be developed to streamline transport and investment flows. EU-backed infrastructure modernization would enhance operational efficiency in these zones. Multilateral dispute resolution frameworks should be embedded to manage future disagreements peacefully. These mechanisms should align with established international transit-access models used globally. They should not resemble military basing agreements in any form. The guiding principle must remain that Ethiopia receives reliable and predictable maritime access. Eritrea, in turn, retains full sovereignty over its territory and infrastructure. In exchange, Eritrea benefits from stable revenue streams and infrastructure development. Such arrangements would reduce zero-sum competition in the region. They would also strengthen mutual economic interdependence. Over time, this model could serve as a blueprint for other contested transit regions globally.

C. Create a Security and Non-Militarization Framework

The European Union should support the development of a regional security framework focused on de-escalation and transparency. This framework must prioritize the prevention of militarized escalation in sensitive border areas. It should establish structured border monitoring mechanisms supported by neutral observers. Maritime confidence-building measures would help reduce tensions in contested waters. Military de-escalation channels should be institutionalized to prevent misunderstandings from escalating into conflict. Independent verification systems could strengthen trust between parties. The African Union should play a central coordinating role in these mechanisms. The EU could provide technical assistance, logistical support, and financial backing. The United Nations could contribute additional monitoring and legitimacy. A key objective must be the prevention of escalation driven by misinformation. Nationalist rhetoric and misinterpretation of strategic intent must be actively mitigated. Transparent communication channels would reduce the risk of accidental conflict. Early-warning systems could identify emerging tensions before they escalate. Regular reporting mechanisms would improve accountability among stakeholders. Over time, such a framework could become a cornerstone of regional stability architecture.

D. Establish an EU Global Gateway Red Sea Corridor

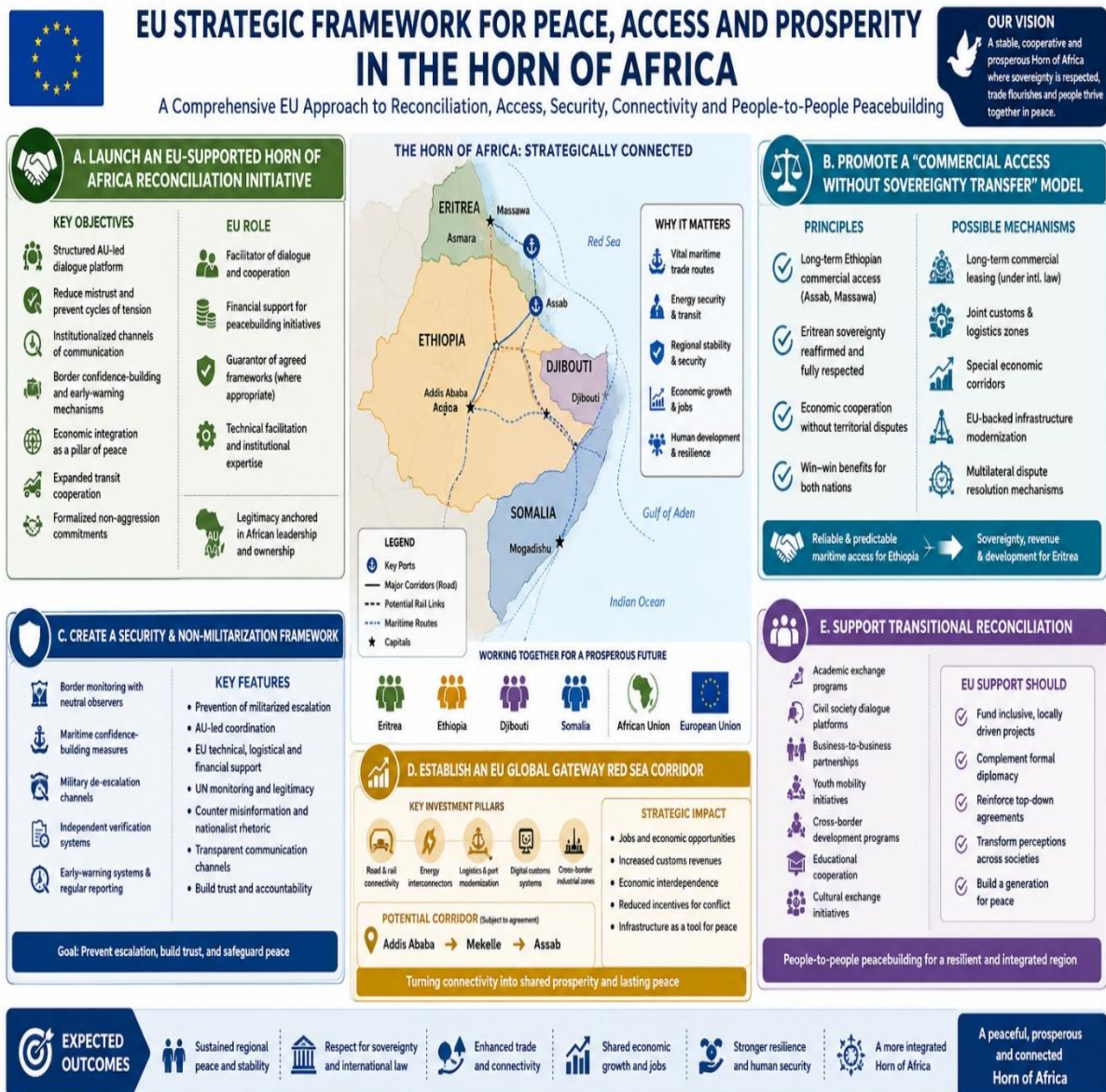
The European Union could leverage its Global Gateway strategy to finance a comprehensive regional connectivity corridor across the Horn of Africa. This initiative would integrate physical infrastructure, digital systems, and energy networks into a unified development framework. Priority investments could include road rehabilitation and modernization across key trade routes. Rail feasibility studies could explore long-term multimodal transport options. Cross-border energy interconnectors would strengthen regional power stability. Logistics infrastructure upgrades would improve trade efficiency and reduce transaction costs. Digital customs systems would enhance transparency and reduce delays at border points. Cross-border industrial zones could stimulate manufacturing and job creation. A potential corridor could extend from Addis Ababa through Mekelle toward Assab, subject to regional agreement and political feasibility. Such projects would generate substantial employment opportunities across multiple sectors. They would also expand customs revenues for participating states. Economic interdependence created by these investments would reduce incentives for conflict. The EU's existing engagement under the Global Gateway framework already provides a foundation for scaling such initiatives. This would position the EU as a long-term development partner in the region. It would also reinforce Europe's strategic interest in stable and secure trade routes. The corridor approach would transform infrastructure into a tool of peacebuilding rather than competition.

E. Support Transitional Reconciliation

Sustainable peace in the Horn of Africa cannot be achieved solely through elite-level diplomatic agreements. It requires deep and sustained engagement across societies, institutions, and generations. The European Union should therefore support transitional reconciliation initiatives at multiple levels. Academic exchange programs can foster mutual understanding between emerging leaders. Civil society dialogue platforms would strengthen cross-border trust and cooperation. Business-to-business partnerships can create shared economic interests that transcend political disputes.

Youth mobility initiatives would help build a new generation less constrained by historical grievances. Cross-border development programs can improve livelihoods in peripheral and conflict-affected regions. Educational cooperation would enhance knowledge transfer and regional integration. Cultural exchange initiatives could reduce long-standing mistrust between communities. EU funding should prioritize inclusive and locally driven projects. These initiatives must be designed to complement, not replace, formal diplomacy. Grassroots engagement would reinforce top-down political agreements. Over time, such efforts could reshape perceptions across societies in the region. They would help transform former adversarial relationships into cooperative networks. This multi-layered reconciliation approach would significantly enhance the durability of peace. Ultimately, it would support the emergence of a more stable, integrated, and resilient Horn of Africa.

Figure



The legacy of the 1998–2000 war and the Tigray conflict continues to shape public mistrust. Sustainable peace requires social normalization, not merely diplomatic normalization.

The entire design follows a “stability-through-integration” logic, meaning insecurity is treated as a symptom of fragmented incentives rather than isolated crises.

a. From conflict management → conflict prevention

Instead of reacting to crises (wars, migration spikes, piracy), the model shifts toward institutional dialogue platforms (A), security de-escalation systems (C), and long-term reconciliation (E).

b. From zero-sum geopolitics → mutual economic dependence

The model assumes states fight over ports, borders, and access, so the solution is shared infrastructure and shared economic gains. This is why “commercial access without sovereignty transfer” (B) and “Global Gateway corridor” (D) are central pillars.

c. From external intervention → African-led ownership

EU role is deliberately limited to financing, technical facilitation, and guarantees, while legitimacy is anchored in African Union leadership. This reduces resistance and increases political acceptance.

d. From fragmented projects → system architecture

Instead of isolated aid programs, everything is linked: diplomacy (A), legal-economic framework (B), security layer (C), infrastructure (D), and societal resilience (E). This forms a multi-layer stability stack.

2. Expected Yield (What the EU expects to gain)

- a. Strategic and security yield Reduced risk of Red Sea escalation Lower piracy and maritime disruption risk Improved early-warning capacity for regional conflicts More predictable Horn of Africa security environment
- b. Economic yield Stabilised Red Sea trade corridor (Europe–Asia route protection) Lower shipping insurance and disruption costs New infrastructure investment opportunities Expanded EU-linked logistics and energy networks
- c. Migration yield Reduced irregular migration pressure over time Stabilisation of key origin/transit states (Somalia, Ethiopia, Eritrea, Djibouti)
- d. Geopolitical yield Increased EU influence in a region contested by Gulf states, China, and Russia Stronger EU role as “rule-setting stabiliser” rather than military actor
- e. Soft power yield Strengthened EU credibility as a peacebuilding actor Enhanced legitimacy through AU partnership model

3.. Budget Logic (How funding is structured)

There is no single budget line; instead it is a multi-layer financing architecture.

A. Governance & diplomacy (Initiative A + mediation support) Estimated share: low–moderate cost AU-led dialogue platform support technical mediation teams institutional design funding

→ Typical funding: grants

→ Scale: low hundreds of millions over several years (EU external action tools)

B. Economic integration & commercial access model (B) Moderate cost, high complexity customs system redesign logistics zones legal frameworks for transit access

→ Funding: technical assistance + private sector leverage

→ EU role: catalytic, not primary investor

C. Security & non-militarisation framework (C) Moderate cost monitoring systems early-warning infrastructure coordination mechanisms with AU/UN

→ Mostly institutional funding (cheaper than military deployment)

D. Global Gateway corridor (D) — largest cost driver High-capital expenditure roads, rail, ports access infrastructure energy interconnectors digital customs systems industrial zones

→ Funding: EU grants + concessional loans + private co-investment

→ Scale: multi-billion euro, multi-decade investment

E. Transitional reconciliation (E) Low cost, high social impact education programs civil society networks youth mobility academic exchanges

→ Erasmus-like schemes, NGO grants, blended aid

4. Overall Cost Logic (Big Picture)

The framework follows a “small governance cost, large leverage investment” model:

Low-cost: diplomacy, mediation, reconciliation

Medium-cost: security architecture, legal frameworks

High-cost: infrastructure corridors (Global Gateway)

EU funding is primarily designed to de-risk projects and unlock larger co-financing from states, IFIs, and private capital.

5. Strategic Outcome Model (What success looks like)

If fully implemented, the expected end-state is:

Institutionalised Horn of Africa dialogue system (A) Predictable maritime access arrangements

(B) Lower militarised tension zones (C) Integrated Red Sea economic corridor (D)

Gradual social reconciliation across societies (E) Overall result: a shift from a fragmented,

high-risk geopolitical corridor to a structured, economically interdependent regional system anchored to EU trade routes.

Instead of competition over harbours and naval bases, Team Europe introduces a novelty role: shared-access maritime governance frameworks that decouple infrastructure control from exclusive sovereignty claims, replacing zero-sum basing rights with cooperative port usage, joint logistics coordination, and regulated commercial access regimes.



9. Risks and Constraints

Eritrean Distrust of Western Involvement

Asmara may perceive EU initiatives as interference. Therefore:

- diplomacy must be gradual,
- respectful of sovereignty,
- and coordinated with African institutions.

Ethiopian Domestic Nationalism

Red Sea access has become politically sensitive inside Ethiopia. EU diplomacy must avoid legitimizing territorial claims while acknowledging Ethiopia's economic needs. At the same time, there are systemic challenges both in the federal model and decentralisation in Ethiopia that must be addressed in track II-format for Ethiopia to lead with credibility in the Horn of Africa. It has been resolved it could be allocated a peace and conflict research network focusing on the Red Sea and that Eritrea a Red Sea-Rift Center for seismic activity to be undergirded by the EU provided good behaviour combined with constructive engagement in the transformation of the Nile Initiative to an approach based on basin -wide management

Regional Rivalries

The Horn is increasingly influenced by:

- Gulf powers,

- Turkey,
- China,
- Russia,
- and the UAE.

EU engagement must therefore be strategic and coordinated rather than reactive.

Fragility of the Tigray Settlement

Unresolved tensions in northern Ethiopia remain a major destabilizing factor. ([European External Action Service](#))

10. Ethiopia and Constructive Leadership in the Red Sea: Strategic Requirements for Foreign Policy and Regional Stability

The EU-Ethiopia Strategic Engagement

The story of exchange between the European Union and Ethiopia is less a straight line than a series of overlapping currents—trade routes, political negotiations, and cultural misunderstandings that slowly accumulated into today’s complex relationship.

It begins, symbolically, not in Brussels but in older corridors of exchange across the Red Sea and the Horn of Africa, where Ethiopian highland polities were already connected to Mediterranean and Arabian worlds through trade in coffee, ivory, and salt. When modern European institutions later consolidated into what is now the European Union, they inherited a very different logic: standardized trade regimes, development frameworks, and bureaucratic diplomacy.⁴

From asymmetry to structured engagement

In the early phases of modern EU–Ethiopia relations, exchange was heavily development-oriented. Europe primarily saw Ethiopia through the lens of food security, humanitarian assistance, and institutional support. Ethiopia, in turn, engaged Europe as both a market and a source of aid, but also as a distant political actor whose norms were not always aligned with domestic state-building priorities.

Trade was present, but limited—coffee remained the symbolic anchor. Ethiopian coffee entered European markets as a premium commodity, while European manufactured goods and development inputs flowed in the opposite direction. Yet beneath this apparent simplicity, political assumptions diverged: Europe emphasized governance reforms and liberal institutional models, while Ethiopian elites often prioritized state capacity, sovereignty, and controlled modernization.

⁴ https://www.eas.europa.eu/ethiopia/european-union-and-ethiopia_en#95614

The post-socialist shift and ideological residue

The end of Ethiopia's Marxist-Leninist period in 1991 created a new political landscape. Former state structures fragmented, regionalization deepened, and new elite formations emerged. Some were technocratic, others ethnically or regionally rooted, and many were shaped by diaspora experience in Europe and North America.

In this period, EU engagement increasingly encountered what could be called “post-ideological hybridity”: actors who spoke the language of liberal development economics in Brussels but operated within very different domestic political logics at home. This produced both cooperation and friction. EU programs expanded in governance, infrastructure, and civil society, but their reception depended heavily on which Ethiopian elite networks mediated access.

Trade deepening, politics complicating

By the 2000s and 2010s, trade and investment relations began to widen. European firms explored textiles, agriculture, and infrastructure-linked sectors in Ethiopia, while Ethiopia sought foreign investment to support industrialization and export-led growth strategies.

But political tensions occasionally disrupted the smooth narrative of economic integration. EU concerns over human rights, electoral processes, and conflict dynamics sometimes clashed with Ethiopian state priorities centered on stability and development sequencing. These disagreements were not simply diplomatic—they were rooted in different historical experiences of state formation and legitimacy.

Culture as the quiet bridge

Amid these structural tensions, cultural exchange played a slower but stabilizing role. Ethiopian diaspora communities in Europe became cultural intermediaries—through music, coffee culture, religion, and academic exchange. Ethiopian Orthodox traditions, jazz-influenced diaspora music scenes, and growing academic interest in the Horn of Africa helped create informal channels of understanding that state institutions alone could not sustain.

At the same time, European cultural presence in Ethiopia—through education partnerships, development NGOs, and urban architectural influence—created visible but uneven layers of Europeanization, often concentrated in urban centers like Addis Ababa.

The present condition: layered interdependence

Today, EU–Ethiopia relations are best understood as layered interdependence rather than a single partnership. Trade continues to grow cautiously, political dialogue remains sensitive and sometimes strained, and cultural exchange operates as both bridge and mirror—reflecting mutual perceptions more than simple integration.

What began as asymmetrical engagement has evolved into a dense web of selective cooperation: Ethiopia navigating multiple internal political logics while engaging a diversified EU, and the EU balancing normative ambitions with strategic and economic interests.

In this sense, the relationship is not defined by resolution, but by ongoing negotiation—between sovereignty and integration, development and governance, tradition and modernity, all refracted through the long arc of exchange between the Horn of Africa and Europe.

Figure



Brussels and Addis Ababa should deepen a steady rhythm of political dialogue, a continual conversation that builds trust like a bridge laid stone by stone across shifting ground, where words become waypoints and understanding becomes the path itself. Together, they should fortify the foundations of democratic life—institutions that stand like enduring pillars, and the rule of law that runs like a clear, binding thread through public life—so that governance gains both gravity and grace.

Civic space in Ethiopia should widen and breathe, allowing media to speak with many voices, civil society to sing in full chorus, and political participation to move like open doors in a bustling agora. Anti-corruption efforts should cut through public finance with clarity and

candor, replacing shadow with sunlight, opacity with openness, and suspicion with systems that stand transparent and true.

In the realm of rights and responsibility, both partners should build stronger mechanisms of monitoring and accountability, so that justice does not whisper but resounds. In the Horn of Africa—crossroads of currents and histories—peace efforts should persist like a long tide of diplomacy, steady, patient, and persistent, carrying mediation across contested shores. Early warning systems should be sharpened and shared, sensing tremors before they become earthquakes, funded and forged in common purpose.

Security cooperation should bind intelligence sharing with legal safeguards, a careful balance of vigilance and restraint, ensuring protection does not eclipse principle. Efforts to counter violent radicalisation should reach into classrooms and communities alike, addressing the ache of exclusion, the silence of unemployment, and the search for belonging among youth. Migration governance should open safer legal pathways, easing movement like controlled rivers rather than perilous crossings, while irregular flows are reduced through development that grows roots where uncertainty once ruled. Return and reintegration should be handled with dignity and repair, turning departure into the possibility of return rather than rupture.

Economic cooperation should widen like a growing marketplace, drawing EU investment into Ethiopian industry, strengthening small and medium enterprises that hum with local ingenuity and job-creating energy. Trade should move more freely, with barriers softened and access expanded, so exchange becomes less a gate and more a corridor. Climate collaboration should turn toward renewable horizons and sustainable fields, where sun and soil are partners in endurance and harvest.

Across all these domains, cooperation should not be episodic but continuous—an interwoven fabric of policy and principle, and partnership and purpose—so that diplomacy becomes not merely exchange, but shared architecture of stability and hope.

11. Strategic challenges

Ethiopia faces a set of interconnected strategic challenges that cut across internal stability, economic development, and regional geopolitics. At the core is the issue of internal cohesion. Despite efforts at federal governance, the country continues to experience tensions between the central state and regional administrations, rooted in competing political demands, questions of autonomy, and unresolved grievances from recent conflicts such as the Tigray war. These dynamics make state consolidation fragile and periodically expose the risk of renewed violence in different regions, particularly Amhara and Oromia.

Closely linked to this is the challenge of ethnic federalism. Ethiopia's political system is designed to balance diverse identities, but in practice it has often intensified competition over territory, representation, and resources. Instead of fully stabilising the state, it has at times deepened fragmentation, creating a political environment where identity and power are tightly intertwined and difficult to depoliticise.

Economically, Ethiopia faces significant pressure. High inflation, foreign currency shortages, and debt constraints limit the government's ability to invest in infrastructure and development

at the scale required by its large and growing population. The economy remains heavily dependent on agriculture, leaving it highly exposed to climate variability, particularly droughts that can quickly translate into food insecurity and humanitarian stress.

Regionally, Ethiopia operates in a volatile neighbourhood. Instability in Sudan and South Sudan, as well as security threats linked to Somalia and militant groups in the wider Horn of Africa, create persistent border and security risks. At the same time, Ethiopia must navigate complex geopolitical competition over the Red Sea corridor, where regional and global actors have overlapping interests.

A major long-term strategic issue is water security, particularly the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam on the Nile. While it is central to Ethiopia's development ambitions and energy generation, it has also created sustained diplomatic friction with downstream states such as Egypt and Sudan, making Nile governance a continuing source of geopolitical tension.

Finally, Ethiopia's external relations require careful balancing. The country seeks investment and partnerships from actors such as China, Gulf states, the European Union, and the United States, while trying to preserve policy autonomy and avoid dependency. This balancing act is increasingly important as external financing and geopolitical alignment become more tightly linked.

Overall, Ethiopia's strategic challenge is not a single problem but a convergence of internal fragmentation, economic vulnerability, and a demanding regional environment that together test the resilience of the state.

For Ethiopia, "execution" of strategy does not happen in a clean, centralized way. It is shaped by a layered system where policy often moves through negotiation rather than direct command. At the core, implementation depends on the relationship between the federal government and regional states. Because Ethiopia's political structure is federal and ethnically based, regional authorities play a decisive role in whether national policies are actually carried out on the ground. Where trust is weak or political competition is high, execution becomes inconsistent or contested.

A second layer is security capacity. In areas affected by conflict or instability, the ability to implement policy depends on whether state institutions and security forces can maintain control and provide basic stability. Without security, even well-designed strategies remain theoretical. A third layer is external dependency. Many development, reconstruction, and stabilization efforts rely on foreign investment, aid, or debt arrangements, meaning that execution is partially linked to international cooperation and financial conditions.

From the European perspective, partnership with Ethiopia is most effective when it focuses on long-term stabilization rather than short-term intervention. The European Union is not positioned as a military actor in the region, but it can play a significant role through economic support, institutional strengthening, and selective security cooperation. This includes assistance in counterterrorism coordination, border management, and maritime security in the Red Sea corridor, as well as investment in infrastructure, energy, and agricultural resilience. Governance support, such as judicial reform and administrative capacity-building, also forms

part of this partnership logic. Migration management is another key area, particularly in relation to transit routes linking the Horn of Africa to Europe.

The regional environment further shapes Ethiopia's strategic position. Relations with Eritrea remain particularly sensitive, marked by periods of cooperation and deep mistrust. Although the 2018 peace agreement improved relations, underlying security concerns and competing influence in northern Ethiopia continue to create uncertainty, making Eritrea a variable rather than stable partner.

With Sudan, the relationship is defined by border tensions, especially in contested areas, alongside the broader importance of Nile water politics and the impact of Sudan's internal instability. This makes Sudan both strategically important and structurally unpredictable for Ethiopia's security environment.

The situation with Libya is more indirect but still relevant. Libya's instability affects Ethiopia mainly through wider migration routes toward Europe, the movement of armed networks and illicit flows across the Sahel and North Africa, and the broader fragmentation of regional security systems that link the Horn of Africa to the Mediterranean.

Taken together, Ethiopia's strategic challenge is to manage internal fragmentation while navigating a volatile regional system, where neighbouring crises and wider Mediterranean instability all feed back into its own security and development trajectory.

12. The Tigray Conflict

Tigray is torn between Addis Ababa and Asmara because the region has become both a contested frontier and a political fault line, suspended between two competing centers of power after the catastrophic Tigray war. Beneath the surface lies not only a geopolitical rivalry between Ethiopia and Eritrea, but also a profound crisis of trust, legitimacy, and survival within Tigray itself.

After the Pretoria peace agreement, some Tigrayan leaders chose cautious engagement with Addis Ababa, believing cooperation with the federal government offered the only realistic path toward reconstruction, reintegration, and political stability⁵. Others, however, viewed Addis with deep suspicion, arguing that promises of protection, justice, and territorial restoration had remained incomplete or unfulfilled. In this atmosphere of disappointment and uncertainty, factions emerged within the Tigrayan political elite, each seeking different alliances and different guarantees for Tigray's future.

Asmara, meanwhile, remains a powerful shadow over the region. Eritrea fought heavily during the war and continues to see Tigray through the lens of long historical hostility toward the Tigray People's Liberation Front. At the same time, relations between Eritrea and Ethiopia have deteriorated since the peace agreement, transforming Tigray into a strategic buffer and bargaining ground between the two capitals. Addis fears renewed instability or separatist mobilisation in the north, while Asmara fears a resurgent Ethiopia consolidating regional

⁵ <https://igad.int/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/Download-the-signed-agreement-here.pdf>

influence and seeking stronger access to the Red Sea. Tigray therefore becomes more than territory; it becomes a hinge upon which wider regional anxieties turn.

The tragedy is that ordinary people in Tigray remain trapped between competing ambitions, much like a valley caught between converging storms. War has left shattered infrastructure, displaced communities, famine scars, militarisation, and social fragmentation. Political factions now struggle not only over ideology but over security, recognition, and control of the postwar order. In such conditions, mistrust spreads like cracks through dry earth: Addis distrusts Tigrayan nationalism, Tigrayan factions distrust one another, and many Tigrayans distrust both Addis Ababa and Asmara alike.

Remedy requires more than ceasefires or temporary bargains; it requires rebuilding the architecture of confidence itself. First, the Pretoria agreement must be fully implemented with transparency and consistency, especially regarding disarmament, territorial disputes, humanitarian access, and the safe return of displaced populations. Peace cannot survive if agreements remain symbolic while grievances remain tangible.

Second, inclusive political dialogue within Tigray is essential. Rival Tigrayan factions must move from zero-sum competition toward a shared transitional framework that prioritises civilian recovery over factional dominance. Elders, civil society, women's groups, youth leaders, and religious institutions should become active mediators in this process, transforming politics from a battlefield of personalities into a forum of collective restoration.

Third, Ethiopia and Eritrea require sustained diplomatic engagement through regional and international mediation. The Horn of Africa cannot endure perpetual cycles of proxy rivalry. Confidence-building measures, border de-escalation mechanisms, and monitored security arrangements could reduce the temptation to manipulate Tigrayan divisions for strategic advantage. Regional organisations and international partners should encourage diplomacy that is preventive rather than reactive.

Economic recovery is equally vital. Reconstruction projects, employment programs, agricultural renewal, and restored trade corridors could help replace the economy of war with an economy of interdependence. Young people without livelihoods are often vulnerable to militarisation and political manipulation; prosperity can become a stronger stabiliser than coercion.

Finally, justice and reconciliation must accompany reconstruction. Without accountability for wartime abuses and acknowledgment of collective suffering, peace risks becoming merely silence between conflicts. Truth commissions, reparative mechanisms, and community reconciliation initiatives could begin healing the psychological fractures left by war.

Tigray's crisis is therefore not only about geography or political allegiance; it is an allegory of a region struggling to emerge from the ruins of war while surrounded by competing powers and unfinished histories. The remedy lies in transforming rivalry into dialogue, suspicion into safeguards, and survival politics into shared regional stewardship.

Improving the Pretoria Agreement

The Pretoria Agreement arrived like a sunrise after a storm that had shaken the mountains of Ethiopia to their roots. Peace demanded courage, and courage demanded trust. Trust became the bridge between enemies who once spoke only through the thunder of weapons.

Figure



This infographic explains how the Pretoria Agreement can evolve from a temporary ceasefire into a sustainable and durable peace framework in Ethiopia. It is organized into interconnected sections that examine the agreement, its achievements, the ongoing challenges, and the reforms needed for long-term implementation.

The Pretoria Agreement

The **Pretoria Agreement** is not viewed as fully sufficient on its own. The subtitle, “**From Ceasefire to Durable Peace in Ethiopia,**” emphasizes the difference between ending active conflict and building a stable political order afterward.

This distinction is critical because many peace agreements succeed in stopping violence but fail to establish long-term political and social stability.

The dove and handshake symbols visually represent reconciliation, diplomacy, and peacebuilding.

The Pretoria Agreement

This section summarizes the 2022 peace agreement signed between the Government of Ethiopia and the Tigray People’s Liberation Front.

The agreement’s central objective was a **Permanent Cessation of Hostilities (CoH)** following the devastating Tigray conflict.

The infographic highlights two central ideas: the agreement significantly reduced large-scale fighting, but durable peace requires stronger implementation mechanisms and broader institutional support.

The pen-and-document icon symbolizes legal commitment and formal diplomacy.

Key Achievements So Far

This section highlights the major successes achieved since the agreement was signed.

Cessation of Hostilities

Large-scale military confrontation declined substantially after the agreement, reducing civilian casualties and humanitarian destruction.

Improved Humanitarian Access

Aid organizations gained greater access to conflict-affected regions, helping restore food distribution, medical supplies, and emergency assistance.

AU Monitoring and Verification Mechanism

The African Union established a mechanism to monitor implementation, verify ceasefire compliance, oversee disarmament efforts, and reduce misinformation.

High-Level Dialogue Platform

Communication channels between the parties remained open after the agreement, helping prevent an immediate return to war.

The green color palette symbolizes stabilization and cautious optimism.

Major Challenges (Top Right Section)

This section explains why peace in Ethiopia remains fragile despite progress.

Incomplete Withdrawal of Armed Forces

Some armed groups and regional forces remained in contested territories, contributing to insecurity and mistrust. Concerns also persist that disarmament could become asymmetrical if all actors are not held equally accountable.

Millions of IDPs Not Returned

Many internally displaced persons (IDPs) remain unable to safely return home because of insecurity, damaged infrastructure, and unresolved territorial disputes.

Weak Monitoring and Enforcement

Although the AU mechanism monitors implementation, it has limited enforcement authority. It can identify violations but struggles to compel compliance.

Political Exclusion

Some local communities, civil society groups, women, and regional stakeholders felt excluded from negotiations. Elite-centered peace agreements often struggle when broader society is not meaningfully integrated into implementation.

Transitional Justice Gaps

Victims of violence continue to seek truth, accountability, reparations, and recognition. Without credible justice mechanisms, resentment and mistrust may persist beneath the surface.

Economic Fragility

The war severely damaged banking systems, telecommunications, roads, schools, hospitals, and local economies. Economic instability can increase the risk of renewed conflict.

The red tones in this section visually represent danger, instability, and unresolved tension.

Central Circle: Durable Peace

At the center of the infographic is its core argument:

Durable peace requires inclusive governance, accountability, economic recovery, and regional cooperation.

The infographic stresses that peace cannot rely solely on the absence of fighting. Sustainable peace also depends on political legitimacy, economic opportunity, social healing, and institutional trust.

The dove within the circle symbolizes hope, reconciliation, and national recovery.

Six Major Recommendations for Improvement

These recommendations form the infographic's primary policy proposals for strengthening implementation.

A. Create an Independent Guarantor Mechanism

The goal is to increase trust and accountability through an AU, IGAD, and UN joint monitoring body supported by clear compliance timelines and quarterly public reports.

Independent oversight is important because peace agreements often fail when no neutral institution can enforce commitments or verify implementation.

B. Expand Political Inclusion

The infographic argues that elite peace must evolve into societal peace by including women, youth, elders, civil society organizations, displaced communities, and regional stakeholders in implementation processes.

Inclusive dialogue increases legitimacy and strengthens grassroots support for peace.

C. Strengthen Transitional Justice

The proposed reforms include an independent truth commission, victim participation, reparations, and reconciliation mechanisms.

Communities affected by atrocities often require acknowledgment and accountability before meaningful reconciliation becomes possible.

D. Prioritize Economic Recovery and Services

The infographic recommends restoring banking and telecommunications systems, rebuilding schools and hospitals, and creating employment opportunities.

Economic recovery helps reduce conflict incentives while rebuilding public trust in state institutions.

E. Improve DDR Programs

DDR refers to Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration.

The infographic proposes transparent weapons verification, vocational training, psychosocial support, and reintegration assistance to prevent former combatants from returning to armed mobilization.

F. Increase Regional Diplomacy

The recommendations include strengthening Ethiopia–Eritrea–IGAD dialogue, coordinating border stabilization, and improving Horn of Africa security cooperation.

Because the conflict had regional dimensions, long-term peace also requires sustained regional diplomacy.

Success Depends On (Lower Right Section)

This section identifies four foundational conditions necessary for successful implementation.

Political Will

Leaders must demonstrate genuine commitment to implementing the agreement.

Participation of Communities

Peacebuilding efforts must include affected populations and local stakeholders.

Regional and International Support

External actors can provide funding, mediation, monitoring, and technical expertise.

Transparent Communication

Public trust increases when implementation processes are visible, measurable, and accountable.

Roadmap for Better Implementation (Bottom Section)

This roadmap presents peacebuilding as a gradual and structured process.

Step 1: Clear Action Plan

Responsibilities and priorities should be clearly defined.

Step 2: Time-Bound Implementation

Implementation should follow measurable deadlines and benchmarks.

Step 3: Independent Monitoring

Progress must be regularly verified by credible oversight mechanisms.

Step 4: Community Engagement

Local participation and ownership are essential for sustainable peace.

Step 5: Sustainable Peace

The final objective is to build resilient institutions capable of preventing future conflict.

The arrows symbolize gradual forward movement rather than instant transformation.

The infographic concludes with its central philosophical argument:

“Peace agreements end wars. Inclusive institutions sustain peace.”

The message emphasizes that ceasefires may stop violence temporarily, but long-term peace depends on governance, justice, economic stability, accountability, and social inclusion.

It reflects a broader lesson from global peace processes: military agreements alone rarely produce lasting peace unless institutions and communities actively sustain them afterward.

Rhetorically, we ask:

What is a ceasefire without justice, and what is justice without healing?

The agreement silenced guns that had roared louder than earthquakes across the Horn of Africa. Across villages and shattered cities, mothers waited for peace as if waiting for rain after a thousand years of drought. Drought created suffering, and suffering created the desperate hunger for reconciliation.

Can a nation truly rebuild if millions remain displaced from the homes that shaped their memories?

The African Union stood as a giant shield attempting to guard the fragile future of the region. Future became the language of negotiators who understood that war devours generations faster than fire devours forests. The implementation process moved slowly, slowly like a wounded river searching for the sea.

How can trust survive when armed groups still stand in contested territories?

The economy of Ethiopia trembled under the weight of destruction so immense it seemed capable of crushing history itself. History became both a teacher and a warning to leaders gathered around negotiation tables. The return of displaced families carried hope brighter than a million lanterns shining through darkness. Darkness remained wherever justice failed to reach grieving communities.

Can durable peace emerge without women, elders, youth, and civil society shaping the process together?

Regional diplomacy became the heartbeat of stability across the Horn, a heartbeat powerful enough to echo across continents. The Pretoria Agreement was not merely a document; it was a fragile flame struggling against hurricane winds of mistrust and division. If that flame is

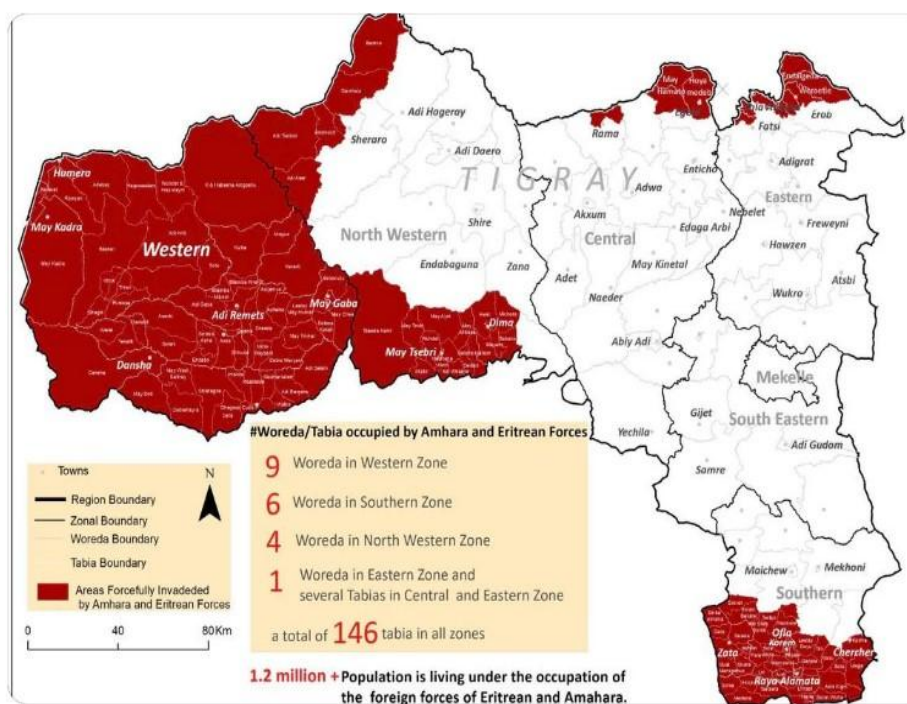
protected with accountability, inclusion, and reconciliation, Ethiopia could rise with the strength of a phoenix reborn from ashes taller than mountains.

Modalities for the Disarmament of TPLP

The question of whether the disarmament modalities for the Tigray People's Liberation Front under the Pretoria Agreement were “the right ones” is highly debated among policymakers, security analysts, and affected communities. The answer depends on what standard is being used: immediate cessation of war, long-term stability, political fairness, or regional security.

From a conflict-resolution perspective, the agreement achieved one major success: it sharply reduced large-scale warfare in Ethiopia. In that sense, sequencing disarmament early helped stop active combat quickly. The logic was straightforward: fewer weapons would reduce the probability of renewed escalation.

Figure



Source: UK Government

Western Tigray is widely reported to be under de facto control of Amhara regional forces and their allies. This area represents a large and strategically important portion of Tigray’s western territory. Eritrean forces are not holding a clearly defined continuous zone but are reported to be present in parts of northern Tigray near the border. Their presence is more intermittent and military in nature rather than formal administration. Most of central and eastern Tigray is generally considered to be under the control of the Tigray regional authorities. The situation remains unstable, with contested authority and ongoing tensions affecting different parts of the region. Overall, a significant western portion is under Amhara control, while Eritrean influence is mainly localized in northern border areas.

However, critics argue that the modalities were incomplete or uneven in several ways.

First, many observers noted that disarmament timelines appeared faster than the restoration of political and security guarantees. This created fears among Tigrayan communities that disarmament could produce vulnerability before full normalization occurred. In post-conflict settings, groups often ask: *Who protects civilians after weapons are surrendered?*

Second, implementation depended heavily on trust between former enemies who had recently fought one of the deadliest conflicts in modern African history. Trust was fragile, and fragile trust complicates DDR processes (Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration).

Third, critics questioned whether the agreement sufficiently addressed the role of other armed actors beyond the TPLF. A disarmament framework can appear asymmetrical if one side disarms while contested territorial or military realities remain unresolved.

Fourth, successful DDR usually requires:

- economic reintegration,
- psychological rehabilitation,
- local reconciliation,
- and long-term monitoring.

Without these, former combatants may feel politically excluded or economically stranded.

Supporters of the Pretoria framework respond that no peace agreement can succeed if armed mobilization remains indefinite. They argue that delaying disarmament could have prolonged humanitarian suffering and weakened the ceasefire itself.

A more balanced implementation model might have included:

1. phased and reciprocal disarmament,
2. stronger international verification mechanisms,
3. clearer civilian protection guarantees,
4. broader inclusion of local communities,
5. and faster reconstruction and political normalization.

So the issue may not be whether disarmament itself was wrong, but whether the sequencing, guarantees, and enforcement mechanisms were sufficiently balanced to produce sustainable peace rather than only temporary stabilization. In peace processes, weapons are rarely only military tools; they are symbols of security, leverage, fear, and political survival. That is why disarmament is never merely technical—it is deeply political.

Summary

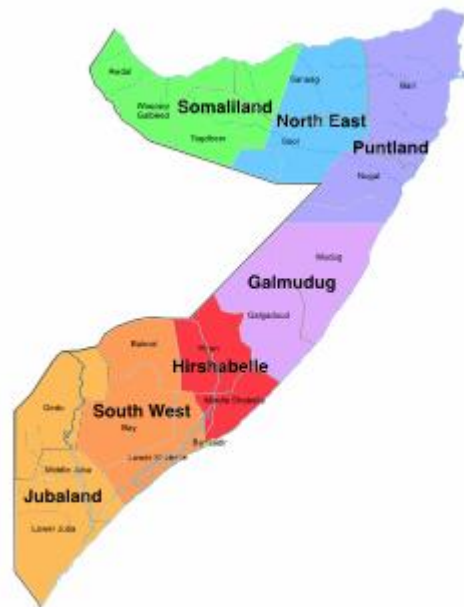
Tigray's challenges are complex and interconnected, arising from the aftermath of war and unresolved political and territorial disputes. Internal political fragmentation is a major issue, with rival elites and competing administrative structures weakening unified leadership. This division reduces Tigray's ability to negotiate effectively with the Ethiopian federal government and manage external pressures. Relations with Addis Ababa remain incomplete despite the Pretoria Agreement, especially regarding disputed areas like Western Tigray and the full restoration of regional authority. At the same time, tensions between Ethiopia and Eritrea increase insecurity, as Tigray risks becoming a buffer zone or proxy battleground between the two states. Humanitarian and economic recovery is also severely constrained by displacement, infrastructure destruction, and economic collapse, which can fuel further instability. Governance challenges persist as rebuilding institutions struggle with low public trust and the presence of armed actors. Overall, Tigray's stability depends on fragile internal cohesion, incomplete federal settlement, and a volatile regional geopolitical environment.

13. The Voes of Somalia

The literature on Somalia's formation and evolution consistently traces the deep historical layering of Somali society, from ancient trade networks along the Horn of Africa coast to the gradual Islamization that connected the region to wider Indian Ocean and Islamic worlds. A central thread across these works is the enduring significance of pastoralism and clan-based social organization, which shaped political authority, social cohesion, and conflict resolution long before the emergence of the modern state.

Across this body of scholarship, Somalia's historical trajectory is not presented as a single explanatory narrative but as a layered debate over how to interpret authority, identity, and state formation in a society where centralized institutions have repeatedly struggled to consolidate legitimacy. I. M. Lewis's *A Modern History of the Somali* remains foundational precisely because it treats clan organization not as a static "tribal remnant" but as a dynamic social infrastructure that both enabled mobility and mediation and also shaped the limits of centralized state authority. Yet even in Lewis's framing, clan structures are not sufficient explanations on their own; they become intelligible only through their interaction with colonial administration, shifting economic pressures, and the political ambitions of postcolonial elites. Raphael Chijioke Njoku's *The History of Somalia* reframes this longue durée in more synthetic form, emphasizing continuity between precolonial trade networks, the Islamization of the Horn, and the disruptive reordering introduced by European partition, while also highlighting how independence in 1960 emerged from overlapping nationalist aspirations that were never fully institutionally consolidated.

Figure



Christopher Clapham's comparative approach in *The Horn of Africa: State Formation and Decay* complicates any Somalia-specific exceptionalism by situating its fragility within a broader regional pattern in which state-building projects confront deeply embedded social systems, uneven coercive capacity, and externally shaped boundaries that rarely align with local political geographies. In this reading, Somalia is less an anomaly than an extreme case of a wider Horn of Africa condition where state authority is continuously negotiated rather than definitively institutionalized. Abdi Ismail Samatar's political economy perspective adds another layer of causality by showing how both colonial extraction and postcolonial development strategies produced uneven regional incorporation, particularly between urban centers and pastoral hinterlands, thereby entrenching structural inequalities that later became political cleavages rather than purely economic disparities.

Across these interpretations, colonial rule functions less as a single causal event than as a reconfiguration of governance logics: it imposed territorial fixity on a historically fluid pastoral landscape, introduced new administrative hierarchies, and redirected economic flows toward external extraction, all of which altered but did not erase existing forms of authority. The Dervish movement is therefore read ambivalently in the literature, simultaneously as an anti-colonial resistance project and as an early attempt—albeit partial and contested—at centralized political consolidation grounded in religious legitimacy and military organization. Independence in 1960 is similarly treated not as an endpoint but as a fragile conjuncture in which two differently administered colonial territories were fused into a single political unit without fully harmonized institutions, legal systems, or administrative cultures, producing structural tensions that early nationalist optimism often obscured.

Post-independence state formation, particularly under increasingly authoritarian governance, is widely interpreted as a shift from competitive parliamentary politics to coercive centralization, where efforts to unify authority paradoxically intensified peripheral resistance and weakened institutional trust. Within this trajectory, the 1991 collapse is rarely framed as an isolated rupture; instead, it is understood as the cumulative outcome of militarized politics,

patrimonial governance, external Cold War patronage, and unresolved center–periphery tensions that had been embedded since independence. Critical interventions such as *The Invention of Somalia* push this argument further by questioning whether the Somali nation-state should be treated as an inevitable historical endpoint at all, suggesting instead that “Somalia” itself is partly a political project that has struggled to fully align with the more durable realities of kinship-based and locally embedded forms of authority.

Taken together, this literature does not converge on a single explanation but rather produces a structured tension between competing interpretations: Somalia as a failed state-building project, Somalia as a regional variant of broader Horn of Africa political logics, and Somalia as a contested national imagination layered over persistent local sovereignties. The result is a historiography in which the central question is not only why centralized authority has been difficult to sustain, but also what kinds of authority—formal, customary, religious, or hybrid—have in practice been continuously reconstituting political order beneath and alongside the state.

Turkey and KSA

Turkey and Saudi Arabia’s engagement in Somalia reflects two distinct models of external involvement shaped by different strategic cultures, historical trajectories, and regional ambitions. Turkey’s approach began in 2011 during the Somali famine, when humanitarian aid created a strong foundation of public legitimacy and political goodwill. This entry point gradually expanded into a comprehensive state-building project focused on strengthening Somalia’s federal institutions rather than bypassing them. Over time, Turkey positioned itself as a central partner in rebuilding governance capacity, security forces, infrastructure, and public administration. Its model is deeply institutional, emphasizing direct engagement with the Somali Federal Government in Mogadishu. The establishment of Camp TURKSOM and the training of elite Somali security units reflect a long-term commitment to shaping the country’s coercive and administrative capacity. Turkey has also invested heavily in infrastructure such as ports, airports, hospitals, and roads, linking development aid to strategic presence.

In parallel, it has pursued maritime and energy interests in Somalia’s offshore zones, reflecting broader ambitions in Red Sea and Indian Ocean geopolitics. This combination of humanitarian legitimacy, institutional embedding, and strategic expansion has made Turkey one of the most influential external actors in Somalia. However, its strong focus on central government institutions has sometimes generated tension with Somalia’s federal states, which often view external support as unevenly distributed. Even so, Turkey’s presence is generally seen as coherent, sustained, and structurally integrated into Somalia’s state-building process.

Saudi Arabia’s engagement with Somalia follows a different logic, one that is less focused on institutional reconstruction and more oriented toward regional stability, religious influence, and geopolitical positioning. Historically, Saudi involvement has operated through financial aid, religious networks, and diplomatic engagement rather than deep administrative integration. Its influence has often flowed through charitable organizations, Islamic institutions, and informal economic and religious ties across the Red Sea. Unlike Turkey, Saudi Arabia has not developed extensive military training programs or embedded infrastructure projects within Somalia’s state system. Instead, its priorities have centered on preventing instability from spilling into the

broader Red Sea region and ensuring that Somalia does not become a platform for piracy, extremism, or rival regional influence. Saudi policy is also shaped by competition with other regional actors in the Horn of Africa, including Turkey and Qatar, as well as broader Gulf geopolitical dynamics. Its engagement tends to be more cautious and indirect, avoiding deep institutional commitments that could entangle it in Somalia's internal political fragmentation. This has resulted in a more diffuse form of influence compared to Turkey's concentrated state-building presence.

The contrast between the two actors reveals fundamentally different visions of external engagement. Turkey seeks to anchor Somalia's sovereignty through institution-building, centralized partnership, and long-term integration into state structures. Saudi Arabia, by contrast, seeks stability and influence through financial support, religious engagement, and strategic containment rather than direct governance reconstruction. One model is structured and developmental, while the other is indirect and network-based. Both approaches are shaped by Somalia's internal fragility, where weak central authority and strong regional dynamics create opportunities for external actors to engage in different ways. The interaction between these external strategies and Somalia's internal federal system further complicates outcomes, as different regions and political actors align with different partners. Ultimately, Somalia becomes a space where competing external state-building philosophies intersect with local governance fragmentation.

Table

Area / Actor	Turkey	Saudi Arabia (KSA)	EU	US
Somalia (federal gov / Mogadishu)	Strong presence: military base, infrastructure, aid	Political + financial influence with federal government	Major donor (aid, governance, training)	Counterterrorism operations, security partner
Mogadishu	Very strong operational hub (base + airport control influence)	Diplomatic + funding influence via federal ties	Aid + institution building	Embassy + intelligence + military strikes (Al-Shabaab focus)
Somaliland	Limited formal engagement (focus remains Mogadishu)	Occasional political/economic engagement	Pragmatic engagement (aid, governance support)	Limited but increasing engagement (security + diplomacy)
Berbera Port (Somaliland)	Indirect interest (regional trade relevance)	Strategic interest in Red Sea logistics	Indirect interest via trade corridors	Strategic interest (Red Sea security + logistics)
Red Sea / Gulf of Aden corridor	Regional power projection	Major strategic maritime interest	Naval security missions	Major naval + security corridor

			(anti-piracy, shipping protection)	(global shipping route)
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The overlap between Turkey, Saudi Arabia, the EU, and the US in the Horn of Africa does not form a single geographic intersection point. Instead, it operates through three interconnected layers of competition and influence, each with distinct actors, functions, and strategic logic.

The governance layer is centered on Somalia's federal institutions in Mogadishu within Somalia. This is the main political arena where external actors engage in state-building, security cooperation, aid delivery, and struggles over legitimacy and institutional influence.

The de facto autonomy layer is located in Somaliland, which operates independently in practice but lacks broad international recognition. Its key strategic focus is the Berbera corridor, which functions as a logistics and trade gateway tied to access to the Red Sea. This creates a semi-separate political and economic space where engagement is often pragmatic rather than formal.

The maritime layer extends across the Red Sea and the Gulf of Aden, forming a global chokepoint that connects Europe, the Middle East, and Asia. This corridor is defined by shipping security, energy transport routes, and naval presence, making it a shared strategic environment for all external actors.

Each external power plays a distinct role across these layers. Turkey is the deepest state-building partner in Somalia, combining infrastructure development, humanitarian assistance, and military training with a strong operational presence centered in Mogadishu. European Union is the largest systemic donor, focused on governance reform, humanitarian support, and institutional capacity-building across Somalia. United States operates primarily as a security-first actor, emphasizing counterterrorism operations, intelligence cooperation, and targeted military engagement against extremist groups. Saudi Arabia functions as a regional financial and diplomatic power, projecting influence through Gulf politics, development funding, and strategic interest in Red Sea trade and maritime routes.

There is no single physical or geopolitical intersection point. Instead, influence converges through functional zones. Mogadishu acts as the political convergence zone where governance, aid, security cooperation, and legitimacy-building overlap. Somaliland and the Berbera axis form a strategic logistics zone shaped by trade infrastructure, semi-autonomous governance, and recognition politics. The Red Sea and Gulf of Aden operate as a global maritime corridor where shipping security, energy flows, and naval power projection intersect.

The core logic is that this is not a map with one meeting point but a layered network of overlapping influence fields, where each actor shifts focus depending on whether the priority is governance, territorial autonomy and logistics, or maritime security.

Since the competition over ports, infrastructure and naval basing in the Red Sea continues unabated and intra-regional trade is increasing, the question arises how to proceed.

Stabilising Somalia requires strengthening the legitimacy and capacity of federal institutions based in Mogadishu so they can deliver security, justice, and basic services consistently across the country.

A core priority is improving national security forces so they can gradually take over counterterrorism and territorial control responsibilities currently supported by external partners. External actors such as United States and Turkey play roles in training, intelligence sharing, and targeted operations, but long-term stability depends on Somali ownership of these capabilities. The European Union contributes by funding governance reforms, institutional development, and humanitarian support that reduce immediate fragility and state dependency gaps.

Regional actors such as Saudi Arabia influence stability indirectly through financial support, diplomacy, and broader Red Sea security interests that affect Somalia's external environment. Political inclusion between federal and regional administrations, including areas like Somaliland, is important to reduce internal fragmentation and competing claims of authority. Economic recovery through infrastructure, ports, and trade corridors is essential to reduce reliance on aid and create incentives for long-term peace. Ultimately, stabilisation depends on aligning internal political cohesion, functioning institutions in Mogadishu, and coordinated but restrained external support that avoids creating parallel power structures.

Establishing security and governance structures in Somalia generally has to begin with building what is often called "minimum viable governance," meaning basic systems that can function even in a fragmented environment. In practice, this involves prioritizing local security arrangements such as community-based policing, trusted local forces, and dispute-resolution mechanisms that people already recognize. Without that foundation, larger national institutions tend to remain weak or be seen as illegitimate.

A key insight from Somalia's experience is that governance works best when it blends existing systems rather than replacing them outright. This includes customary law (Xeer), Islamic legal structures, and modern state institutions working in coordination rather than competition. In many areas, stability has historically depended on these overlapping systems adapting to each other rather than one fully dominating the others. Legitimacy is crucial at this stage, because security forces that are perceived as externally imposed or clan-biased tend to lose authority quickly.

The sequence of stabilization usually matters: security must be established first, but it must immediately be tied to governance, then revenue collection, and only later expanded into broader state services. Attempts to centralize too quickly without this foundation have often failed.

The stabilization plan shown in your infographic is essentially a **step-by-step model for building a functioning state in Somalia from the ground up**, where legitimacy and security come before expansion. It is designed for a context where the state is fragmented and no single authority is fully trusted.

Figure

BUILDING SECURITY & GOVERNANCE IN SOMALIA

FOUNDATION FIRST, THEN STATE



Lasting stability in Somalia starts from the ground up.
Build minimum viable governance that is legitimate, local, inclusive—and only then expand.

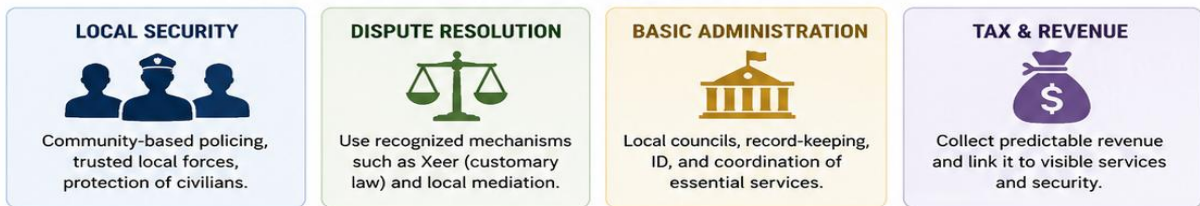


KEY PRINCIPLE

Legitimacy comes from local ownership, not external imposition.

1. START WITH MINIMUM VIABLE GOVERNANCE

Focus on the essentials that people need and trust—especially in a fragmented environment.



2. BLEND SYSTEMS, DON'T REPLACE THEM

Somalia's strength is in overlapping systems working in coordination.



When these systems coordinate instead of compete, legitimacy and stability grow.

3. THE SEQUENCE OF STABILIZATION MATTERS

Build in the right order. Skipping steps weakens the whole system.



WHAT OFTEN FAILS

- ⚠️ × Centralizing too quickly without local legitimacy
- ⚠️ × Ignoring customary and religious systems
- ⚠️ × Imposing external, clan-biased forces
- ⚠️ × Collecting revenue without delivering services



THE BOTTOM LINE

Build security → build governance → build revenue → deliver services → expand the state. Legitimacy at each step is what makes it last.



In Somalia, strong states are not imposed from the top—they are built from the ground up.

At its core, the plan begins with the idea of “**minimum viable governance.**” This means you do not try to build a full centralized government immediately. Instead, you start with the smallest set of institutions that people actually trust and use in daily life. In Somalia’s case, that means focusing on local-level authority rather than national-level control.

The first layer is **local security.** Stability begins with protecting civilians through community-based policing, locally recruited forces, and security arrangements that reflect local social realities. The key idea is that security forces must be seen as “ours,” not imposed from outside or dominated by rival groups. Without this trust, any wider state structure collapses or becomes irrelevant.

The second layer is **dispute resolution**. Instead of relying immediately on formal courts, the system integrates existing Somali mechanisms such as *Xeer* (customary law) and local mediation, alongside Islamic legal institutions where they are already respected. This blended system allows conflicts to be resolved in ways that are socially legitimate rather than externally imposed.

The third layer is **basic administration**. Once local order exists, simple governance functions are introduced—things like local councils, record keeping, identification systems, and coordination of essential services. The emphasis is on practicality rather than bureaucracy: people must see immediate benefits for cooperation.

The fourth layer is **taxation and revenue collection**. Only after governance has legitimacy does the system begin to collect predictable revenue. The logic is that taxation must be tied directly to visible services such as security, infrastructure, or local administration. Without service delivery, taxation is seen as extraction and triggers resistance.

A key principle running through the entire plan is **blending systems rather than replacing them**. Somalia's stability depends on coordination between three overlapping authority structures: customary clan law (*Xeer*), Islamic legal institutions, and modern state administration. Instead of forcing one to eliminate the others, the model assumes they must be aligned so they reinforce each other. When these systems compete, legitimacy collapses; when they coordinate, governance becomes more stable.

Another central idea is that **legitimacy is local, not national-first**. In fragile contexts, people do not initially trust a distant central government. They trust institutions that are embedded in their social and clan networks. This is why bottom-up governance is prioritized over top-down centralization.

The final logic of the plan is the **sequence of stabilization**. Security comes first, because without safety nothing else functions. Governance follows, because order must be organized. Revenue comes next, because it must be grounded in legitimacy. Service delivery follows, because it proves the system works. Only then does broader state expansion become possible.

The underlying warning in the model is that skipping steps—especially trying to centralize too early or imposing external structures—tends to fail. It often produces resistance, fragmentation, or parallel systems of authority.

In short, the stabilization plan is not about instantly building a strong centralized Somali state. It is about gradually constructing legitimacy through local security, hybrid governance, and incremental expansion until a broader national framework becomes viable.

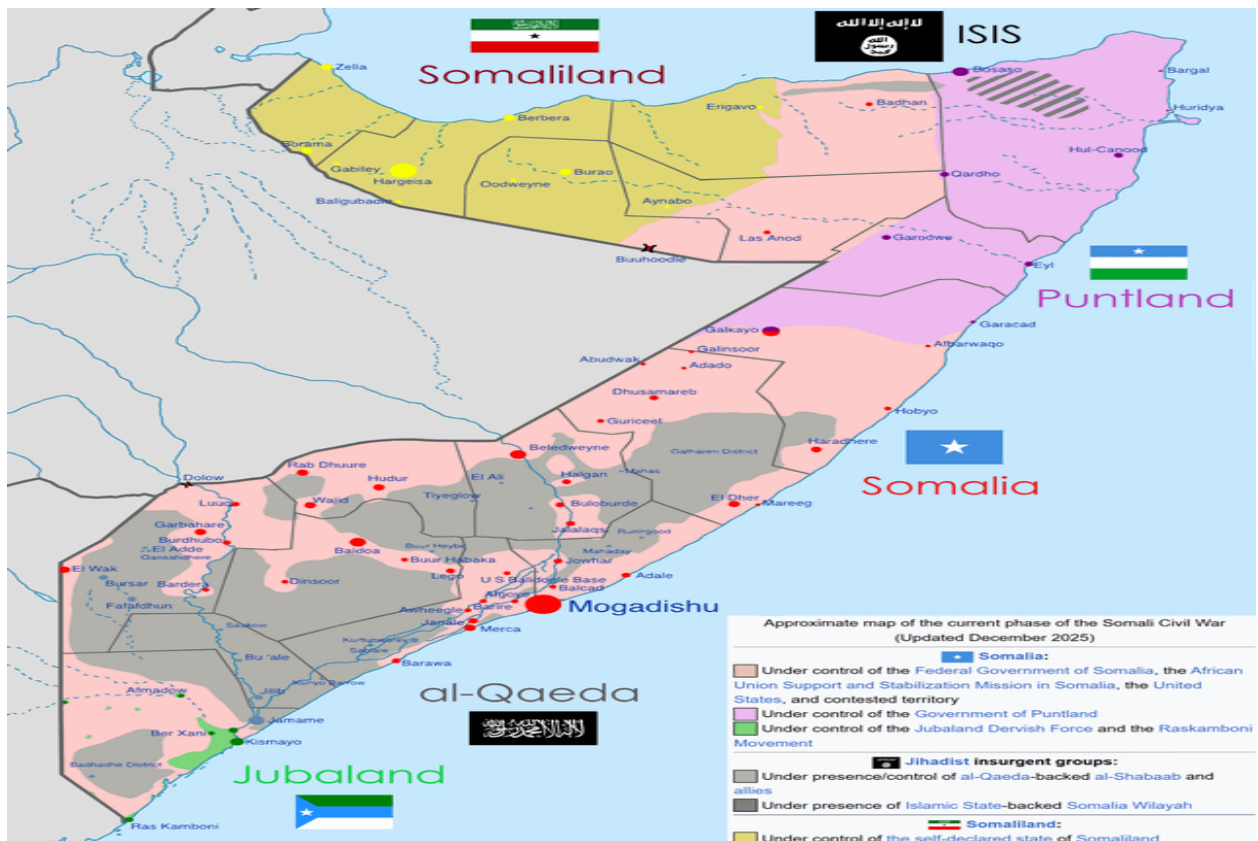
14. Designing a peace process

A workable peace process for Somalia (including Somaliland, Puntland, Jubaland, and contested regions shown in your map) has to treat it as a multi-level political settlement rather than only a security arrangement. The core issue is not only armed conflict but overlapping claims of authority, identity, and access to resources.

The first phase requires building an inclusive political framework that defines all legitimate stakeholders. This would include the Federal Government of Somalia, Federal Member States such as Puntland, Jubaland, Galmudug, Hirshabelle, and South West, as well as Somaliland as a de facto authority. It also includes clan elders, civil society actors such as women and youth groups, religious leaders, and external guarantors like the African Union, United Nations, and IGAD. A nationwide ceasefire would need to be declared, alongside a freeze on territorial expansion and a temporary acceptance of existing control lines as administrative realities to prevent further escalation.

The second phase focuses on security de-escalation and demilitarization. Given the fragmented control across regions, buffer zones would be necessary in contested areas such as Sool, Sanaag, Gedo, and parts of Hiiraan. Joint monitoring mechanisms involving African Union forces and Somali representatives would oversee compliance. Heavy weapons would gradually be withdrawn from urban centers, and local policing structures would be strengthened rather than immediately centralizing security under a single national army.

Figure



The third phase involves restructuring the political system. The current federal arrangement is widely contested and would need revision. One possible outcome is a deep federal model where regional states retain strong constitutional authority over policing, education, and local governance while sharing national responsibilities such as foreign policy and defense. Another possibility is asymmetric federalism in which Somaliland receives a special political

arrangement, Puntland retains enhanced autonomy, and southern states remain more integrated. A longer-term option could resemble a loose confederation with a very limited central government focused on coordination rather than control.

The fourth phase addresses the Somaliland–Somalia relationship through a separate but parallel negotiation track. This process would not assume either reintegration or immediate recognition. Instead, it would focus on practical arrangements such as border management, citizenship rights, trade relations, and security cooperation, particularly against extremist groups. Possible long-term outcomes could include formal independence, a confederal relationship, or a structured two-state cooperation model.

The fifth phase deals with economic and resource governance. A national resource-sharing framework would be necessary to manage revenues from ports, livestock exports, customs, and potential oil and mineral resources. A stabilization fund could be created to support underdeveloped regions, while transparent licensing systems would reduce competition over natural resources that often fuels conflict.

The sixth phase focuses on reconciliation and justice. Somalia’s conflict dynamics are closely tied to clan grievances, land disputes, and displacement. A hybrid justice system combining customary law (Xeer) with formal courts could address disputes. Regional truth and reconciliation processes would help manage historical grievances, and compensation mechanisms could be established for communities affected by war and forced displacement.

The seventh phase addresses insurgent groups such as Al-Shabaab and ISIS-linked factions. This would require a combination of military pressure, local defections programs, and reintegration pathways for lower-level fighters. Expanding governance into newly liberated areas would be essential, alongside cutting financial networks and involving religious leaders in counter-extremism efforts.

The final phase establishes an international guarantee mechanism to support implementation. This would involve African Union verification missions, United Nations political oversight, and IGAD mediation structures, supported by regional stakeholders such as Ethiopia, Kenya, Djibouti, and selected Gulf partners. These actors would help ensure compliance and reduce the risk of agreement breakdown.

The overall logic of this peace process is to stabilize territorial control first, build workable governance structures second, and only then address deeper constitutional and sovereignty questions. Attempting to resolve status disputes before establishing stability has historically led to repeated breakdowns.

The logic of the Somali peace process is a continuous architecture rather than a checklist. It begins by defining legitimacy before addressing force, because the conflict is rooted in overlapping claims of authority, identity, and resources. The first movement establishes an inclusive framework that recognizes all actors—federal, regional, de facto, and societal—under a nationwide ceasefire and a freeze on territorial expansion. Once the political space is stabilized, the process moves into security de-escalation through buffer zones and joint monitoring, emphasizing local policing instead of premature centralization.

From this foundation, the system is restructured to reflect Somalia’s diversity: either a deep federal model with strong regional autonomy or an asymmetric arrangement granting Somaliland and Puntland special status. The Somaliland–Somalia relationship proceeds on a parallel track focused on practical cooperation rather than immediate recognition. Economic governance follows, creating transparent mechanisms for resource sharing and stabilization funds to prevent competition over wealth.

Reconciliation and justice then address clan grievances and displacement through hybrid customary and formal systems. Counter-extremism integrates military pressure with reintegration and religious engagement to dismantle militant networks. Finally, international guarantees by the African Union, United Nations, and IGAD secure compliance and continuity.

The underlying principle is sequential stabilization—territorial calm first, governance second, constitutional resolution last. This reverses the historical pattern of premature sovereignty debates and instead builds a multi-level settlement capable of reconciling legitimacy, control, and identity across Somalia’s fragmented landscape.

Figure



The interactions form a single, continuous chain in which each layer enables the next rather than standing alone. The inclusive political framework creates the minimum legitimacy needed for any security de-escalation to hold, because actors only restrain force when they feel represented. Security stabilization then reduces the incentives for territorial competition, which in turn opens political space for constitutional redesign without fear of military advantage. Political restructuring shapes the environment in which the Somaliland–Somalia track can

proceed, since clarity about federal or asymmetric models determines what forms of coexistence are viable.



Resource governance interacts with all earlier layers by removing the economic drivers that otherwise undermine ceasefires and political bargains. Reconciliation and justice reinforce this by addressing the social and historical grievances that fuel both political fragmentation and recruitment by armed groups. Counter-extremism depends on improved governance and justice to make defections credible and to prevent liberated areas from collapsing back into insurgent control. Finally, international guarantees bind the entire system together by providing verification, mediation, and external pressure, ensuring that each layer reinforces rather than destabilizes the others.

The conflict Economy

Al-Qaeda's financing in Somalia operates almost entirely **through Al-Shabaab**, which is designated as a terrorist organization and is responsible for extensive violence and human rights abuses. The group's financial system is not driven by a single sponsor but by a **self-sustaining political economy** that blends coercion, taxation, and control of trade.

Al-Shabaab's core income comes from its own internal revenue base. It extracts money from businesses, transport corridors, ports, agricultural producers, and urban commercial networks. It imposes what it calls zakat and customs, functioning like a parallel state that taxes economic activity wherever it has influence. It also draws income from controlling or infiltrating trade flows such as livestock, charcoal, sugar, and cross-border trucking. In major cities, including Mogadishu, it maintains covert intimidation networks that force businesses to pay for protection. Some members of the Somali diaspora contribute under pressure to safeguard relatives or property.

External enablers exist but are secondary. Regional smuggling routes across Kenya, Ethiopia, and Yemen create opportunities for illicit revenue. A small fraction of charitable flows from the Gulf may be diverted when oversight is weak, though most Gulf states have tightened controls. Criminal intermediaries in ports and border towns sometimes pay the group to operate safely. Certain local political or business actors also make payments to avoid attacks or disruptions; these are transactional arrangements rather than ideological support.

Al-Qaeda's central leadership provides ideological legitimacy and occasional symbolic financial transfers, but Al-Shabaab is considered one of the most financially independent

affiliates. Its resilience stems from being embedded in Somalia's fragmented political economy, not from a single foreign financier. Disrupting its funding therefore requires expanding governance, strengthening rule of law, and reducing the economic vulnerabilities that allow the group to behave like a shadow administration.

Al-Qaeda's financing in Somalia—channeled almost entirely through **Al-Shabaab**, which is responsible for extensive violence and human rights abuses—only makes full sense when placed inside the **broader Somali conflict economy**, a system where political authority, markets, and violence are deeply intertwined.

The Somali conflict economy is built on fragmented territorial control, overlapping governance systems, and a mix of formal and informal trade. In this environment, Al-Shabaab functions not as an external parasite but as **one of several competing regulatory authorities**. It taxes roads, ports, markets, and businesses in the same way that federal and regional administrations levy fees, except with coercive enforcement. Because state institutions are uneven, corrupt, or absent in many areas, economic actors often treat Al-Shabaab as a predictable—if violent—regulator. This is why its internal revenue base is so strong: it is embedded in the same commercial circuits that sustain the rest of the economy.

The group's ability to extract revenue is reinforced by the structure of Somali trade. Livestock exports, charcoal flows, sugar imports, and cross-border trucking all move through corridors where control is negotiated rather than fixed. Every actor—federal ministries, regional states, clan militias, business cartels, and Al-Shabaab—competes to tax these flows. Payments to Al-Shabaab are often not ideological but transactional, mirroring the payments made to other authorities. This blurs the line between criminality, governance, and insurgency.

External enablers—such as smuggling networks across Kenya, Ethiopia, and Yemen, or leakage from poorly monitored charitable flows—fit into this same pattern. They are not standalone funding streams but extensions of a regional shadow economy that also benefits non-extremist actors. In other words, the same illicit routes that move weapons or contraband for Al-Shabaab also move goods for businessmen, politicians, and clan networks.

Al-Qaeda central's role is marginal in financial terms. Its contribution is symbolic and ideological, not structural. The real engine of financing is the **political economy of fragmentation**, where authority is contested, taxation is competitive, and violence is a tool for regulating markets.

Placed in this context, Al-Shabaab's financial resilience is not an anomaly but a symptom of a wider system in which governance gaps, economic incentives, and security vacuums reinforce one another. Disrupting its financing therefore requires transforming the conflict economy itself—expanding legitimate governance, formalizing trade, and reducing the number of actors who benefit from ambiguity—rather than targeting a single external sponsor.

Somalia's war persists because the political economy rewards conflict more than peace. Al-Shabaab's financial resilience is a symptom of this system, not an anomaly. Transforming the conflict economy—through governance expansion, coherent political settlement, and economic restructuring—is therefore essential to reducing the group's influence and breaking the cycle of violence.

A settlement in Somalia implies **a transformation of the entire political-economic system**, not just a ceasefire or a power-sharing deal. In the Somali context, “settlement” means re-engineering how authority, resources, and security are produced across multiple layers of society. It is not a single agreement but a rebalancing of incentives that currently make conflict profitable and governance fragile.

A settlement implies that **all major actors accept a shared framework of legitimate authority**—federal institutions, federal member states, Somaliland as a de facto entity, clan structures, business networks, and civic groups. It means that territorial control stops being contested through force and becomes regulated through political negotiation. It also implies that the economy shifts away from the conflict-driven marketplace where Al-Shabaab—an Al-Qaeda-affiliated organization responsible for extensive violence and human rights abuses—functions as a parallel state, and toward a system where taxation, trade, and justice are provided by accountable institutions.

A settlement requires **security arrangements that reduce the incentives for armed competition**, including localized policing, joint monitoring, and the gradual demilitarization of contested regions. It implies that political restructuring becomes possible—whether through deep federalism, asymmetric autonomy, or confederal models—because actors no longer fear that constitutional debates will be exploited militarily.

It also implies a **structured relationship between Somalia and Somaliland**, where practical cooperation on borders, trade, and security is possible even without resolving final status questions. A settlement requires a national framework for sharing revenues from ports, customs, livestock, and extractives, so that economic competition no longer fuels conflict. It also implies a reconciliation process that addresses clan grievances, displacement, and land disputes through a hybrid of customary and formal justice.

Finally, a settlement implies **credible external guarantees** from the African Union, United Nations, and IGAD to stabilize commitments and prevent backsliding. In essence, a Somali settlement means shifting from a fragmented conflict economy to a negotiated political order where governance, not violence, becomes the primary mechanism for distributing power and resources.

Towards A stable Tribal Coalition

On the question of a “stable tribal coalition,” Somalia does not have a historical example of a single permanent coalition that successfully unifies the entire country. Instead, stability has usually come from balancing major clan-family groups through negotiated power-sharing arrangements. The current federal system, often described through the 4.5 model, reflects this logic by distributing representation among major clan families and including minority groups in a structured way. Although imperfect, it is an attempt to prevent domination by any single group, since exclusion has repeatedly led to conflict or fragmentation.

Rather than a fixed coalition, what tends to be more stable is a flexible system of federalism where regional administrations have autonomy while still participating in a national framework. This reduces the pressure for total control at the center and acknowledges the reality that political authority in Somalia is distributed across clan and regional lines.

The fragmentation or “breaking off” of parts of Somalia is mainly driven by the long-term weakness of central authority. When the central state collapses or is perceived as unable to provide security and services, regions naturally develop their own governing structures, security forces, and taxation systems. This is what happened after 1991, when Somaliland, Puntland, and other regions built alternative administrations to fill the vacuum.

Another major factor is trust. Many regions are reluctant to fully rejoin or submit to central authority due to fears of resource capture, unequal power-sharing, or domination by rival groups. These fears are reinforced by historical experiences of authoritarian rule, especially under Siad Barre, and by ongoing disputes over representation in federal institutions.

There is also a security dimension, as groups like al-Shabaab exploit weak governance, which further encourages local autonomy as a survival strategy. In this context, decentralization is often less an ideological choice and more a practical response to insecurity.

Somalia is therefore not “breaking off” from a single stable center, but rather repeatedly pulling away from attempts at overly centralized statehood. The deeper structural tension is between a modern centralized nation-state model and a deeply rooted decentralized system of clan-based authority and negotiation. These two logics have never fully aligned, and much of Somalia’s political history can be understood as the struggle to reconcile them without one fully destroying the other.

Somaliland

Implications of Israeli-UAE moves on Somaliland

Israeli recognition of Somaliland represents a significant geopolitical development because it inserts the Somaliland question directly into the broader strategic competition over the Horn of Africa and the Red Sea. Israel became the first UN member state to formally recognize Somaliland in December 2025, establishing diplomatic relations and elevating Somaliland from a de facto political entity to a subject of active international geopolitical contestation. The United States, however, has not extended formal recognition, despite continued debate within American strategic circles.

From the perspective of the United States, the principal objective is not necessarily Somaliland itself but rather the strategic geography that Somaliland occupies. Washington's interests are centred on securing maritime trade routes through the Bab el-Mandeb Strait, maintaining freedom of navigation, monitoring militant threats emanating from Yemen, and preserving influence in a region increasingly characterised by competition among the United States, China, Russia, Turkey, Iran, and the Gulf monarchies. Somaliland's location on the Gulf of Aden provides potential advantages for intelligence collection, naval logistics, and surveillance of one of the most critical maritime corridors in the international system. American calculations are therefore embedded within a broader framework of maritime security and great-power competition.

Israeli objectives are more directly connected to the emerging security architecture of the Red Sea. Since the intensification of Houthi attacks against maritime traffic and the increasing strategic salience of the Red Sea corridor, Israeli policymakers have sought to expand

partnerships beyond the Levant and the Arabian Peninsula. Recognition of Somaliland provides Israel with an opportunity to cultivate a friendly political actor situated opposite Yemen, potentially enhancing intelligence cooperation, maritime monitoring, and diplomatic influence across the western shore of the Red Sea. Israel is also concerned about the calculations and exchanges between Sudani, yemeni and Somali jihadis, something that was a factor in the penning of the fledling peace agreement with Khartoum. Recognition also reflects Israel's broader effort to project itself as a consequential actor in African and Red Sea affairs rather than merely a Middle Eastern power.

The role of the United Arab Emirates is particularly important because Emirati interests predate Israeli recognition and, in many respects, have helped shape the strategic environment in which recognition became possible. The UAE has pursued a long-term strategy of establishing a network of ports, logistics hubs, military facilities, and commercial corridors stretching from the Persian Gulf to the Horn of Africa. Through its involvement in Berbera Port, Berbera Airport, and associated free-trade infrastructure, Abu Dhabi has acquired substantial influence in Somaliland's economic and security sectors. The UAE's objectives are simultaneously economic, military, and geopolitical. Economically, Berbera strengthens Emirati control over maritime commerce and logistics networks linking Africa, the Gulf, and Asia. Militarily, access to facilities along the Gulf of Aden enhances the UAE's ability to project power into the Red Sea and support operations connected to Yemen. Geopolitically, Somaliland provides Abu Dhabi with a means of counterbalancing rival regional actors, particularly Turkey and Qatar, while reinforcing Emirati influence across the western Indian Ocean. The move caused a rupture in the relationship between Abu Dhabi and Riyadh and armed scuffles in Yemen.

Taken together, American, Israeli, and Emirati interests reveal a common strategic denominator: the consolidation of influence over the maritime space connecting the Mediterranean, the Red Sea, the Gulf of Aden, and the Indian Ocean. Somaliland's significance derives not primarily from its domestic political characteristics but from its position within this larger geopolitical system.

For the Horn of Africa, the consequences are substantial. Recognition has intensified debates concerning sovereignty, self-determination, and territorial integrity. It has strengthened Somaliland's diplomatic position while simultaneously challenging the claims of Somalia and provoking concerns among African states regarding the precedent that recognition may establish. At the same time, it has further internationalised the Horn, transforming local political disputes into questions embedded within wider regional and global rivalries.

The broader implication is that the Horn of Africa can no longer be analysed as a peripheral African subregion. It increasingly constitutes part of a single strategic complex encompassing the Red Sea, the Arabian Peninsula, the eastern Mediterranean, and the western Indian Ocean. Within this emerging geopolitical arena, Somaliland has become a focal point through which external powers pursue maritime security, commercial access, military positioning, and regional influence. The recognition issue is therefore best understood not as a narrow diplomatic dispute but as a manifestation of a larger struggle over the future political order of the Red Sea basin.

Somaliland is different from the rest of Somalia mainly in how it emerged, how it stabilized internally, and how it defines its political status.

After the collapse of the central Somali state in 1991, the territory formerly known as British Somaliland in the northwest rebuilt its own institutions. Unlike much of south-central Somalia, where conflict among competing armed groups persisted, Somaliland's local leaders and clan elders managed to negotiate a relatively broad internal settlement. This process was anchored in clan conferences in the early 1990s, which created a hybrid system combining customary authority (Xeer), elected institutions, and local security forces. Over time, this allowed Somaliland to develop functioning governance structures, including its own police, currency, elections, and administrative system.

A major difference is therefore institutional continuity. Somaliland did not experience the same prolonged collapse of governance that affected much of the south. Instead, it built a relatively stable order based on local legitimacy and negotiated clan balance, even though it lacks international recognition as a sovereign state.

Another key distinction is political orientation. Somaliland has consistently pursued independence, arguing that it was a separate colonial entity before unification with the former Italian Somalia in 1960. From its perspective, the 1960 union was voluntary and later effectively reversed after the collapse of the central state. This makes its identity question different from other regions, which generally seek autonomy within a federal Somalia rather than full independence.

In contrast, most of south-central Somalia has remained formally committed to rebuilding a unified Somali state, even though its governance is more fragmented in practice. Puntland, for example, operates as an autonomous federal member state rather than seeking full independence, and other regions follow similar federal arrangements.

So the difference is not simply that Somaliland "broke off," but that it constructed a relatively coherent internal political order early, rooted in local consensus, and then reframed itself as a separate political entity. Its stability is often attributed to early reconciliation processes, lower intensity of prolonged civil war compared to the south, and stronger local institutional consolidation during the 1990s.

Summary

The future stability of the Horn of Africa depends on transforming the Eritrea-Ethiopia relationship from a zero-sum security rivalry into a framework of economic interdependence and mutual recognition.

Push ups are the strengthening of the enforcement of the Algiers agreement in relation to the authority of the Eritrea–Ethiopia Boundary Commission rulings so they are treated as final and fully binding by both Eritrea and Ethiopia, leaving no space for reinterpretation or delay. The parties need to be coaxed to secure an unequivocal commitment from both states to complete border demarcation in full, translating legal acceptance into practical implementation on the ground. The UN has to deploy neutral international monitoring or peacekeeping

mechanisms to stabilize sensitive border zones and prevent renewed militarization or escalation.

It is necessary to introduce clear and credible consequences for non-compliance, ensuring that violations carry meaningful diplomatic and economic costs. The joint border management must be made permanent in terms of a framework under international supervision to oversee implementation and maintain stability over time. We need to ensure sustained engagement by the United Nations and the African Union as active guarantors rather than passive observers of the process. We set out a disciplined, time-bound implementation roadmap with verified milestones that keep both parties accountable to progress. By maintaining open and structured channels for dialogue and dispute resolution disagreements could be better managed legally and peacefully rather than militarily.

The issue of Ethiopian access to the Red Sea is real and strategically significant. However, it can only be resolved peacefully through negotiated commercial arrangements that fully respect Eritrean sovereignty.

The European Union is uniquely positioned to support such a transformation because it combines:

- diplomatic legitimacy,
- development financing,
- infrastructure capacity,
- and experience in post-conflict regional integration.

If managed carefully, the EU could help turn the Red Sea from a source of confrontation into a platform for regional cooperation, economic growth, and long-term peace in the Horn of Africa.

Over the horizon, the EU could engage in infrastructure development between Addis Ababa and Bamako along the old trans-Sahel trade routes in this area of Africa, fostering regional integration, economic growth, and long-term stability, improving connectivity across borders, strengthening trade corridors, enhancing access to markets and services, and supporting sustainable development across the Sahel region. It was here that Africa saw its first large-scale trans-regional trade networks, linking distant communities through the exchange of goods, ideas, and culture.

15. EU-SOMALIA

In May 2026, EU diplomats and officials from Somalia reaffirmed their commitment to building a long-term, sustainable, and mutually beneficial partnership.

Both sides emphasized the importance of strengthening democratic governance institutions across Somalia. They discussed support for transparent public administration and

accountability mechanisms. Rule of law was highlighted as a central pillar for long-term stability.

Security cooperation remained a key priority in the dialogue. The EU reiterated its support for Somali-led efforts to combat terrorism and violent extremism. Both parties stressed the importance of coordinated counter-terrorism strategies.

Migration management was another major focus of the discussions. Officials addressed irregular migration routes and human trafficking risks in the region. They agreed on the need for safer, more orderly, and humane migration systems. Cooperation on border management was also encouraged.

Economic development was identified as essential for reducing instability and poverty. The EU expressed support for investment in Somalia's infrastructure and productive sectors. Both sides discussed ways to improve trade and private sector growth. Job creation for young people was highlighted as a shared concern.

Humanitarian and development assistance were also part of the dialogue. The EU and Somalia recognized ongoing needs related to drought, displacement, and food insecurity. They agreed on improving coordination of aid delivery to affected communities.

Climate change and environmental challenges were acknowledged as emerging risks. Both parties noted that climate shocks are worsening vulnerabilities in rural areas. Cooperation on resilience and adaptation strategies was encouraged.

Education and capacity-building were discussed as long-term investments in Somalia's future. The EU reaffirmed its support for strengthening education systems and vocational training. Health system improvements were also identified as a shared priority.

Finally, both sides committed to maintaining regular political dialogue and practical cooperation. They agreed that sustained engagement would help address shared challenges more effectively. The overall tone of the meeting reflected cautious optimism and a shared desire for stability, growth, and partnership.

The statement also called for "an inclusive and peaceful process to achieve a political agreement, so as to ensure political stability for the whole of Somalia"⁶

An inclusive and peaceful process for a political agreement in Somalia should begin with a broadly accepted framework grounded in the Provisional Constitution. This framework must clearly define roles, powers, and dispute-resolution mechanisms among federal member states and the federal government. A neutral facilitation team, supported by trusted international partners such as the European Union and the African Union, can help maintain credibility. Representation must include federal and state authorities, opposition groups, civil society, women's groups, youth, and marginalized clans. Clan-based inclusion should be carefully balanced to avoid reinforcing division while still ensuring perceived fairness. A phased

⁶ <https://www.eeas.europa.eu/sites/default/files/2026/documents/Joint%20statement%20EU-SO%20Partnership%20Dialogue%2010.05.2026.pdf>

dialogue structure can help manage complexity, starting with confidence-building measures before tackling contentious political issues. Security guarantees for all participants are essential to prevent intimidation and ensure free participation.

Parallel local consultations in regions across Somalia can feed into national negotiations to improve legitimacy. A shared agenda should prioritize the most urgent national issues such as security, elections, revenue sharing, and resource distribution. Establishing agreed principles on power-sharing can reduce zero-sum competition among political actors. Transparent communication channels should be maintained to keep the public informed and reduce misinformation. Independent mediation mechanisms can help resolve deadlocks when parties reach impasses.

Agreement on an electoral model is crucial, with emphasis on inclusivity, credibility, and peaceful transfer of power. Security sector reform should be integrated into the political process to ensure long-term stability. Economic incentives, including development funding linked to progress in dialogue, can encourage compromise. Civil society organizations should be empowered to monitor commitments and hold leaders accountable.

A clear implementation roadmap with timelines and benchmarks is necessary to prevent agreements from stalling. Trust-building measures, such as prisoner releases or ceasefire arrangements, can support momentum in negotiations. Continuous regional engagement with neighboring states can help reduce external interference and align interests. Ultimately, sustained political stability requires Somali-owned leadership of the process, supported but not dictated by external partners.

To ensure success for the EU-Somalia Partnership led by the federal government, the structuring of the partnership had better address in a sustained manner the various issues pertaining to the following areas to lay a more solid foundation for the aimed at stabilisation and economic development of Somalia.

Table

Area	Strategic Commitment	How It Is Concretised (Operational Actions)
Governance & Rule of Law	Strengthen democratic institutions, transparency, accountability	Civil service reform programs; digitalisation of public administration; anti-corruption systems; electoral and judicial technical assistance; joint governance monitoring indicators
Security & Counter-Terrorism	Support Somali-led security and stability efforts	Training and equipping security forces; intelligence-sharing mechanisms; joint operational coordination units; early-warning systems; measurable counter-terrorism benchmarks

Migration & Mobility	Promote safe, orderly, humane migration management	Strengthened border control systems; joint border guard training; anti-trafficking operations; migration data-sharing platforms; return and reintegration programs
Economic Development & Investment	Promote growth, infrastructure, and job creation	Blended finance for infrastructure (energy, ports, transport); public-private partnerships; SME microfinance schemes; vocational training aligned with labor market needs
Humanitarian Assistance	Address drought, displacement, food insecurity	Coordinated humanitarian response platforms; unified needs-assessment systems; improved aid distribution tracking; gradual shift to resilience-focused programming
Climate & Environment	Build resilience to climate shocks	National adaptation planning; early warning systems; climate-resilient infrastructure (water, irrigation); integration of climate risk into all development projects
Education & Health	Strengthen long-term human capital	Teacher training and curriculum reform; digital learning expansion; healthcare system strengthening; primary care expansion; medical workforce training and supply chain reform
Political Dialogue & Cooperation	Maintain sustained engagement and partnership	Annual strategic reviews; implementation roadmaps; sector-specific KPIs; structured EU-Somalia coordination forum.

The matrix shows a clear shift in the EU–Somalia relationship from broad political commitments toward structured, results-oriented cooperation. Each sector links financial instruments with operational activities and measurable outcomes, which reflects a more implementation-driven partnership model. In governance, the emphasis on digitalisation and civil service reform indicates an attempt to reduce structural corruption rather than only provide advisory support. The inclusion of judicial training and accountability systems shows recognition that rule of law is central to long-term state legitimacy.

In the security sector, the reliance on training and joint planning suggests that capacity-building remains the core EU approach rather than direct operational engagement. This aligns with the EU’s preference for supporting Somali-led security ownership while still influencing standards

and coordination. However, achieving measurable reductions in extremist threats depends heavily on domestic political cohesion and sustained funding. The matrix correctly highlights early-warning systems, which are often underdeveloped but crucial for preventive security action.

Migration cooperation appears focused on border governance and anti-trafficking measures, which reflects EU internal policy priorities. The combination of data systems and reintegration programs shows an attempt to address both enforcement and root causes. Yet, the success of return programs often depends on economic conditions inside Somalia, which remain fragile. Coordination with regional transit states is also essential but operationally complex.

Economic development is the most ambitious pillar in the matrix due to its reliance on blended finance and private sector participation. Infrastructure investment through EFSD+ and EIB mechanisms signals a move toward leveraging public funds for larger capital mobilisation. However, Somalia's investment climate risks, including insecurity and weak regulatory frameworks, may limit private sector uptake. Vocational training alignment with labor markets is a positive step toward addressing youth unemployment, which is a structural driver of instability.

Humanitarian assistance remains distinct but is increasingly linked to resilience-building, which is a strategic improvement. The matrix shows a gradual transition from emergency response to longer-term vulnerability reduction. This shift is important in a context of repeated droughts and displacement cycles. Nevertheless, humanitarian needs may still dominate over development planning in crisis periods.

Climate and environmental cooperation is appropriately framed around adaptation rather than mitigation, given Somalia's low emissions profile. Investments in water systems and early warning tools are particularly relevant to recurring drought conditions. The challenge lies in sustaining maintenance and local institutional capacity for these systems. Integrating climate risk into all development programming is a strong cross-cutting principle but difficult to enforce consistently.

Education and health interventions focus on foundational human capital, which is essential for long-term stability. Teacher training and curriculum reform can have slow but lasting effects if properly implemented. Health system strengthening through supply chain improvements addresses a critical bottleneck in service delivery. However, both sectors require stable governance conditions to achieve sustained impact.

The political dialogue component ensures that all sectoral actions are periodically reviewed and adjusted. Annual reviews and KPIs introduce accountability mechanisms that are often missing in donor-partner relationships. This creates pressure for measurable progress but also risks bureaucratic overload if not streamlined. Overall, the matrix reflects a comprehensive but highly complex partnership architecture that depends heavily on implementation capacity within Somalia and coordination efficiency from the EU.

This then has to be implemented through EU Programs, a process of filtering allowing for evaluation of impact and realised results:

Table

Area	EU Instruments / Support Channels	Key Actions (What is done)	Expected Results (What changes)
Governance & Rule of Law	NDICI–Global Europe funding, EU technical assistance, Twinning programs	Civil service reform; digital public administration systems; judicial training; anti-corruption frameworks	More transparent institutions; reduced corruption; stronger judicial independence; improved public trust
Security & Counter-Terrorism	CSDP missions, EU training programs, intelligence cooperation support	Training Somali security forces; joint planning support; counter-terrorism capacity building; early-warning systems	Improved national security capacity; reduced extremist threats; better coordinated security operations
Migration & Border Management	NDICI migration windows, EU Trust Fund legacy tools, Frontex cooperation support	Border management training; anti-trafficking operations; migration data systems; return & reintegration support	Reduced irregular migration flows; improved border control; weakened trafficking networks
Economic Development & Investment	EFSD+ guarantees, EIB financing, NDICI grants, private sector blending facilities	Infrastructure financing (ports, energy, roads); SME support; PPP frameworks; vocational training programs	Job creation; increased private investment; improved infrastructure and trade capacity
Humanitarian Assistance	ECHO humanitarian funding	Emergency food aid; drought response; displacement support; coordinated humanitarian delivery systems	Reduced acute vulnerability; improved crisis response speed; better aid coordination

Climate & Environment	NDICI climate funding, Global Gateway initiatives	Climate adaptation planning; water/irrigation systems; early warning climate services; resilience projects	Reduced climate vulnerability; improved drought resilience; stronger environmental governance
Education & Health	NDICI social sector funding, EU development programs	Teacher training; curriculum reform; digital education tools; health system strengthening; supply chain upgrades	Better education outcomes; improved healthcare access; stronger human capital
Political Dialogue & Coordination	EU–Somalia Joint Dialogue Frameworks	Annual reviews; implementation roadmaps; joint monitoring indicators; sector coordination meetings	More structured cooperation; improved policy alignment; measurable progress tracking

What this table shows is not just a development partnership, but a **governance model transposed through EU programming architecture** into Somalia, where *agency is structured through instruments, conditions, and delivery channels rather than purely sovereign policy choice*.

Across all sectors, the **EU instruments (NDICI–Global Europe, EFSD+, ECHO, CSDP, Frontex-related cooperation)** function as the “delivery spine” of external action. These are not neutral funding streams; they come with embedded priorities, reporting requirements, and performance expectations that shape how Somali institutions engage. In practice, access to resources is often tied to the adoption of specific reform trajectories, such as public financial management systems, border databases, or security sector coordination frameworks.

In governance and rule of law, the use of **twinning and technical assistance** effectively embeds EU administrative templates into Somali institutions. This creates a form of institutional convergence where “good governance” is operationalized through EU-defined standards like digitisation, audit systems, and anti-corruption compliance mechanisms. Agency here is partially conditional, as reforms are often incentivized through continued access to funding and capacity support rather than purely domestic political demand.

In the security pillar, **CSDP missions and training programs** reflect a model of indirect influence where the EU does not directly provide combat capability but shapes doctrine, training standards, and operational coordination. The inclusion of intelligence cooperation and early-warning systems extends this influence into sensitive state functions, effectively

embedding EU security logics into Somali security architecture. The expectation of measurable counter-terrorism outcomes introduces performance pressure that can influence internal security prioritisation.

Migration and border management is one of the clearest examples of **externalised governance through conditional cooperation frameworks**. Tools like Frontex cooperation support and migration data systems function as mechanisms to align Somali border practices with EU migration containment priorities. Return and reintegration programs also reflect a dual logic of humanitarian framing combined with enforcement objectives, where cooperation benefits are linked to compliance with migration control expectations.

Economic development through **EFSD+ guarantees and blended finance** represents a shift from aid to leverage-based investment facilitation. This structure conditions Somali economic development pathways toward sectors that are “bankable” and aligned with EU strategic interests such as infrastructure corridors and trade facilitation. While this can mobilise significant capital, it also narrows policy space by prioritising investment-ready sectors over less commercially viable but socially critical ones.

Humanitarian assistance through ECHO is formally needs-based, but in practice it is increasingly integrated into a broader resilience agenda. This creates a subtle shift from unconditional relief toward systems-based crisis management that emphasizes coordination, data, and delivery efficiency. While less explicitly conditional than other instruments, it still shapes institutional behaviour through funding priorities and delivery standards.

Climate and environment programming shows strong integration of **risk governance frameworks**, particularly through early warning systems and adaptation planning. Here, conditionality is less political and more technical, but it still structures decision-making by prioritising data-driven planning and resilience metrics. This can strengthen capacity but also increase dependence on external technical systems.

Education and health interventions demonstrate long-term **human capital conditioning**, where reforms are oriented toward system standardisation and service delivery benchmarks. Curriculum reform, teacher training, and supply chain modernization embed external best practices into domestic systems, gradually aligning them with EU development norms. The agency of local ministries exists, but within programmatic constraints tied to funding cycles and evaluation frameworks.

Finally, political dialogue and coordination mechanisms function as the **meta-governance layer** of the entire system. Annual reviews, roadmaps, and indicators are not just administrative tools but instruments that structure accountability and prioritisation across all sectors. This creates a continuous feedback loop where progress is defined, measured, and corrected according to jointly agreed—but often externally shaped—benchmarks.

Overall, the table reflects a **hybrid governance system**, where sovereignty is not removed but is increasingly exercised through structured cooperation with embedded conditionality. Agency is therefore not absent, but it is **channelled, formatted, and made legible through EU programming systems**, which determine what kinds of reforms are fundable, measurable, and therefore politically viable.

Partnership-building initiatives

Below are partnership-building initiatives structured around the four areas discussed between the European Union and Somalia:

In **Rule of Law and Democratisation**, initiatives could focus on strengthening constitutional institutions, supporting judicial independence, and expanding access to justice through legal aid services. Joint programs can build capacity for electoral management bodies to deliver credible and inclusive elections, while also supporting anti-corruption agencies and public financial accountability systems. Civic education initiatives involving civil society, women, and youth groups can help improve democratic participation and public trust in institutions. This could also include the design of effective governance towards the sustainable society targets, given Somalia's appalling ranking on the SDG Index: 164⁷

In **Peace and Stability**, partnership initiatives could prioritize security sector reform, including training and professionalization of police and justice actors, alongside improved coordination between federal and regional security forces. Conflict prevention mechanisms such as community-based peacebuilding platforms and early warning systems can be strengthened. Joint support can also focus on disarmament, stabilization of liberated areas, and reintegration programs for ex-combatants, especially youth at risk. The needs of the Somali Coast Guard are understood to range from maritime training and capacity building, provision of equipment and patrol assets, institutional development and command structure support, coastal surveillance systems, and operational support for securing Somalia's territorial waters and exclusive economic zone.

Note some coastal communities initially framed piracy as a response to (1) Illegal fishing (2) Loss of livelihoods (3) Weak maritime governance. Modern piracy in the region is driven mainly by economic collapse and insecurity, Armed criminal networks, Strategic hijacking of shipping routes. Piracy has significantly declined due to International naval patrols and Somali coastal security improvements, but illegal fishing concerns still exist, especially in monitoring and enforcement capacity gaps. Piracy is not caused by fish stocks, but past illegal fishing and weak governance contributing indirectly to instability in Somalia's coastal regions. The Fish clans are also weakly represented in the Somali political system.

In **Migration and Mobility**, initiatives could include the development of legal migration pathways, skills mobility schemes, and labour agreements that allow Somali workers to access regulated employment opportunities in Europe and regional markets. Programs can also strengthen border management systems, anti-smuggling and anti-trafficking operations, and biometric identification systems. Support for diaspora engagement platforms can help channel remittances and skills transfer into national development projects.

In **the Economic and Global Gateway Agenda**, initiatives could focus on infrastructure development such as ports, energy systems, transport corridors, and digital connectivity under blended finance and public-private partnership models. Support can also be directed toward value chain development in agriculture, fisheries, and livestock to improve export capacity. Additional initiatives can promote SME financing, investment de-risking tools, and regulatory

⁷ <https://dashboards.sdgindex.org/profiles/somalia/>

reforms that improve the business environment, enabling greater private sector participation in Somalia's economy.

Later it will be discussed how to match **Global Gateway projects and initiatives** in the interests of identifying “opportunities for investment, partnership and private sector engagement”.

Opportunities for investment, partnership, and private sector engagement between the European Union and Somalia are strongly concentrated in sectors where Somalia has high natural potential and the EU brings finance, technology, and regulatory expertise. Renewable energy offers major potential due to Somalia's strong solar and wind resources and low electrification rates, with opportunities for mini-grids, utility-scale solar, and rural electrification projects supported through blended finance and public-private partnerships. The fisheries and blue economy sector is also highly promising, particularly in sustainable fishing, cold-chain systems, fish processing facilities, and maritime governance, with export opportunities aligned to EU market standards.

Agriculture and agro-processing present another key area, especially through irrigation development, climate-smart farming, storage infrastructure, and value addition for crops such as sesame, fruits, and livestock products. Livestock remains a strategic export sector where investment can focus on veterinary services, quarantine facilities, meat processing, feed production, and traceability systems to meet international export requirements. Infrastructure, ports, and logistics also offer strong potential through modernization of ports, road corridors, customs digitization, and inland logistics hubs that connect producers to markets.

The digital economy and financial services sector is rapidly expanding, driven by mobile money usage, creating opportunities in fintech, digital identity systems, e-government platforms, and startup ecosystems, where EU technology firms and investors can play a catalytic role. Climate resilience and water management are increasingly important due to recurring droughts and floods, creating demand for irrigation rehabilitation, water harvesting systems, early warning technologies, and climate-resilient infrastructure supported by EU climate finance instruments. Governance, skills development, and private sector strengthening are also essential areas for partnership, including vocational training, SME financing, business incubation, and trade facilitation reforms that improve the overall investment climate.

16. Militarisation in the Horn of Africa

“Militarisation of the Horn of Africa” means the region is becoming increasingly shaped by military forces, weapons, and security competition rather than mainly civilian political processes.

The Horn of Africa—generally including Somalia, Ethiopia, Eritrea, Djibouti, and sometimes nearby states—has become a strategic hotspot because it sits near major global shipping routes like the Red Sea and the Suez Canal corridor. This makes it highly important for international trade and global security interests.

Militarisation in this context refers to several connected developments. One is the growing presence of foreign military bases and troops in the region, especially in places like Djibouti,

where multiple global powers maintain bases due to its strategic location. Another is the increase in arms imports, military spending, and security cooperation between regional governments and external powers. Many countries in the region are also dealing with internal conflicts, insurgencies, or political instability, which keeps their militaries heavily involved in governance and security. At the same time, competition between outside powers—such as the United States, China, France, Turkey, and Gulf states—adds another layer, as they seek influence over trade routes, counterterrorism operations, and regional alliances.

Overall, militarisation means that security and military considerations are becoming central to how the region is governed and influenced, both by local governments and external actors. This can contribute to instability and proxy competition, even while also supporting certain security goals like anti-piracy operations and counterterrorism efforts.

what needs to be done to improve security in the Horn of Africa by addressing the underlying problems (rather than just militarising it). If that's right, the key idea is that long-term security in the region usually depends less on military buildup and more on fixing the political, economic, and regional issues that drive conflict.

One major issue is weak governance and political exclusion. In several countries in the Horn of Africa, governments struggle with corruption, limited state capacity, or exclusion of certain ethnic or political groups. When people feel shut out of power, armed resistance and instability are more likely. Strengthening institutions, rule of law, and inclusive political systems is often seen as more effective than relying heavily on security forces.

Another driver is unresolved conflicts and border tensions, such as historical disputes between states or internal civil wars. These tend to fuel cycles of retaliation and militarisation. Diplomatic solutions, peace agreements, and sustained mediation are essential to reduce the need for constant military readiness. Economic hardship is also a major factor. High unemployment, poverty, and lack of infrastructure make it easier for armed groups to recruit and for communities to become unstable. Investment in jobs, education, trade, and development can reduce the incentives for violence. There is also the issue of external military involvement. Competing foreign bases and alliances can sometimes worsen tensions by turning local conflicts into proxy rivalries. Better coordination between external actors—or limiting purely strategic military competition—can reduce escalation risks.

Finally, security problems like piracy, terrorism, and armed insurgencies often require more than military responses. Approaches that combine policing, intelligence sharing, regional cooperation, and addressing root causes tend to be more sustainable than force alone.

In short, improving security in the Horn of Africa is less about “more security forces” and more about addressing the political, economic, and diplomatic conditions that produce insecurity in the first place.

Figure



17. Strengthening Governance and Inclusion

Durable security begins with legitimate governance that earns public trust. States must invest in transparent institutions that deliver services equitably. Anti-corruption commissions should be empowered to prosecute high-level graft. Electoral systems need reform to ensure fair representation of marginalized groups. Civil society and local councils can act as bridges between citizens and the state. Judicial independence must be protected to guarantee rule of law. Inclusive governance reduces grievances that fuel rebellion.

Resolving Conflicts Peacefully

Diplomacy must replace militarized confrontation. Regional organizations like IGAD should lead sustained mediation rather than episodic talks. Border commissions can demarcate disputed territories to prevent flare-ups. Peace agreements must include mechanisms for monitoring and accountability. Transitional justice can help societies heal from civil wars. Confidence-building measures—joint patrols, shared infrastructure—turn rivals into partners. Long-term peace depends on continuous dialogue, not one-off summits.

Boosting Economic Development

Economic opportunity is the most reliable antidote to insecurity. Governments should prioritize job creation through small-enterprise support and agricultural modernization. Regional trade corridors can link inland producers to ports. Investment in education and vocational training equips youth for productive work. Infrastructure—roads, power, digital networks—connects communities and markets. Public-private partnerships can mobilize capital for sustainable industries. Economic growth must be inclusive to prevent new inequalities.

Managing Foreign Influence

External powers should coordinate rather than compete. A regional code of conduct for foreign bases could limit militarization. Joint development projects can replace zero-sum rivalries. Transparency in defense agreements prevents suspicion among neighbors. Multilateral forums can align external assistance with local priorities. The Horn's states must assert agency by defining their own security agenda. Balanced diplomacy ensures sovereignty while benefiting from global partnerships.

Addressing Root Causes of Insecurity

Poverty and exclusion create fertile ground for violence. Social protection programs can cushion vulnerable households. Expanding access to healthcare and education builds resilience. Youth engagement initiatives channel energy into civic participation instead of militancy. Environmental adaptation—water management, reforestation—reduces resource conflicts. Gender equality policies empower half the population to contribute to stability. Tackling root causes transforms security from reaction to prevention.

Enhancing Regional Cooperation

Security challenges cross borders; solutions must too. Shared intelligence networks can track extremist movements. Coordinated policing against piracy and trafficking strengthens maritime safety. Regional disaster-response units can mitigate humanitarian crises. Economic integration through customs unions fosters interdependence. Cultural exchanges and academic partnerships build mutual understanding. A united Horn can negotiate collectively with global powers, amplifying its voice.

18. Comparisons of resource management in the Horn of Africa

1. Cross-cutting institutional reality in the Horn of Africa

Across the Horn of Africa, extractive governance is shaped by a persistent structural contradiction between formal institutional design and operational reality on the ground. Although most states have developed increasingly sophisticated mining, petroleum, and energy legislation, these legal frameworks are only weakly translated into enforceable regulatory practice. The result is a region where law has advanced faster than the institutional capacity required to implement it.

Three reinforcing structural patterns define this gap. First, there is a widespread condition of strong formal legal frameworks paired with weak enforcement capacity. States are generally able to articulate ownership, licensing regimes, and regulatory procedures in legislation, but struggle to enforce compliance, monitor production, or systematically capture revenues from extraction activities.

Second, there is a persistent mismatch between centralized legal ownership of subsurface resources and decentralized operational control over those same resources. While constitutions and mining laws typically vest ownership of minerals and hydrocarbons in the central state,

actual access, extraction, and local regulation are often managed by regional authorities, informal networks, or hybrid public–private arrangements operating at sub-national levels.

Third, extractive governance in the Horn is deeply shaped by security–resource entanglement. Control over mining areas, oil blocks, and exploration sites is frequently mediated through security provision, whether by state forces, regional administrations, militias, or foreign-backed security arrangements. As highlighted in Horn Review analyses, the actor that ensures physical access and stability in extraction zones often becomes the de facto regulator of those resources, regardless of formal legal mandates.

Taken together, these dynamics produce a fundamental dualism between “legal sovereignty” and “effective sovereignty.” Legal sovereignty refers to the formal claims embedded in constitutions and sectoral legislation that assign ownership and regulatory authority over natural resources to the state. Effective sovereignty, however, refers to the actual distribution of control over extraction, revenue flows, and access rights in practice. Across much of the Horn, these two forms of sovereignty are increasingly decoupled, with effective control frequently residing outside the formal institutions that are nominally responsible for governing the sector.

2. Comparative cross-table (Gold, CRM minerals, Energy)

Overall, the table shows a fairly consistent pattern across Somalia, Ethiopia, and Kenya: formal legal frameworks are converging toward modernization and central state ownership, but the real difference lies in institutional capacity and enforcement rather than the written laws themselves.

A. Governance & legislation comparison

Area	Somalia	Ethiopia	Kenya	Regional Pattern
Mining law framework	Outdated mining code + new draft reforms; Petroleum laws more developed than mining	Modern mining proclamations + constitutional federal system	Mining Act (2016) + petroleum law + strategic minerals regulations	Most countries are updating laws but implementation lags
Resource ownership model	Formally centralized, but de facto “mineral federalism” emerging	State ownership under federal system	State (national government holds in trust for citizens)	Central ownership is standard across region
Gold regulation	Dominated by ASM + informal exports; weak	Significant ASM gold in Oromia, Benishangul ; state	More formalized artisanal + industrial mining regime	Gold mostly ASM-driven, weak formal control

	licensing enforcement	licensing system		
Critical minerals (CRM)	Emerging lithium/rare earth potential; fragmented governance	Lithium, tantalum, potash development under state control	Strategic minerals list (lithium, cobalt, REE declared strategic)	CRM governance still emerging, but Kenya most structured
Energy sector governance	Petroleum law exists; offshore exploration interest but weak regulation capacity	State-led hydro + new IPP reforms; strong central control	Mature electricity regulator (EPRA), expanding geothermal & wind	Kenya most institutionalized energy regulator

Starting with mining law frameworks, all three countries are in transition. Somalia is the laggard, with an outdated mining code and only draft-level reforms, while its petroleum sector is comparatively more developed. Somalia contrasts with both Ethiopia and Kenya here mainly in terms of regulatory maturity. Ethiopia and Kenya both have more modern mining legislation, but even in those cases, implementation is uneven—especially outside major industrial corridors.

On resource ownership, there is a strong regional convergence toward centralized state ownership models. Even where federal systems exist (notably Ethiopia), the legal principle remains state ownership with varying degrees of decentralization in administration. Somalia’s “de facto mineral federalism” is the outlier, reflecting governance fragmentation more than formal policy design. Kenya is the most administratively straightforward, with national-level trust ownership and clearer institutional hierarchy.

For gold regulation, the dominant regional story is artisanal and small-scale mining (ASM). Across all three countries, ASM activity outpaces formal industrial control. Somalia shows the weakest licensing enforcement and the most informal export structure, while Ethiopia has significant ASM clusters but a more structured state licensing system. Kenya sits somewhat in the middle, with more formalization but still ASM-heavy dynamics. The shared regional issue is not absence of regulation, but weak enforcement and limited traceability.

In critical minerals (lithium, rare earths, tantalum, cobalt), all three are still in early-stage governance. Ethiopia and Kenya appear more proactive in formally declaring strategic minerals and structuring oversight frameworks. Kenya stands out as the most systematized, with clearer “strategic minerals” classification. Somalia, by contrast, has geological potential but fragmented governance and minimal regulatory coherence.

The energy sector governance comparison shows the clearest divergence. Kenya is the most institutionally developed, with an established regulator and relatively mature renewable energy expansion (geothermal and wind in particular). Ethiopia also has strong state control and

significant hydropower dominance, but is more centralized and reforming its IPP space. Somalia again lags due to limited regulatory capacity, despite offshore petroleum interest.

Big picture: the region is moving in the same direction (state-centric ownership + modernization of mining/energy law), but outcomes diverge sharply based on:

- regulatory capacity (Kenya strongest),
- federal coordination (Ethiopia mixed but structured),
- and institutional fragility (Somalia weakest).

B. Institutional capacity comparison

This second table sharpens the comparison by focusing less on “laws on paper” and more on how mining governance actually functions in practice—and the differences become more stark.

Across all four dimensions, Somalia stands out as the most fragmented system, Ethiopia represents a centralized but state-driven model, and Kenya shows the most institutionally formalized and market-facing framework.

On mining regulator strength, the pattern is essentially a spectrum of institutionalization. Somalia’s regulatory environment is weak and divided between federal and regional authorities, which creates overlapping claims and inconsistent enforcement. Ethiopia, by contrast, has consolidated authority under strong federal ministries, giving it administrative coherence even if decision-making is highly centralized. Kenya sits at the most advanced end, with relatively independent regulators and clearer licensing procedures that reduce discretion and ambiguity. The key difference here is not just strength, but predictability of governance—which is highest in Kenya and lowest in Somalia.

In revenue management, the contrast is even more consequential. Somalia faces structural leakage risks: unclear royalty frameworks, weak tax administration, and limited enforcement capacity mean that resource rents are difficult to capture consistently. Ethiopia performs better due to centralized fiscal control, which improves collection efficiency but concentrates revenue at the federal level. Kenya again is the most systematized, with relatively transparent taxation and more established revenue-sharing and reporting mechanisms. The underlying divergence is between extractive capture capacity vs fiscal transparency and institutional routinization.

The security of mining areas dimension highlights one of the most distinctive regional differences. Somalia’s mining security is often hybridized—sometimes provided by regional administrations, sometimes by private actors, and occasionally linked to informal “security-for-access” arrangements. This creates what is effectively a securitized bargaining economy around extraction rights. Ethiopia relies primarily on state security forces, especially in strategic extraction zones, reflecting stronger state penetration but also political centralization. Kenya is comparatively stable, with mining activity occurring in a more predictable security environment, reducing the need for militarized arrangements. The key difference is that Somalia’s mining sector is structurally tied to negotiated security provision, unlike the other two.

Finally, foreign investment control shows how governance style shapes investment entry. Somalia’s system is highly ad hoc, relying on negotiated deals that vary by region and political actor, which increases uncertainty but also flexibility. Ethiopia uses structured federal concessions, meaning investment is more controlled and standardized, though less flexible. Kenya operates a competitive but regulated licensing system, which tends to attract investors seeking predictability and rule-based entry. The key divergence here is between informal deal-making (Somalia), centralized state negotiation (Ethiopia), and regulated market competition (Kenya).

Area	Somalia	Ethiopia	Kenya	Key difference
Mining regulator strength	Weak federal regulator; competing regional authorities	Strong state institutions (Ministry of Mines & Energy)	Independent regulatory agencies + licensing system	Kenya strongest institutional depth
Revenue management	Fragmented, high leakage risk, unclear royalty sharing	Central fiscal control, better collection capacity	Transparent fiscal regime + established taxation systems	Somalia weakest revenue capture
Security of mining areas	Often provided by regional states or private actors (“security-for-minerals”) (HORN REVIEW)	State security forces dominate extraction zones	Generally stable security environment for mining	Somalia uniquely securitized
Foreign investment control	Highly negotiated, often ad hoc agreements	Structured federal concessions	Competitive but regulated licensing rounds	Somalia most informal

The table can be read as a clear typology of three distinct extractive governance systems in the Horn of Africa, each shaped by how authority, enforcement, and investment access are organized in practice rather than in law alone.

Somalia: Fragmented, negotiated, securitized resource governance Resource governance is characterized by overlapping authorities, weak institutional consolidation, and high reliance on negotiated arrangements between federal actors, regional administrations, and non-state or

private security providers. Regulatory outcomes are transactional rather than rule-based, with access to resources often tied to local power balances and security arrangements. This produces flexibility, but also high uncertainty, leakage risk, and inconsistent enforcement.

Ethiopia: Centralized, state-dominant, administratively structured model Governance is anchored in strong federal institutions that maintain tight control over licensing, fiscal flows, and strategic resources. The system is bureaucratically coherent and state-led, with relatively high administrative capacity and centralized decision-making. However, this structure prioritizes control over market flexibility, meaning investment and resource allocation are heavily mediated by state planning and political priorities.

Kenya: Institutionalized, regulated, investor-predictable framework Kenya represents the most rules-based system, where independent or semi-independent regulators, clearer licensing procedures, and more transparent fiscal regimes create a relatively predictable investment environment. While not free of challenges—especially in ASM regulation and enforcement gaps—the system is structurally oriented toward procedural consistency, legal clarity, and market-facing governance.

Key insight

The three cases reflect a progression from negotiated governance (Somalia) to centralized administrative governance (Ethiopia) to institutionalized regulatory governance (Kenya). Each model trades off differently between control, flexibility, and predictability, shaping not only investment outcomes but also how resource authority is exercised on the ground.

C. Sector-specific comparison

This table highlights a consistent theme across the three countries: a gap between formal regulatory systems and actual extraction realities, especially in the gold sector. Each case reflects a different type of “implementation gap” rather than absence of policy.

Somalia shows the most severe disconnect between law and practice. Although mining legislation exists, enforcement capacity is weak, and artisanal and small-scale mining (ASM) dominates production. The result is a largely informal export system where the state has limited ability to monitor output or capture fiscal value. The key structural problem is not just informality, but state incapacity to convert resources into revenue.

1. GOLD

Country	System	Reality on ground	Key issue
Somalia	Mining law exists but weak enforcement	ASM dominates, informal exports common	State cannot capture value
Ethiopia	Licensing system under federal authority	Gold extraction tied to regional states	Regional tensions affect control

Kenya	Licensed artisanal + industrial gold mining	More formal but ASM still significant	Illegal mining in western regions
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Ethiopia presents a different dynamic: the regulatory system is stronger and formally centralized under federal authority, but in practice gold extraction is heavily influenced by regional state structures. This creates a layered governance problem where control over resources becomes entangled in center–region relations. The main issue here is political and administrative fragmentation within a formally centralized system, where jurisdictional tensions reduce policy coherence.

Kenya sits at a more advanced point in institutional development, with both artisanal and industrial mining operating under a licensing framework. However, ASM remains significant, and illegal mining persists, particularly in western regions. The challenge is less about absence of regulation and more about enforcement consistency and regulation of dispersed informal activity within an otherwise structured system.

Overall pattern: All three cases demonstrate that formal mining laws are not the binding constraint; rather, the key differentiator is state capacity to enforce, coordinate across administrative levels, and regulate ASM economies. Somalia struggles with value capture, Ethiopia with center–region control tensions, and Kenya with enforcement completeness in otherwise functioning institutions.

In summary, gold is the least institutionalized mineral across the Horn, making it the most conflict-prone. Strengthen institutions, formalize ASM, improve enforcement, coordination. Expand transparent licensing systems and digital tracking. Clarify revenue sharing between central and regional governments. Invest in geological data and cadastral systems. Increase monitoring of exports and mineral supply chains. Improve security governance in extraction zones. Harmonize mining laws across regional and federal levels. Attract investment through predictable, rules-based regulation. In Sudan, ask UAE to stop processing the gold of rebellions and instead contribute constructively in Masr-led conference diplomacy with the EU leading from behind.

CRITICAL RAW MATERIALS (CRM: lithium, cobalt, REEs, tantalum)

This table shows a clear divergence in mining governance maturity and strategic mineral positioning across the Horn of Africa, with countries moving at different speeds from exploration dependence toward structured resource strategies.

Somalia sits at an early transition stage where a formal mining code exists but is outdated and weakly enforced. Institutional authority remains fragmented, with “mineral federalism” emerging in practice due to limited central control. Despite this, there is growing attention to potential lithium and rare earth element (REE) prospects in northern regions, meaning the strategic direction is still largely speculative and opportunity-driven rather than policy-driven.

Ethiopia presents a more coherent state-led model. Mining proclamations and investment frameworks are supported by strong centralized institutions, giving the state high capacity to direct sector development. The strategic orientation is increasingly focused on industrial

Country	Legal status	Institutional strength	Strategic direction
Somalia	Emerging legal framework; outdated mining code	Very weak federal control; “mineral federalism” emerging (HORN REVIEW)	Lithium/REE potential in northern regions
Ethiopia	Mining proclamations + investment policy	Strong centralized state coordination	Focus on industrial minerals + emerging lithium potential
Kenya	Strategic Minerals Regulations (2017) + declared list of 14 strategic minerals	Moderate-to-strong regulatory clarity	Move toward “strategic minerals state control”
Djibouti/Eritrea	Limited legal frameworks	Low institutional capacity	Mostly exploration-stage

minerals and emerging lithium development, reflecting a deliberate attempt to link geology to industrial policy and long-term value addition.

Kenya shows the most legally structured system in the group, with defined strategic minerals regulations and an official list of priority resources. Institutional strength is moderate to strong, and governance is more predictable. The strategic shift toward state-guided control of strategic minerals indicates a hybrid model where market participation remains important but operates within a clearer framework of national resource prioritization.

Djibouti and Eritrea remain at an earlier stage of development, with limited legal frameworks and relatively low institutional capacity. Their mining sectors are still largely exploration-driven, meaning strategic direction is not yet strongly defined beyond attracting early-stage investment and geological surveying.

Overall, the region reflects a gradient of mineral governance evolution from Somalia’s fragmented and emerging system, through Ethiopia’s centralized developmental model, to Kenya’s more regulated and institutionalized framework, with Djibouti and Eritrea still

primarily in exploration mode. The key insight is that while strategic minerals like lithium and REEs are becoming increasingly important, only Ethiopia and Kenya currently have the institutional capacity to convert geological potential into coherent long-term industrial strategy. In summary, Kenya is the most “policy-ready”; Somalia is the most “fragmented”.

4. ENERGY (oil, gas, electricity systems)

This table highlights a clear energy governance gradient across the Horn of Africa, where differences are driven less by resource endowment alone and more by institutional capacity, infrastructure development, and regulatory maturity.

Somalia shows a dual reality in petroleum governance: offshore licensing frameworks exist and attract political attention, but governance remains highly sensitive and contested. The electricity sector is structurally weak, with limited national grid coverage and heavy reliance on imports and localized generation. The key feature is that energy governance is politically driven but institutionally underdeveloped, especially in offshore hydrocarbons where sovereignty and revenue expectations are high but administrative capacity is limited.

Country	Petroleum governance	Electricity governance	Key feature
Somalia	Petroleum laws + offshore licensing efforts	Weak national grid, reliance on imports	Offshore oil politically sensitive
Ethiopia	Strong state-controlled hydro + IPPs	Expanding national grid (GERD influence)	Hydro-dominated energy state
Kenya	Petroleum Act + independent regulator	Advanced renewable mix (geothermal, wind)	Most diversified energy system
Djibouti	Small grid, import-dependent	Geothermal potential emerging	External dependence

Ethiopia represents a highly centralized, state-led energy model anchored in large-scale hydropower development. Petroleum governance is less central compared to electricity dominance, where state control over generation and transmission remains strong, reinforced by major infrastructure such as the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam. The system is characterized by hydro-dominant energy planning with expanding national grid integration, making electricity a strategic pillar of state-building and industrialization.

Kenya stands out as the most diversified and institutionally mature energy system in the region. Petroleum governance is structured under a defined legal and regulatory framework, while electricity generation benefits from a strong mix of geothermal, wind, hydro, and thermal sources. The presence of independent regulation and competitive energy planning results in a

market-responsive and diversified energy transition model, reducing dependence on any single source.

Djibouti reflects a small, import-dependent energy system with limited domestic generation capacity. While geothermal potential is emerging, current electricity supply relies heavily on imports and external partnerships. The key feature is structural dependence on external energy sources, with gradual exploration of indigenous renewable options as a long-term strategy.

Sudan has a petroleum-heavy energy history, with infrastructure and production capacity significantly disrupted by political instability and conflict. Electricity generation is uneven, with urban centers partially supplied and rural areas facing chronic shortages. The system is characterized by **declining hydrocarbon stability combined with fragile grid infrastructure**, making governance highly dependent on political conditions and external support.

South Sudan remains heavily dependent on crude oil exports as its primary energy and fiscal pillar, while domestic electricity access is extremely limited. Infrastructure is underdeveloped, and the energy system is shaped by oil revenue dependence rather than diversified energy planning. The key feature is **extreme oil dependency with minimal domestic energy infrastructure development**, making the sector highly vulnerable to production shocks and political instability.

Overall, the region displays multiple energy governance models: Somalia as politically sensitive but institutionally weak, especially in offshore hydrocarbons; Ethiopia as a centralized, hydro-dominated state energy system focused on grid expansion; Kenya as a diversified, regulated, and institutionally mature energy market; Djibouti as a small-scale, import-dependent system with emerging renewable potential; Sudan as a conflict-affected, petroleum-disrupted system with fragile electricity infrastructure; and South Sudan as an extreme oil-dependent economy with minimal domestic energy development. The key insight is that stronger institutions (Kenya, Ethiopia) enable diversification and planning, while weaker or conflict-affected states (Somalia, Sudan, South Sudan) remain constrained by fragmentation, instability, and overreliance on hydrocarbons or imports.

Pattern: Kenya = diversified; Ethiopia = state-controlled hydro; Somalia = fragmented + high potential but low capacity.

Key structural insights

Across the Horn of Africa, mining and petroleum sectors are formally governed by increasingly modern legal frameworks, yet enforcement capacity diverges sharply from one state to another. Kenya and Ethiopia have been more successful in translating legislation into operational regulatory systems, whereas Somalia exhibits the widest disconnect between statutory authority and real-world control over extractive resources. In Somalia, the state's legal claim to regulate minerals and hydrocarbons is consistently undermined by fragmented territorial authority, weak administrative reach, and the prevalence of informal extraction networks. As a result, legal sovereignty over resources exists on paper, while effective control is exercised by sub-state actors, private operators, or security-linked groups.

In Somalia in particular, control over extractive resources is determined less by statutory frameworks and more by security arrangements on the ground. Actors that provide or guarantee security in mining or exploration zones effectively gain influence over licensing, taxation, and revenue flows. This dynamic has enabled regional administrations to operate as de facto regulators of extractive activity, often setting their own access rules and negotiating directly with investors or operators, as noted in Horn Review analyses. In contrast, Kenya and Ethiopia exhibit more visible alignment between formal state security structures and regulatory authority, which reduces—but does not eliminate—the space for parallel control systems. The Horn-wide pattern suggests that in weakly consolidated states, security provision becomes the primary currency of resource governance, displacing formal legal authority.

A consistent regional pattern is that electricity and petroleum sectors are more institutionally developed than mining sectors. Across Ethiopia, Kenya, and Djibouti in particular, energy governance benefits from clearer regulatory agencies, more structured investment frameworks, and stronger integration into national development planning. Mining, by contrast, remains heavily informal in practice, with artisanal and small-scale extraction dominating production in many areas and regulatory enforcement remaining inconsistent. Even where petroleum legislation is advanced, as in Somalia, institutional capacity to manage licensing, monitoring, and revenue assurance remains significantly weaker than in electricity regulation or downstream energy management systems elsewhere in the region.

The emergence of lithium, rare earths, tantalum, and other strategic minerals is reshaping internal governance dynamics, particularly in Somalia. Potential deposits in northern and central regions are increasing the bargaining power of sub-national authorities, who are positioning themselves as gatekeepers of access and licensing. This is contributing to what some analysts describe as “mineral federalism,” where control over subsurface resources becomes an additional axis of decentralization alongside political and security fragmentation. Similar, though less extreme, pressures are also emerging in Ethiopia and Kenya, where strategic mineral classification is prompting tighter central oversight while simultaneously incentivizing regional competition over resource-endowed territories.

Somalia’s existing and legacy mining frameworks reflect a highly centralized legal design that assumes strong national enforcement capacity. In practice, however, regional administrations control access to land, security conditions are localized, and federal institutions lack the operational reach to implement licensing uniformly. This structural mismatch has rendered centralized legal control ineffective. The implication is that Somalia’s extractive governance cannot rely on legal centralism alone and instead requires a cooperative federal model in which authority is shared between federal licensing bodies and regional implementation structures.

Comparative evidence from Kenya and Ethiopia shows that more coherent fiscal systems—particularly predictable taxation and clearer revenue allocation rules—are essential for maintaining state authority over extractive sectors. Somalia’s main weakness lies in the absence of a trusted and enforceable royalty-sharing framework between federal and regional levels. This gap has led to fragmented fiscal practices, including parallel taxation regimes and ad hoc agreements that undermine national revenue consolidation. Without a transparent and enforceable redistribution mechanism, extractive governance will continue to incentivize institutional fragmentation rather than coordination.

In Somalia, mining governance cannot be separated from security governance. The presence or absence of armed protection directly shapes who can access extraction sites, negotiate contracts, and enforce payment obligations. Effective policy design therefore requires explicit integration of security considerations into licensing systems. This includes structured mapping of security responsibilities for extraction zones, the establishment of demilitarized or neutralized mining areas where feasible, and the regulation of local security arrangements to prevent capture by non-state armed actors or politically affiliated groups.

Compared to Kenya and Ethiopia, Somalia remains at an earlier stage of institutional development in the extractive sector, where legal frameworks are still being designed or revised rather than consistently implemented. Attempting to scale up extraction under these conditions creates significant risks, including elite capture, corruption, and the financing of conflict actors through resource rents. The sequencing challenge is therefore critical: institutional consolidation, regulatory capacity, and revenue systems must be strengthened before large-scale commercial extraction is expanded.

Given current political and administrative realities, neither full centralization nor full regional autonomy provides a stable governance solution. Full centralization is constrained by limited federal capacity, while full decentralization risks institutional fragmentation and uncoordinated exploitation. The most viable approach is a hybrid model that combines federal-level licensing authority with regionally implemented operational agreements, supported by a national revenue clearing mechanism that ensures standardized collection and redistribution of extractive revenues.

Kenya's approach to strategic minerals demonstrates the value of clearly defining priority resource categories under national policy, thereby strengthening state leverage over high-value commodities while improving investor predictability. Regulatory clarity also tends to attract more structured and compliant investment flows. For Somalia, adapting this approach would involve formally designating strategic mineral zones, standardizing licensing procedures across federal and regional levels, and creating clear regulatory categories for emerging resources such as lithium and rare earth elements to reduce discretionary and informal negotiation practices.

Bottom line synthesis

Kenya represents the most institutionally advanced extractive governance system in the region, particularly in its integration of strategic mineral policy and diversified energy regulation. Ethiopia demonstrates strong centralized control over key extractive and energy sectors, supported by relatively cohesive state institutions. Somalia, by contrast, possesses significant resource potential but remains constrained by fragmented institutional authority, resulting in what can be described as a condition of "fragmented sovereignty" over natural resources. Regionally, extractive governance is increasingly converging toward two dominant trends: the strategic prioritization of critical minerals and the growing entanglement of resource control with security governance structures.

19. Red Sea and Ethiopia

For Ethiopia to exercise constructive leadership in the Red Sea region, it must shift from a posture centered on strategic entitlement toward one based on regional partnership, economic interdependence, diplomatic credibility, and cooperative security.

As the Horn of Africa's largest population center and one of Africa's most influential states, Ethiopia possesses the demographic, economic, and geopolitical weight to become a stabilizing regional power. However, sustainable leadership in the Red Sea cannot emerge through coercion, unilateral rhetoric, or military pressure regarding maritime access. It requires legitimacy, trust-building, and institutional diplomacy.

A constructive Ethiopian Red Sea strategy should therefore pursue:

- peaceful economic access rather than territorial ambition,
- multilateral regionalism rather than unilateralism,
- cooperative maritime development,
- reconciliation with neighbors,
- and strategic partnerships with the European Union, the African Union, Gulf states, and East African partners.

Ethiopia's Strategic Position

Ethiopia is a structurally significant state in Africa due to its demographic, political, and geographic weight. It is the second most populous country on the continent. It also hosts the headquarters of the African Union in Addis Ababa. This institutional role amplifies its diplomatic influence across Africa. Ethiopia plays a central role in the Horn of Africa's security architecture. Its geography connects the interior of East Africa with the Red Sea basin. This position gives it both opportunities and constraints in external trade. The country's economic transformation depends heavily on external connectivity. Maritime access remains a core requirement for sustained development. Regional stability directly affects Ethiopia's trade performance.

Energy integration is also increasingly important for long-term growth. Transport corridors determine the efficiency of its export-import system. At present, over 90 percent of Ethiopia's trade flows through Djibouti. This creates a high level of structural dependency. Such dependency exposes Ethiopia to external logistical risks. It also limits diversification of trade routes. Any disruption in a single corridor can affect the entire economy. This vulnerability is therefore a strategic concern. However, it does not automatically imply instability if managed cooperatively. Constructive leadership requires addressing this issue through diplomacy. Regional cooperation offers more sustainable solutions than unilateral action. Infrastructure partnerships can reduce logistical bottlenecks. Economic integration can improve mutual trust among neighboring states. Diversified corridors can enhance resilience of trade systems. Digital customs systems can improve efficiency at border points. Energy trade agreements can strengthen interdependence. Transport modernization can reduce costs and delays. Ethiopia's development strategy must balance ambition with regional sensitivity. Respect for neighboring

sovereignty is essential in this context. Predictable diplomatic engagement strengthens regional confidence. Long-term stability depends on institutionalized cooperation mechanisms. The Horn of Africa benefits from interconnected rather than competitive economies. Ethiopia can play a convening role in regional integration efforts. Its size and market capacity give it natural leadership potential. However, leadership must be exercised through cooperation rather than pressure. Maritime access discussions should prioritize commercial arrangements. Such arrangements are internationally recognized and widely used. Trust-building measures are essential for durable agreements. Economic vulnerability can be transformed into opportunity through integration. Ultimately, Ethiopia's structural challenges can become a foundation for regional cooperation if managed constructively.

Core Principles for Constructive Red Sea Leadership

A. Respect for Sovereignty

The foundational requirement for constructive regional leadership is an unequivocal and consistently demonstrated respect for the sovereignty, territorial integrity, and political independence of neighboring states, particularly Eritrea, Djibouti, Somalia, and Sudan. Any political discourse or strategic communication that implies historical entitlement to ports or territorial revisionism risks eroding regional trust, heightening security sensitivities, and generating unnecessary diplomatic friction across the Horn of Africa.

In this context, constructive leadership requires a clear and public reaffirmation that maritime access must be pursued strictly through peaceful, legal, and commercially negotiated arrangements. Such access should be grounded in international law, mutual benefit, and economic interdependence, rather than coercive leverage, military pressure, or revisionist narratives.

A transparent commitment to these principles would substantially strengthen Ethiopia's diplomatic credibility, reduce regional suspicion, and create a more stable foundation for long-term cooperation.

B. Transition from Hard Power to Economic Statecraft

Ethiopia's most sustainable and influential form of regional power lies not in military posture, but in economic statecraft and structural connectivity. A forward-looking regional strategy would therefore prioritize development-oriented instruments of influence, including logistics integration, infrastructure partnerships, trade corridor development, energy cooperation, industrial linkages, and digital connectivity systems.

Rather than framing maritime access or port infrastructure as strategic assets to be controlled, Ethiopia would benefit from positioning itself as the primary engine of regional economic transformation. This reorientation reframes national strength in terms of productivity, interdependence, and shared growth rather than territorial competition or zero-sum strategy.

Such an approach closely mirrors successful integration models observed in Southeast Asia and parts of Europe, where regional leadership has been achieved through trade facilitation, institutional cooperation, and supply chain integration rather than coercive competition.

III. Strategic Actions Ethiopia Should Pursue

1. Normalize and Institutionalize Relations With Eritrea

The Ethiopia–Eritrea relationship remains central to the long-term stability of the Red Sea sub-region. A durable peace architecture requires the establishment of permanent diplomatic dialogue mechanisms, structured military deconfliction channels, expanded cross-border trade frameworks, and the gradual reopening and normalization of transport corridors.

Any sustainable arrangement regarding Assab or Massawa can only emerge through incremental trust-building, institutional continuity, and predictable engagement over time.

A key strategic adjustment would be Ethiopia's explicit recognition and affirmation of Eritrean sovereignty over its ports, coupled with parallel negotiations to secure reliable, long-term commercial access. This distinction between sovereignty and access is essential: sovereignty disputes tend to destabilize regions, while commercially governed access arrangements are widely recognized as legitimate under international practice and can support mutual economic benefit.

2. Develop a Cooperative Horn of Africa Economic Architecture

Ethiopia is well positioned to play a convening role in advancing a broader Horn of Africa economic framework focused on integration rather than dominance. This could include coordinated efforts in customs modernization, transport harmonization, regional energy pooling, and maritime cooperation mechanisms.

Such an initiative could potentially bring together Eritrea, Djibouti, Somalia, Sudan, Kenya, and South Sudan into a gradually deepening economic cooperation structure. The objective would be to reposition Ethiopia not as a hegemonic actor, but as a facilitating hub for regional connectivity and institutional coordination.

Constructive leadership in this context is most effectively expressed through the strengthening of institutions, rules, and shared systems rather than through coercive leverage or unilateral influence.

3. Build a Cooperative Red Sea Maritime Policy

Ethiopia could contribute meaningfully to the development of a cooperative and inclusive Red Sea maritime framework focused on shared security and mutual prosperity. Priority areas could include anti-piracy coordination, maritime environmental protection, coordinated port development planning, and the enhancement of Red Sea trade security mechanisms.

A guiding principle of this approach would be the promotion of shared maritime prosperity rather than exclusive strategic control or competitive port dominance. This framing would help reduce regional anxieties and improve confidence among both African coastal states and key external stakeholders, including Gulf countries and international trading partners.

20. Repair Relations With Somalia

Recent tensions with Somalia over maritime agreements have had a noticeable negative impact on Ethiopia's regional credibility and have contributed to heightened diplomatic sensitivity across the Horn of Africa. These developments underscored the importance of clear, consistent, and carefully coordinated foreign policy messaging in a region where historical grievances and security concerns remain deeply embedded. Constructive leadership requires a deliberate shift away from unilateral or ambiguously framed agreements toward fully transparent, mutually negotiated frameworks grounded in international law and regional consensus. Rebuilding trust with Somalia depends on sustained diplomatic engagement at the highest political and technical levels, supported by continuous communication channels that reduce the risk of misunderstanding or escalation.

A renewed approach should prioritize unequivocal respect for Somali sovereignty and territorial integrity, particularly in relation to maritime jurisdiction and coastal governance. Ethiopia's long-term strategic interests are best served by reinforcing Somalia's state institutions rather than circumventing or weakening them through parallel arrangements. Transparent consultation with Somali authorities in any regional maritime or economic agreement is essential to restoring confidence and demonstrating good faith. This includes ensuring that all agreements are clearly communicated, publicly justified, and aligned with established regional and international legal frameworks.

Constructive leadership would also involve expanding diplomatic presence and engagement mechanisms between Addis Ababa and Mogadishu, including regular bilateral summits, technical working groups, and crisis prevention platforms. Such mechanisms would reduce the likelihood of misinterpretation and help institutionalize cooperation beyond short-term political cycles. In addition, Ethiopia could support Somalia's capacity-building efforts in maritime governance, customs administration, and port management as part of a broader stabilization strategy. Strengthening Somali institutional capacity would contribute directly to regional security and economic predictability.

Economic cooperation between the two countries should be reframed around shared development priorities rather than contested strategic assets. This includes cross-border trade facilitation, infrastructure connectivity, and coordinated logistics planning that benefits both inland and coastal economies. A stable and predictable Ethiopia–Somalia relationship would also enhance investor confidence and encourage broader regional integration initiatives supported by international partners.

Ultimately, stable Ethiopia–Somalia relations are essential not only for bilateral cooperation but also for the wider security architecture of the Horn of Africa. The durability of regional peace depends heavily on mutual recognition, respect for sovereignty, and predictable diplomatic conduct. Any perception of territorial ambition or coercive intent risks undermining years of fragile progress in regional normalization efforts. By contrast, a consistent commitment to dialogue, transparency, and institutional cooperation would significantly enhance Ethiopia's standing as a responsible regional actor.

Long-term stability will require embedding these principles into formal agreements, regional forums, and multilateral frameworks that extend beyond ad hoc diplomacy. It will also require political restraint in public communication, ensuring that strategic objectives are articulated in

ways that reinforce trust rather than suspicion. Over time, such an approach could transform Ethiopia–Somalia relations from episodic tension into structured cooperation anchored in mutual benefit. This transformation would serve as a cornerstone for broader Horn of Africa integration and would strengthen the region’s collective capacity to manage security, trade, and development challenges in a coordinated manner.

21. YEMEN

Ethiopia’s interest in Yemen is mainly driven by its need for stable access to the Red Sea for trade. Because Ethiopia is landlocked, it relies on nearby ports, making maritime security in the Red Sea very important. Instability in Yemen threatens key shipping routes, especially the Bab el-Mandeb Strait.

The conflict in Yemen also contributes to irregular migration and humanitarian pressures in the Horn of Africa. Ethiopia is affected by these migration flows, both as a source and transit country. Ethiopia avoids direct military involvement in Yemen but supports diplomatic solutions to the conflict.

It also balances its relationships with Gulf countries that are involved in Yemen’s conflict. Overall, Ethiopia prioritizes regional stability in Yemen to protect its trade, security, and economic interests. We anticipate Addis Abbeba to engage in constructive peace diplomacy and to promote peace and prosperity in Yemen and the insertion of entrepots used by its merchants on trade with India and Asian countries.

Eritrea and Ethiopia intersect on Yemen mainly through geography, security, and regional power competition in the Red Sea–Bab el-Mandeb corridor, which links the Horn of Africa directly to Yemen across one of the world’s most strategic maritime chokepoints.

Why?

First, both countries are indirectly tied to Yemen because the Bab el-Mandeb Strait sits between Yemen and the Horn of Africa. Control and stability in Yemen directly affect shipping lanes that also matter to Ethiopia (as a landlocked state dependent on Red Sea access) and Eritrea (a coastal Red Sea state).

Second, during the Yemeni civil war (from 2015 onward), the Gulf states—especially Saudi Arabia and the UAE—projected military and logistical influence across both Yemen and the Horn. Eritrea, due to its coastal geography, became more directly involved by allowing foreign military use of its ports and airfields. Ethiopia, while less directly involved on Eritrean soil, became indirectly engaged through regional security alignments and Gulf partnerships.

Third, Eritrea’s coastline gave it a strategic role in Red Sea military logistics related to Yemen, particularly during the Saudi-led coalition’s operations. This increased Eritrea’s regional relevance and sometimes placed it in a parallel but not coordinated position with Ethiopia regarding Red Sea security architecture.

Fourth, Ethiopia’s involvement is more structural than operational: the Yemeni conflict intensified Ethiopia’s long-term concern about reliable maritime access, since instability in

Yemen raises risks for Red Sea shipping routes and increases dependence on neighboring coastal states, including Eritrea, Djibouti, and Sudan. This indirectly feeds into Ethiopia–Eritrea tensions over ports and access.

Fifth, both Ethiopia and Eritrea are affected by proxy competition involving Gulf states, where Yemen is part of a wider Red Sea theater. UAE and Saudi influence in Eritrea and Ethiopia has at times shaped regional alignments, with Yemen acting as the central conflict zone connecting these broader strategies.

Sixth, Yemen also matters through security spillover risks, including arms flows, smuggling routes, and maritime insecurity in the Red Sea. These networks link Yemen, Eritrea’s coastline, and Ethiopia’s border regions indirectly, especially through informal trade and migration routes.

Finally, Yemen functions as a strategic mirror of the Ethiopia–Eritrea relationship: both states see Red Sea instability through the lens of their own rivalry and security concerns, meaning Yemen is not just a separate conflict but part of the wider geopolitical system tying the Horn of Africa to the Arabian Peninsula.

Here, The EU could, first, use its economic weight to support rules-based maritime security in the Red Sea, especially around Bab el-Mandeb, which directly connects Yemen to Horn of Africa states. Because European trade flows heavily through this route, the EU has a strong interest in reducing piracy risks, arms smuggling, and naval escalation that spill over from the Yemen conflict into Eritrea’s waters and Ethiopia’s supply chains.

Second, the EU could support coordinated regional diplomacy rather than isolated bilateral fixes. One of the structural problems in the Ethiopia–Eritrea relationship is that agreements tend to be leader-driven and fragile. In a wider Red Sea framework, including Yemen and Gulf actors, the EU could help anchor dialogue in institutions rather than personalities.

Third, the EU could expand development and port-access cooperation programs that reduce zero-sum competition over maritime access. For Ethiopia especially, access to Red Sea logistics is a strategic pressure point, and unmanaged competition over ports can spill into tensions with Eritrea. Structured EU-backed trade facilitation and infrastructure investment could reduce that pressure.

Fourth, in relation to Yemen, the EU could help limit the regionalization of the conflict, where Yemeni instability becomes entangled with Horn of Africa rivalries. By coordinating sanctions enforcement, humanitarian corridors, and maritime monitoring, the EU can reduce the space for proxy escalation involving Eritrean coastline or wider Red Sea militarization.

Finally, the EU’s comparative advantage is not coercion but institution-building and long-term conditional cooperation. In a region where Ethiopia–Eritrea relations and Yemen’s war are both shaped by fragmented authority and shifting alliances, external actors like the EU are most effective when they reinforce predictable rules—on shipping, trade, and security coordination—rather than backing short-term alignments.

In summary, the EU acts less as a military actor and more as a stabilizing external institution shaping incentives across the whole Red Sea corridor.

Strengthen Internal Political Stability

The European Union holds significant strategic potential to reinforce and elevate Ethiopia's role as a stabilizing and constructive regional anchor in the Horn of Africa by advancing a comprehensive, long-term partnership spanning infrastructure modernization, regional trade integration, diplomatic coordination, energy transition, and digital connectivity systems. As a pivotal state in the region, Ethiopia occupies a uniquely influential geopolitical position, functioning as a bridge between the African interior and the Red Sea corridor, while also serving as a critical gateway connecting East African economies to global maritime trade networks. A stable, economically integrated, and institutionally resilient Ethiopia therefore aligns directly with core European strategic interests, including regional stability, conflict prevention, managed migration, sustainable development, climate adaptation, and the reinforcement of predictable, rules-based international economic governance.

Within this framework, the EU could assume a catalytic and transformative role by mobilizing substantial infrastructure financing through blended public-private investment mechanisms designed to unlock large-scale connectivity projects and reduce structural economic fragmentation across the region. Such engagement would extend beyond conventional transport infrastructure to include integrated trade facilitation ecosystems, interoperable cross-border logistics platforms, and institutional capacity-building initiatives aimed at improving regulatory efficiency and regional economic coordination. In parallel, enhanced maritime cooperation would strengthen the security and resilience of Red Sea and Indian Ocean shipping corridors, supporting safer navigation routes, reducing supply chain vulnerabilities, and reinforcing the stability of intercontinental trade flows linking Africa, Europe, and Asia.

A central strategic dimension of this partnership could focus on the development and modernization of key transport and economic corridors, particularly the Addis Ababa–Assab axis, which holds significant potential to diversify Ethiopia's access to maritime gateways while simultaneously accelerating industrial expansion, deepening regional commerce, and strengthening cross-border economic interdependence. Complementing this, comprehensive customs modernization programs—supported by advanced digital infrastructure, interoperable border systems, and harmonized regional regulatory frameworks—could substantially reduce trade inefficiencies, enhance fiscal transparency, and improve the predictability and competitiveness of regional markets.

Energy cooperation would represent another high-value pillar of EU–Ethiopia engagement, particularly through the expansion of renewable and low-carbon energy systems. Ethiopia's considerable hydropower resources, combined with its growing wind and solar potential, could be further developed through EU-backed investment in cross-border electricity interconnections, regional power pooling architectures, and export-oriented clean energy infrastructure. Such initiatives would not only reinforce Ethiopia's emergence as a regional energy hub but also advance Europe's broader climate objectives by expanding sustainable energy corridors and supporting the global transition toward decarbonized development pathways.

Additional strategic opportunities lie in the digitization and modernization of logistics and trade ecosystems across the Horn of Africa. This includes the deployment of intelligent freight management systems, digitally integrated port and inland transport coordination platforms, and data-driven supply chain optimization tools designed to increase efficiency, transparency, and resilience. Industrial zone development further complements this agenda by enabling structural economic transformation through European-supported technology transfer, workforce upskilling, export-oriented manufacturing ecosystems, and environmentally sustainable industrial policy frameworks. Collectively, these initiatives would deepen Ethiopia's integration into regional and global value chains while fostering inclusive job creation and long-term economic diversification.

However, the scale and sustainability of EU engagement would remain closely conditioned on continued progress in regional de-escalation, credible governance reforms, and a sustained commitment to peaceful diplomatic engagement. European institutions are likely to prioritize institutional accountability, transparency, rule-of-law adherence, conflict prevention mechanisms, and constructive regional relations as foundational requirements for deepened strategic alignment and long-term investment confidence.

Ultimately, a strengthened and multidimensional EU–Ethiopia partnership could evolve into a cornerstone of stability, connectivity, and economic transformation across the Horn of Africa. If implemented with consistency, institutional discipline, and sustained political will, such cooperation could unlock transformative interregional trade corridors, accelerate industrial diversification, enhance infrastructure resilience, and contribute meaningfully to long-term peace, prosperity, and geopolitical equilibrium in one of the world's most strategically consequential regions.

22. Required Foreign Policy Leadership Style

Ethiopia's long-term strategic posture on Red Sea access and wider Horn of Africa stability is best understood as a problem of *time horizons, trust deficits, and regional system design*, rather than a narrow question of immediate access or transactional bargaining. In such a fragile geopolitical environment, outcomes are determined less by single negotiations and more by whether actors can sustain restraint, predictability, and institutional engagement over extended periods. This makes strategic patience not simply a diplomatic preference, but a structural necessity. The Red Sea question in particular cannot be resolved through accelerated pressure or episodic diplomacy; it requires sequencing—where negotiation, infrastructure planning, and incremental confidence-building reinforce one another over years or even decades. Attempts to compress this timeline through coercive signalling or maximalist positioning tend to generate counter-balancing coalitions, harden neighbouring threat perceptions, and ultimately reduce Ethiopia's optionality rather than expand it.

Within this constraint, multilateral diplomacy becomes the most viable mechanism for converting structural landlocked vulnerability into cooperative regional influence. Instead of treating forums as symbolic venues, Ethiopia's comparative advantage lies in actively shaping agenda-setting within institutions such as the African Union, IGAD, and broader Red Sea or Horn of Africa coordination frameworks. The presence of the African Union headquarters in Addis Ababa provides not just symbolic prestige but a platform effect: it allows Ethiopia to

embed its strategic concerns within continental norms around integration, connectivity, and collective security. However, this advantage only translates into durable influence if Ethiopia is perceived not as a unilateral claimant seeking exception, but as a system-shaping actor seeking rules that are broadly acceptable to coastal and inland states alike. In this sense, Ethiopia's optimal role is closer to that of a convenor and stabiliser of regional bargaining systems rather than a direct challenger to maritime sovereignty arrangements.

The final and most decisive layer is credibility, which functions as the underlying currency of regional diplomacy in the Horn of Africa. Unlike material capabilities, credibility accumulates slowly and can be lost quickly, especially in environments marked by historical mistrust and security sensitivity. For Ethiopia, credibility is not limited to formal treaty compliance, but extends to behavioural consistency across time—coherent signalling between domestic political actors, disciplined communication in external messaging, and a clear separation between strategic objectives and rhetorical escalation. When nationalist framing becomes volatile or inconsistent with diplomatic commitments, it raises uncertainty among neighbours about Ethiopia's long-term intentions, which in turn encourages hedging behaviour and external balancing. Conversely, when commitments are stable and repeatedly honoured, Ethiopia's influence increases even in the absence of coercive leverage, because other actors begin to incorporate Ethiopian preferences into their own planning assumptions. Over time, this predictability becomes a form of structural power: not the ability to force outcomes, but the ability to shape the range of outcomes others consider safe, feasible, and worth negotiating.

23. Iran's Power Projection

Iranian power projection into the Red Sea region is primarily based on asymmetric influence rather than traditional naval dominance. Instead of relying on a large expeditionary navy, Tehran uses proxy networks, missile and drone capabilities, maritime disruption tactics, and political partnerships to shape events around one of the world's most important trade corridors linking the Indian Ocean with the Suez Canal through the Bab el-Mandeb Strait.

A major focus of international concern is Iran's relationship with the Houthi movement in Yemen. Western and Gulf intelligence assessments generally conclude that the Houthis have received varying levels of training, weapons technology, and operational support from Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC). Through this relationship, Iran can influence shipping security in the southern Red Sea without directly deploying major naval forces.

The strategic importance of the Red Sea stems from its role in global commerce and energy transport. Large volumes of European-Asian trade, Gulf energy exports, and military logistics pass through the Bab el-Mandeb chokepoint. Even limited disruption in this corridor can increase shipping insurance costs, delay cargo movements, and affect global energy markets.

One of the principal concerns surrounding Iranian activity is the use of proxy-enabled maritime coercion. The Houthis have demonstrated the ability to target commercial and military vessels using anti-ship missiles, drones, mines, and unmanned boats. These attacks create a "gray zone" environment in which shipping can be threatened without a formal interstate war. This allows Iran to exert strategic pressure while maintaining a degree of plausible deniability.

Another concern involves anti-access and area-denial capabilities. Houthi missile and drone systems have periodically created an environment in which commercial vessels and naval forces face elevated operational risk in parts of the Red Sea. Even intermittent attacks can force companies to reroute vessels around southern Africa, increasing transportation costs and placing strain on international naval patrols.

Analysts are also concerned about a broader Iranian strategy linking pressure in both the Red Sea and the Strait of Hormuz. In a regional crisis, Tehran could potentially combine direct pressure in the Persian Gulf with indirect proxy pressure in the Red Sea, complicating Western and Gulf naval responses and stretching maritime security resources across multiple chokepoints simultaneously.

Intelligence cooperation and regional influence dynamics involving Ethiopia and Sudan are also increasingly discussed in strategic assessments. Iran has historically sought political, intelligence, and logistical relationships across the Horn of Africa and the western Red Sea basin in order to support arms smuggling routes, improve maritime awareness, and counter rival Gulf and Western influence. In Sudan, earlier periods of cooperation reportedly involved transit networks used for moving weapons toward regional proxy groups before Khartoum shifted closer to Gulf partners. In Ethiopia, concerns are less about formal alliance structures and more about the possibility of intelligence engagement, diplomatic positioning, and future access opportunities connected to Red Sea security competition. Regional instability, weak border controls, and ongoing conflicts in the Horn of Africa create conditions that external powers, including Iran, may attempt to exploit for strategic access and intelligence collection.

The scope of cooperation between Iran, Ethiopia, and Sudan appears to be expanding, but the depth and character of each relationship differ markedly in both scale and strategic intent.

In the case of Iran–Ethiopia relations, the focus is primarily on institutional security cooperation, intelligence exchange, and limited defense-related engagement. A notable development came in May 2025, when Ethiopian and Iranian police authorities signed a memorandum of understanding that formalized collaboration in areas such as intelligence sharing, cross-border crime prevention, training, and broader institutional capacity building. This agreement reflected a gradual but deliberate effort to strengthen ties at the level of internal security agencies rather than through direct military alignment.

Beyond formal agreements, analysts have pointed to earlier reports suggesting that Iran provided surveillance and combat drone systems to Ethiopian government forces during the Tigray conflict. These capabilities were reportedly used to enhance reconnaissance and precision strike capacity during critical phases of the war, although the extent and continuity of such transfers remain contested in open-source reporting. Taken together, the relationship with Ethiopia appears to involve intelligence cooperation between security institutions, coordination on counterterrorism and cross-border crime, training exchanges, and possible limited transfers of surveillance and drone technology. At the same time, there is no strong public evidence indicating that the relationship has evolved into a formal military alliance or a permanent intelligence-sharing framework comparable to Iran’s deeper partnerships elsewhere.

The Iran–Sudan relationship, by contrast, is significantly more militarized and strategically consequential. Since the outbreak of the Sudanese civil war in 2023, multiple reports have indicated that Iran has provided the Sudanese Armed Forces with drones, military equipment, and technical assistance. Systems attributed to Iran, including Mohajer-series drones, have reportedly been used in combat operations against the Rapid Support Forces, strengthening Sudanese military capabilities in an active conflict environment.

Additional reporting has suggested that Iranian cargo aircraft may have been used to deliver military supplies to Port Sudan, and that Iranian advisors or security personnel could be assisting elements of Sudan’s military operations. Beyond battlefield support, Iran has also pursued broader strategic objectives along the Red Sea corridor. These include efforts to expand influence over key maritime routes and reported interest in establishing access to naval facilities on Sudan’s Red Sea coast, although claims of a permanent base have been publicly denied or politically rejected by Sudanese authorities.

The intelligence dimension of the Iran–Sudan relationship is particularly significant. Access to the Red Sea region would provide Tehran with valuable opportunities for maritime surveillance, monitoring of commercial shipping lanes connected to the Suez Canal, and broader strategic observation of regional rivals and Western naval activity. This places Sudan within a much more overtly geopolitical framework for Iran compared to Ethiopia.

Taken together, the comparison highlights two distinct models of engagement. Iran’s relationship with Ethiopia is primarily institutional and security-oriented, centered on police cooperation, intelligence exchange, and limited technological support, particularly in surveillance and drones. In contrast, Iran’s engagement with Sudan has evolved into a far deeper and more operationally significant partnership, characterized by reported arms transfers, active battlefield support, and strategic calculations tied to Red Sea access and maritime influence.

More broadly, these relationships reflect Iran’s wider effort to expand its footprint in the Horn of Africa and the Red Sea corridor. The region offers Tehran a combination of strategic maritime access, opportunities to counterbalance Gulf and Western influence, and potential intelligence vantage points near some of the world’s most critical shipping routes, including the Bab el-Mandeb strait.

Reducing Iran’s footprint in the Red Sea would depend on a combination of military, political, and economic pressures that either limit its partners’ willingness to cooperate or raise the costs of Iran’s involvement.







Figure

CONDITIONS FOR REDUCING IRAN'S FOOTPRINT IN THE RED SEA

Iran expands influence in the Red Sea through military support, arms transfers, and strategic partnerships—especially with Sudan. Reducing this footprint requires a combination of political, military, economic, and diplomatic actions.



KEY CONDITIONS

<p>1 STABILIZATION AND POLITICAL SETTLEMENT IN SUDAN</p>  <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A durable ceasefire and inclusive political process reduce the need for external military support. • A unified, internationally backed government is more likely to restrict foreign military presence along the Red Sea. • Reconstruction aid and sanctions relief can be conditioned on limiting military cooperation with Iran. 	<p>2 SUSTAINED EXTERNAL NAVAL PRESENCE AND DETERRENCE</p>  <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Expanded patrols and surveillance by U.S., European, and regional navies increase the risk for Iranian-linked activities. • Stronger interdiction of suspected arms shipments and logistics routes makes supply chains harder and riskier. • Persistent maritime domain awareness reduces Iran's operational flexibility. 	<p>3 STRONGER REGIONAL COORDINATION AND INTELLIGENCE SHARING</p>  <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Red Sea and Horn of Africa states should coordinate on port security, customs, and maritime monitoring. • Closer intelligence sharing exposes Iran-linked networks and disrupts facilitation activities. • A cohesive security architecture reduces the space Iran exploits through bilateral relationships.
<p>4 DIPLOMATIC NORMALIZATION AND REDUCED REGIONAL TENSIONS</p>  <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improved Iran–Gulf relations, especially with Saudi Arabia, reduce incentives for proxy competition in the Red Sea. • Lower regional tensions mean fewer opportunities for Iran to expand influence through partners in conflict zones. • Diplomacy backed by confidence-building measures supports long-term stability. 	<p>5 REDUCED PARTNER DEPENDENCE ON IRAN</p>  <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • As internal security improves and conflicts wind down, demand for Iranian drones, weapons, and advisors decreases. • Partner states diversifying their defense suppliers weaken Iran's leverage. • Building local defense and surveillance capacity reduces reliance on external support. 	<p>6 ECONOMIC LEVERAGE AND ACCOUNTABILITY</p>  <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Targeted sanctions on Iranian entities, facilitators, and front companies raise the cost of operations. • Monitoring financial networks and trade routes disrupts funding and procurement. • International accountability for arms transfers and violations deters future activity.

WHY THESE CONDITIONS MATTER

 <p>Limit Iran's access to strategic ports, logistics, and military partnerships.</p>	 <p>Protect critical maritime routes and global trade through the Red Sea and Bab el-Mandeb.</p>	 <p>Deny Iran valuable intelligence collection opportunities near the Suez Canal and major sea lanes.</p>	 <p>Promote stability, sovereignty, and long-term security in the Red Sea region.</p>
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OUTCOME: A MORE SECURE RED SEA

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Reduced Iranian military presence ✓ Stronger regional cooperation ✓ Secure maritime routes ✓ Greater stability and economic opportunity
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A key condition would be stabilization inside Sudan. Iran's most tangible Red Sea leverage today is tied to the Sudanese Armed Forces and the ongoing civil war environment. If Sudan moves toward a durable ceasefire or political settlement, the demand for external military support—including drones, training, and technical assistance—would likely decline. A unified, internationally supported government in Khartoum would also face stronger incentives to restrict foreign military partnerships along its Red Sea coast, especially if tied to reconstruction aid or sanctions relief.

A second factor is sustained external naval presence and deterrence. Expanded maritime patrols and surveillance by the United States, European navies, and regional actors such as Saudi Arabia and Egypt would raise the operational risk for Iranian-linked logistics, including

suspected arms shipments or advisory deployments. Stronger interdiction efforts in the Red Sea–Horn of Africa corridor would make sustained covert supply chains harder to maintain.

Regional alignment also matters. If Red Sea states coordinate more closely on port security, intelligence sharing, and maritime monitoring, Iran's room for maneuver narrows significantly. Initiatives that integrate Djibouti, Sudan, Eritrea, Saudi Arabia, and Egypt into a more cohesive security architecture would reduce the value of fragmented bilateral relationships that Iran can exploit.

Diplomatic normalization is another pressure point. Improved Iran–Gulf relations, especially with Saudi Arabia, could reduce incentives for proxy competition in the Red Sea. When regional tensions are lower, external actors generally have less motivation to project influence through partners in conflict zones like Sudan.

Finally, Iran's footprint would shrink if its partners' internal military needs decline. In both Sudan and, to a lesser extent, Ethiopia, Iran's relevance is partly driven by demand for drones, surveillance tools, and training. If those needs are met by other suppliers or domestically, or if conflicts wind down, Iran's strategic leverage naturally weakens.

In short, Iran's presence in the Red Sea is most likely to contract not through a single action, but through a convergence of conflict resolution in Sudan, stronger maritime enforcement, tighter regional coordination, and reduced demand for external military support.

At the same time, there are important limits to Iranian power projection. Iran does not possess the capability to sustain full conventional naval dominance in the Red Sea far from its home waters, and the Houthis retain their own political agenda rather than functioning as simple Iranian proxies. A complete and prolonged closure of the Bab el-Mandeb would likely provoke a large multinational military response. For this reason, the primary concern among governments is usually not total control of the waterway, but rather sustained disruption, uncertainty, and coercive leverage over international trade and regional security.

24. The Role of the European Union

The European Union holds substantial potential to reinforce and elevate Ethiopia's constructive role as a regional anchor in the Horn of Africa by deepening long-term strategic cooperation across infrastructure development, regional trade architecture, diplomatic engagement, energy transition, and connectivity systems. As a pivotal state in the region, Ethiopia occupies a uniquely influential geopolitical position, linking the African interior to the Red Sea corridor and serving as a gateway between East African markets and global maritime trade routes. A stable, economically integrated, and institutionally strengthened Ethiopia therefore aligns closely with core European strategic priorities, including regional stability, managed migration flows, sustainable development, climate resilience, and the strengthening of predictable, rules-based economic systems.

In this context, the EU could assume a transformative and catalytic role by mobilizing large-scale infrastructure financing and blending public and private investment to support connectivity projects that enhance regional integration and reduce structural economic fragmentation. This would include not only traditional transport corridors but also integrated

trade facilitation systems, cross-border logistics platforms, and institutional capacity-building frameworks. Complementary engagement in maritime cooperation would further strengthen the resilience of Red Sea and Indian Ocean trade routes, supporting safer, more efficient shipping lanes and reinforcing the stability of global supply chains that connect Africa with Europe and Asia.

A central pillar of this partnership could involve the development and modernization of strategic corridors such as the Addis Ababa–Assab axis, which carries significant potential to restore and diversify Ethiopia’s access to maritime gateways while simultaneously stimulating industrial growth, regional commerce, and cross-border economic interdependence. Alongside this, the modernization of customs administrations through advanced digital systems, interoperable border management technologies, and harmonized regulatory standards could significantly reduce trade bottlenecks, improve revenue transparency, and enhance the predictability of regional commerce.

Energy cooperation represents another high-impact domain, particularly in the expansion of renewable and green power systems. Ethiopia’s hydropower and emerging renewable energy capacity could be leveraged through EU-supported investment in cross-border electricity interconnections, regional power pooling mechanisms, and export-oriented clean energy infrastructure. This would not only position Ethiopia as a potential regional energy hub but also advance Europe’s broader climate and sustainability objectives by strengthening low-carbon energy corridors beyond the continent.

Further strategic opportunities exist in the digitization of logistics and trade ecosystems, including the deployment of smart freight management systems, port-to-inland connectivity solutions, and data-driven supply chain optimization platforms. Industrial zone development could also serve as a cornerstone of structural transformation, with European cooperation facilitating technology transfer, vocational training, export-oriented manufacturing, and environmentally sustainable industrial policy design. Together, these measures would help integrate Ethiopia more deeply into regional and global value chains while generating employment and supporting inclusive economic growth.

Figure

EU-ETHIOPIA PARTNERSHIP: A STRATEGIC PILLAR FOR A STABLE, CONNECTED AND PROSPEROUS HORN OF AFRICA

Deepening long-term cooperation across infrastructure, trade, energy, connectivity and governance to build a resilient and integrated region.

WHY IT MATTERS	HIGH-IMPACT PRIORITY AREAS FOR EU COOPERATION		PILLARS OF SUCCESS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ethiopia is a pivotal regional anchor, linking the African interior to the Red Sea and global maritime trade routes. A stable, prosperous and integrated Ethiopia advances EU core priorities: stability, managed migration, sustainable development and climate resilience. Stronger cooperation supports rules-based economic systems and predictable regional integration. The EU has a transformative role to play through investment, diplomacy and strategic partnership. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> INFRASTRUCTURE & CONNECTIVITY Large-scale financing for transport corridors, cross-border logistics, trade facilitation and institutional capacity building. STRATEGIC CORRIDORS Develop and modernize the Addis Ababa-Assab corridor to diversify maritime access and boost regional commerce and industry. CUSTOMS MODERNIZATION Digital systems, interoperable border management and harmonized standards to reduce bottlenecks, improve revenue transparency and trade predictability. ENERGY TRANSITION & POWER TRADE Invest in renewable energy, cross-border interconnections, power pooling and clean energy export infrastructure. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> MARITIME COOPERATION Strengthen Red Sea & Indian Ocean maritime security, port efficiency and safe global shipping lanes. DIGITAL TRADE & LOGISTICS Deploy digital customs, smart freight systems, port-to-inland connectivity and data-driven supply chain optimization. INDUSTRIAL ZONES & VALUE CHAINS Cooperation on industrial parks, technology transfer, vocational training and green, export-oriented manufacturing. CLIMATE RESILIENCE & SUSTAINABILITY Support adaptation, sustainable agriculture, water management and climate-smart infrastructure. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Regional de-escalation and peaceful diplomacy Credible governance reforms and institutional strengthening Transparency, accountability and conflict prevention Constructive regional relations and cooperation Inclusive economic growth and job creation With these foundations, EU-Ethiopia cooperation can deliver long-term stability, prosperity and shared geopolitical balance.

THE EUROPEAN UNION'S "ASKS" OR EXPECTATIONS FROM ETHIOPIA

POLITICAL & INSTITUTIONAL STABILITY	GOVERNANCE & RULE OF LAW	HUMAN RIGHTS & CIVILIAN PROTECTION	ECONOMIC REFORM & MACRO STABILITY	SECURITY & REGIONAL DIPLOMACY	REGIONAL COOPERATION & INTEGRATION	MIGRATION MANAGEMENT	ENVIRONMENT & CLIMATE ACTION
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reduce internal conflict Sustainable peace processes National reconciliation efforts 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Transparency and accountability Respect for constitutional processes Strong, effective institutions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Protect civilians in conflict areas Ensure humanitarian access Uphold international human rights obligations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Market-oriented reforms Fiscal transparency and stability Private sector growth and investment Job creation and economic resilience 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Regional de-escalation Peaceful diplomacy Adherence to international law Stable trade routes and migration management 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Active role in AU and RECs Cross-border infrastructure & trade corridors Shared development initiatives 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Address root causes of irregular migration Development and employment solutions Humane and cooperative approaches 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Climate adaptation and resilience Renewable energy expansion Sustainable resource management

IN RETURN, THE EU OFFERS

Development assistance	Infrastructure financing	Investment partnerships	Technology transfer	Capacity building	Political support in multilateral forums
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A SHARED SYSTEM: INTERCONNECTED SECURITY IN THE HORN OF AFRICA

UNITED STATES	EUROPEAN UNION	ISRAEL	YEMEN	THE SYSTEM REALITY
<p>Focus: Counterterrorism and maritime security</p> <p>Engagement through military and intelligence cooperation across multiple states</p> <p>Interventions in one country often create unintended consequences in others</p> <p>Coordinated regional frameworks improve strategic outcomes</p>	<p>Focus: Migration management and trade route security</p> <p>Instability drives migration pressures and disrupts Asia-Africa-Europe maritime trade</p> <p>Uses development assistance, infrastructure investment and preventive diplomacy</p> <p>Regional approaches are most effective for integration and stability</p>	<p>Focus: Maritime security and intelligence cooperation</p> <p>Red Sea is vital for trade and energy flows</p> <p>Relies on informal partnerships to monitor regional developments</p> <p>Broader regional coordination enhances long-term security stability</p>	<p>Integral part of the same security system</p> <p>Conflict affects the Bab el-Mandeb Strait and maritime security</p> <p>Armed groups and fragmented governance fuel instability</p> <p>Instability interacts with Horn dynamics on both shores</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Horn of Africa is a highly interconnected security system. Actions in one area create ripple effects across the region. No actor can isolate itself from regional dynamics. Fragmented approaches intensify instability. Integrated diplomatic, security, economic and maritime frameworks are essential.

THE WAY FORWARD

A strengthened and multidimensional EU-Ethiopia partnership can become a foundational pillar for stability, integration and economic transformation in the Horn of Africa—unlocking new trade corridors, industrial diversification, infrastructure resilience and shared prosperity.

COOPERATION TODAY. STABILITY TOMORROW. PROSPERITY TOGETHER.

At the same time, the scope and depth of EU engagement would remain contingent upon sustained progress in regional de-escalation, credible governance reforms, and a durable commitment to peaceful diplomacy. European institutions are likely to prioritize transparency, institutional accountability, conflict prevention, and constructive regional relations as essential prerequisites for deeper strategic alignment and long-term investment confidence.

Ultimately, a strengthened and multidimensional EU-Ethiopia partnership could evolve into a foundational pillar of stability, integration, and economic transformation across the Horn of Africa. If implemented effectively and supported by consistent political commitment, such

cooperation could unlock new interregional trade corridors, accelerate industrial diversification, enhance infrastructure resilience, and contribute meaningfully to long-term peace, prosperity, and geopolitical balance in one of the world's most strategically sensitive regions.

The European Union's "asks" or expectations from Ethiopia are generally shaped by its broader priorities in stability, development cooperation, human rights, and regional security in the Horn of Africa. They are not formal demands in a rigid sense, but rather conditions and benchmarks that influence the depth of political, financial, and strategic engagement.

A central expectation is political and institutional stability. The EU places strong emphasis on the reduction of internal conflict, sustainable peace processes, and credible national reconciliation efforts. Progress in this area is seen as essential for long-term partnership and investment confidence.

Another major expectation relates to governance and the rule of law. The EU typically encourages transparency in public institutions, accountability in governance, and respect for constitutional processes. Strengthening institutions is viewed as critical for reducing fragility and improving service delivery.

Human rights and civilian protection are also key considerations. The EU consistently stresses the importance of protecting civilians in conflict-affected regions, ensuring access for humanitarian assistance, and respecting international human rights obligations. These factors heavily influence political dialogue and development funding.

Economic reform and macroeconomic stability are another important area of focus. The EU generally supports market-oriented reforms, fiscal transparency, and improved investment conditions. It also encourages private sector development and policies that enhance job creation and economic resilience.

In the security domain, the EU expects continued commitment to regional de-escalation and peaceful diplomacy. This includes constructive engagement with neighboring states, avoidance of escalation in regional disputes, and adherence to international legal frameworks. Stability in the Horn of Africa is a shared priority due to its implications for trade routes and migration flows.

The EU also places significant emphasis on regional cooperation. Ethiopia is encouraged to play a constructive role in institutions such as the African Union and regional economic communities. Cooperation on infrastructure, trade corridors, and cross-border development is seen as essential for long-term stability.

Migration management is another sensitive area of engagement. The EU seeks cooperation on addressing irregular migration drivers through development, employment creation, and stability rather than purely security-based approaches. This is linked to broader EU concerns about migration flows toward Europe. Environmental sustainability and climate resilience are increasingly important expectations. The EU supports climate adaptation efforts, renewable energy development, and sustainable resource management, particularly in agriculture and water systems.

Overall, EU expectations from Ethiopia can be summarized as a combination of internal stability, responsible governance, respect for human rights, constructive regional diplomacy, and commitment to economic reform. In return, the EU offers development assistance, investment partnerships, infrastructure financing, and political support within multilateral frameworks.

Escalatory approaches risk spreading instability across the entire security complex. Cooperative basin governance would provide a more sustainable alternative to confrontation. The United States engages the region mainly through counterterrorism priorities and maritime security interests. Groups operating in Somalia and the wider Horn shape American strategic engagement. US military and intelligence cooperation is distributed across multiple states in the region. However, interventions in one country often generate unintended consequences in neighboring states. This reflects the interconnected nature of the regional security structure. A fragmented approach reduces long-term effectiveness. Coordinated regional frameworks would improve strategic outcomes. The European Union is primarily affected through migration flows and trade route security. Instability in the Horn influences migration pressures toward Europe. It also affects maritime trade routes linking Asia, Africa, and Europe.

The EU therefore has strong incentives for preventive diplomacy. Development assistance and infrastructure investment are key tools of engagement. These tools are most effective when applied regionally rather than bilaterally. The EU benefits from supporting integration and reducing structural fragmentation. Israel's engagement is driven by maritime security and intelligence cooperation in the Red Sea region. Instability in neighboring coastal states affects its broader security environment. The Red Sea is a critical corridor for Israeli trade and energy flows. Israel increasingly relies on informal partnerships to monitor regional developments. However, the complexity of the system limits the effectiveness of isolated strategies. Broader regional coordination would enhance security stability. Yemen is an integral part of the same interconnected security system. Its internal conflict directly affects maritime security in the Bab el-Mandeb Strait. Armed groups and fragmented governance structures contribute to regional instability. Yemen's instability interacts with Horn of Africa dynamics in multiple ways.

This creates a shared maritime insecurity environment across both shores of the Red Sea. External interventions in Yemen also influence neighboring African states. The result is a single interconnected security theater rather than separate crises. Across all actors, the Horn of Africa operates as a system where security is mutually dependent. No state or external power can isolate itself from regional dynamics. Actions taken in one location frequently produce ripple effects elsewhere. This makes unilateral solutions structurally insufficient. The region functions as a node within a broader Red Sea and Indian Ocean security architecture. External actors often act as amplifiers of regional dynamics rather than controllers of outcomes. This increases the importance of coordination among external powers. Without coordination, overlapping interventions can intensify instability. The structural reality of the region demands integrated approaches to diplomacy and security. Economic, maritime, and political dimensions are deeply intertwined. Long-term stability requires addressing all of these dimensions simultaneously. Fragmented engagement tends to reproduce cycles of instability. Integrated frameworks offer a more sustainable path forward. The Horn of Africa therefore

represents a high-interdependence security environment. Its stability depends on aligning internal and external strategies within a coherent system.

25. Six Dimensions of Federalist Interventions

Given the impact of imperial grandeur, administrative diarray and the manner in which Addis Abbeba practices federalism, perhaps a comparative study may be warranted into the challenges of moving from ethnic federalism to cooperative federalism to better understand how to even out relations between eritrea and Ethipoia. To identify hexie and correct interventions, however, have proven a challenge in the classrooms of Ethiopia.

Motive may be more prestigious - the peeps overthere simply dont understand that practice is unpractical, and if they do, not how to induce change.

To analyze how federalist theories can “cure” Spain’s political ills, we can structure interventions across six dimensions:

- Institutional Design & Intergovernmental Coordination – mechanisms for dialogue, councils, and legislative negotiation.
- Fiscal Autonomy & Revenue-Sharing – regional control over taxation and allocation of resources.
- Cultural & Identity Recognition – protection of language, traditions, and national identities within regions.
- Legitimacy & Accountability – strengthening political responsibility and responsiveness of parties and officials.
- Conflict Resolution & Legal Frameworks – constitutional or legal tools to manage disputes between central and regional governments.
- Citizen Participation & Democratic Oversight – referenda, assemblies, and public consultation to ensure policies are democratically legitimate.

4.Cross-Tab Table: Federalist Theories × Six Dimensions of Intervention

Dimension	Cooperative Federalism	Competitive Federalism	Ethnic / Multinational Federalism
1. Institutional Design & Intergovernmental Coordination	Permanent councils, structured negotiation, shared governance agreements.	Minimal coordination; relies on competition to drive solutions.	Coordination exists but asymmetric powers recognized for identity-based regions.

2. Fiscal Autonomy & Revenue-Sharing	Coordinated fiscal agreements negotiated between levels of government.	High regional fiscal autonomy; performance-linked revenue.	Autonomy can be asymmetrical, with regions like Catalonia granted special fiscal privileges.
3. Cultural & Identity Recognition	Cultural recognition is negotiated as part of shared governance.	Focus is on efficiency; culture secondary unless it affects performance.	Core focus: languages, traditions, and historical rights formally recognized.
4. Legitimacy & Accountability	Institutionalized procedures reduce reliance on individual actors; improves legitimacy via dialogue.	Performance incentives enforce accountability; voters reward effective governance.	Legitimacy comes from constitutional recognition of identities; reduces perceived injustice.
5. Conflict Resolution & Legal Frameworks	Legal agreements and councils mediate disputes peacefully.	Disputes resolved via competition and performance metrics; weaker legal mediation.	Constitutional recognition of asymmetrical powers provides legal grounding for identity-based claims.
6. Citizen Participation & Democratic Oversight	Participatory mechanisms supplement intergovernmental dialogue.	Indirectly via voter feedback on regional performance.	Direct: identity-based representation, referenda, and cultural assemblies reinforce participation.

Spain's political system operates under a quasi-federal model, established by the 1978 Constitution, balancing central sovereignty with asymmetrical regional autonomy. The system has struggled with institutional gridlock, Catalan separatism, party fragmentation, and political polarization. Federalist theory provides a lens to analyze potential solutions, emphasizing cooperative, competitive, and ethnic/multinational approaches.

Cooperative federalism stresses intergovernmental negotiation, shared rule, and institutionalized dialogue between central and regional governments. It is particularly useful for reducing legislative stalemate and promoting compromise among Spain’s fragmented multi-party system. However, cooperative mechanisms depend heavily on political goodwill and can stall if elites act irresponsibly.

Competitive federalism frames regions as autonomous actors competing for resources, efficiency, and performance outcomes. This approach incentivizes responsible governance through measurable results but may exacerbate inequalities between wealthier and poorer regions. It can reduce conflicts over practical issues like fiscal allocations if paired with strong accountability frameworks.

Ethnic or multinational federalism emphasizes recognition of cultural, linguistic, and national identities. In Spain, this approach is critical for addressing Catalonia’s historical grievances and legitimizing regional autonomy within constitutional boundaries. Ethnic federalism overlaps with cooperative federalism by encouraging negotiation but also risks entrenching separatist ambitions if unchecked. Federalist interventions can be assessed across six dimensions: institutional design, fiscal autonomy, cultural recognition, legitimacy, conflict resolution, and citizen participation. Cooperative federalism excels at institutional design and conflict resolution, creating councils and legal mechanisms for dialogue. Competitive federalism excels at fiscal autonomy and accountability, linking regional performance to voter incentives.

Ethnic federalism excels at cultural recognition and legitimacy, protecting minority identities and reducing the perceived injustice that fuels separatism. All three theories contribute to citizen participation, either through negotiated governance, electoral accountability, or identity-based representation. Spain’s experience shows that failing to integrate these approaches creates gridlock and empowers opportunistic political elites. Lessons learned include the need for permanent negotiation channels, balanced fiscal autonomy, recognition of identities, and mechanisms to enforce party accountability. A hybrid approach—combining dialogue, performance incentives, and identity recognition—is essential to address Spain’s political ills while maintaining democratic legitimacy and national cohesion.

Cross-Tab: Ethnic Federalism & Decentralized Governance

Dimension	Ethiopia	Bosnia and Herzegovina	Iraq	Cyprus	Spain
1. Cooperative Federalism	Formally federal but weak coordination; intergovernmental councils exist but are politically constrained and often	Highly institutionalized consociational bargaining system; coordination exists but is blocked by ethnic vetoes	Ad hoc bargaining between Baghdad and regions; especially unstable with Kurdistan	No operational cooperative federalism; coordination exists only in negotiation framework	Strongest case; permanent intergovernmental councils and structured negotiation routines across central and regional governments

	overridden by central authority	and fragmentation	over sovereignty and oil	s, not governance reality	
2. Legislative Moves	Constitution grants ethnic self-rule and secession rights but enforcement is inconsistent and politically unstable	Extremely rigid Dayton-based constitution; strong protections but low adaptability and chronic deadlock	Constitutional ambiguity on federal powers and oil revenue sharing fuels recurring disputes	No unified constitutional settlement; legal framework remains incomplete due to political division	Stable constitutional framework for autonomy, though contested in interpretation (especially secession-related disputes)
3. Institution-Building	Regional institutions exist but remain dependent on central state and ruling party structures	Highly complex but fragmented institutional system; duplication across entities and cantons reduces efficiency	Uneven capacity; strong regional (Kurdish) institutions but weak federal administrative cohesion	Fully separated institutions on each side; no integrated governance structures	Strong, mature regional governments integrated into national system (education, health, policing capacities)
4. Policy Development (Fiscal & Governance Outcomes)	Highly centralized fiscal system; regional dependence on federal transfers limits policy autonomy	Fragmented fiscal system with inefficiencies and weak redistribution across entities	Oil revenue-sharing dominates policy disputes; weak fiscal consensus undermines national planning	No integrated fiscal or policy system due to political division	Mixed but functional fiscal asymmetry; strong regional policy innovation with negotiated redistribution
5. Conflict Resolution & Legal Frameworks	Legal mechanisms exist but weak enforcement; conflicts often escalate beyond institutional control	Strong legal system with constitutional court + international oversight; prevents escalation but rigid	Formal legal frameworks exist but often bypassed by political bargaining and informal	Conflict managed via international negotiation frameworks (UN-led), but no final settlement	Strong constitutional and judicial dispute resolution; courts central in managing autonomy conflicts

			power structures	implemented	
6. Citizen Participation & Democratic Oversight	Limited autonomous participation; often mediated through ruling party structures	Electoral participation exists but is ethnically segmented, reducing cross-group accountability	Elections occur but dominated by sectarianism and patronage networks	Separate political systems for each community; no unified democratic oversight	High participation levels with strong regional and national electoral accountability systems

Core Implications

Across all six dimensions, three structural findings emerge:

First, cooperative federalism is the decisive variable. Spain succeeds because coordination is institutionalized; Ethiopia and Iraq struggle because coordination is politically contingent rather than procedural.

Second, fiscal and institutional capacity determines stability more than constitutional design. Bosnia has strong legal design but weak functionality; Ethiopia has formal autonomy but weak fiscal decentralization; Iraq has resource wealth but fragmented fiscal governance.

Third, ethnic recognition alone does not determine outcomes. It stabilizes inclusion in Bosnia and Spain but intensifies fragmentation in Ethiopia and Iraq when not matched with strong coordination systems.

Table Actionable Insights

Dimension	Ethiopia	Bosnia and Herzegovina	Iraq	Cyprus	Spain
1. Cooperative Federalism (Core Architecture)	Problem: coordination is hierarchical, not cooperative. Fix: establish binding intergovernmental council with co-decision authority over security + development planning.	Problem: veto-based coordination blocks governance. Fix: replace ethnic veto redundancy with weighted majority intergovernmental council model.	Problem: bargaining replaces institutions. Fix: constitutionalize federal–regional council with enforceable arbitration over oil + security.	Problem: no operational cooperation. Fix: phased dual-community administrative councils before final	Best model: strong councils exist. Improvement: formalize dispute escalation ladder to reduce constitutional court overreach in political disputes.

				settlement .	
2. Fiscal Autonomy & Revenue-Sharing	Problem: fiscal centralization undermines federalism. Fix: introduce formula-based equalization grants + limited regional tax authority.	Problem: fragmented fiscal duplication. Fix: unify indirect tax system and central equalization pool.	Problem: oil revenue conflict destabilizes federation. Fix: independent hydrocarbon revenue commission with automatic distribution formula.	Problem: no shared fiscal system. Fix: design pre-unification revenue escrow system for confidence-building.	Strength: asymmetric fiscal autonomy works. Fix: improve transparency and interregional equalization formula legitimacy.
3. Cultural & Identity Recognition	Problem: ethnic recognition fuels segmentation. Fix: shift from ethnic federalism to multi-identity civic federal overlay (cross-ethnic regions or incentives).	Problem: identity is over-institutionalized. Fix: reduce constitutional entrenchment of ethnic categories in policy veto structure.	Problem: identity politicized through sectarian competition. Fix: depoliticize identity in fiscal distribution mechanisms.	Problem: identity locked in zero-sum sovereignty conflict. Fix: design shared symbolic institutions (education, civic service programs)	Strength: balanced identity recognition. Fix: strengthen interregional civic identity programs to reduce secession incentives.
4. Legitimacy & Accountability	Problem: legitimacy eroded by central dominance and conflict. Fix: decentralize accountability through joint federal-regional performance audits.	Problem: peace legitimacy without performance legitimacy. Fix: introduce service-delivery accountability benchmarks across entities.	Problem: corruption and patronage dominate legitimacy. Fix: federal anti-corruption authority jointly appointed by center and regions.	Problem: dual legitimacy without integration. Fix: pre-set joint governance legitimacy framework tied to	Strength: strong legitimacy. Fix: improve accountability in asymmetric regions to prevent perceived inequality.

				settlement .	
5. Conflict Resolution & Legal Frameworks	Problem: legal frameworks exist but are unenforced. Fix: establish binding intergovernmental arbitration court with execution power.	Problem: legal rigidity creates paralysis. Fix: introduce fast-track political mediation layer before constitutional court escalation.	Problem: legal bypassing by informal power. Fix: constitutionalize enforcement authority for federal rulings.	Problem: unresolved conflict framework. Fix: UN-backed transitional arbitration authority with binding interim rulings.	Strength: strong judiciary. Fix: create political mediation institution before litigation escalation.
6. Citizen Participation & Democratic Oversight	Problem: party-mediated participation. Fix: institutionalize independent regional citizen assemblies linked to federal decisions.	Problem: ethnic segmentation of democracy. Fix: introduce cross-ethnic civic electoral incentives and national party strengthening.	Problem: sectarian voting and clientelism. Fix: electoral reform toward programmatic parties + independent electoral commission.	Problem: dual democratic systems. Fix: staged integration of cross-community civic participation platforms.	Strength: high participation. Fix: improve deliberative democracy mechanisms at regional level.

Doctrinal Implications (Cooperative Federalism Theory)

The core theoretical takeaway is that cooperative federalism is not a descriptive label for decentralized or multi-ethnic governance systems. It is, instead, a design doctrine of enforceable intergovernmental constraint, where stability depends on structured bargaining, not political goodwill.

1. Cooperative federalism is not structure—it is binding decision architecture

The defining feature of cooperative federalism is not whether a state is federal, decentralized, or ethnically organized, but whether intergovernmental decisions are binding, routinized, and enforceable across levels of government.

Where intergovernmental councils lack enforcement authority, as in Ethiopia and Iraq, federalism degrades into unstable bargaining systems or recentralization under crisis pressure.

In these cases, coordination is episodic, politically contingent, and ultimately reversible, meaning the “federal” layer cannot constrain state behavior.

Where coordination systems are over-institutionalized but structurally vetoed, as in Bosnia and Herzegovina, cooperation becomes procedurally dense but functionally inert. Decision-making is locked by mutual blocking rights, producing stability without adaptability.

By contrast, Spain demonstrates a more effective equilibrium: intergovernmental coordination is institutionalized, but paired with escalation pathways that ensure disputes can be resolved without paralyzing the system. The key distinction is not decentralization itself, but whether the system has credible enforcement and escalation logic built into cooperation.

2. Fiscal federalism is the real constitution of multi-ethnic states

In practice, the operative constitution of multi-ethnic federations is fiscal, not symbolic or identity-based. Political stability is determined less by constitutional identity recognition than by the structure of revenue authority and distribution.

The decisive variables are who controls revenue extraction, how redistribution is calculated, and whether allocation follows automatic rules or discretionary political bargaining. Where fiscal systems are discretionary and politically negotiated, as in Ethiopia and Iraq, fiscal conflict becomes the primary driver of instability and center–periphery tension.

Bosnia illustrates a different failure mode: fiscal fragmentation across multiple entities produces administrative inefficiency and weak redistribution, reinforcing territorial segmentation. Spain, by contrast, demonstrates that asymmetrical fiscal autonomy can remain stable when embedded in predictable negotiated frameworks and partially rule-based transfers.

The doctrinal conclusion is clear: fiscal design is the operational core of federal stability, not a secondary administrative function.

3. Ethnic recognition without cross-cutting institutions produces segmental entrenchment

Ethnic recognition alone does not generate stability. In fact, when institutional design stops at recognition without building cross-cutting governance structures, it tends to reinforce segmentation rather than mitigate it.

In Ethiopia, constitutional ethnic federalism has strengthened identity-based territorialization without producing sufficient interregional integration mechanisms. In Bosnia and Herzegovina, constitutional recognition of constituent peoples has been essential for peace maintenance, but without integrative institutions it has also locked politics into ethnic segmentation.

The missing institutional layer in these systems is consistent: absence of cross-regional governance bodies, weak shared fiscal systems, and limited civic or non-ethnic participation channels. Where these mechanisms are absent, identity becomes the primary axis of political competition rather than one layer among others.

The implication is that recognition must be paired with integrative institutional design or it structurally hardens divisions.

4. *The key design principle is “cooperation by constraint, not goodwill”*

Stable cooperative federal systems do not depend on elite trust, political harmony, or negotiated goodwill. They depend on structural constraints that force cooperation as the default mode of governance.

This requires four embedded design features: *binding arbitration mechanisms that cannot be bypassed politically; automatic fiscal distribution rules that reduce discretionary conflict; structured escalation ladders that prevent disputes from stagnating; and enforceable intergovernmental decisions that have operational consequences.*

Spain approximates this logic most closely, where institutionalized negotiation is paired with legal and fiscal mechanisms that constrain unilateral action. Systems that lack these constraints revert either to centralization (Ethiopia, Iraq) or institutional paralysis (Bosnia).

The doctrinal principle is therefore not cooperation as intent, but cooperation as enforced institutional necessity.

Cooperative federalism is not a descriptive category of diversity management. It is a discipline of institutional constraint engineering, where system stability depends on whether intergovernmental relations are enforceable, procedural, and structurally unavoidable.

Systems fail when cooperation is optional, as in Ethiopia and Iraq, or when it is immobilized by veto saturation, as in Bosnia. *Systems stabilize when cooperation is embedded as a routine, enforceable, and procedurally escalated governance architecture, as most clearly approximated in Spain.*

Applying these four principles to the federal system of Somalia, especially its institutions in Mogadishu, shifts the logic of governance from political bargaining to rule-based coordination.

Cooperative federalism should be understood not as goodwill between actors, but as binding decision architecture that compels coordination even under political disagreement.

In Somalia’s current system, federal and regional relations often depend on informal negotiation and shifting trust.

A binding architecture would formalise intergovernmental decision-making so that key areas like security, elections, and resources follow enforceable procedures rather than ad hoc deals.

This changes cooperation from optional alignment into mandatory institutional behaviour.

Fiscal federalism is effectively the real constitution of a multi-ethnic or multi-clan state because it determines stability more than formal political texts.

In Somalia, competition over revenue from customs, ports, and taxation is a central source of political tension between the federal government and member states.

A rules-based fiscal system would replace renegotiation with predictable revenue-sharing formulas.

This would reduce zero-sum competition and allow both federal and regional governments to plan independently of political fluctuations in Mogadishu.

Ethnic or clan recognition without cross-cutting institutions tends to entrench divisions rather than reduce them.

In Somalia, clan-based representation provides identity recognition but often reinforces parallel political structures.

Without shared institutions such as integrated civil services, national security forces, and joint administrative systems, these identities remain institutionally separated.

This leads to segmentation where groups interact mainly through bargaining rather than shared governance.

The principle of cooperation by constraint replaces reliance on political goodwill with structural interdependence.

Instead of assuming stable trust, institutions are designed so that actors must cooperate because rules and systems make non-cooperation costly or ineffective.

This includes binding fiscal formulas, joint security command structures, and enforceable dispute resolution mechanisms.

Compared to the current system, this reduces vulnerability to political cycles and elite fragmentation.

Overall, these principles transform Somali federalism from a negotiation-based system into a rule-constrained institutional order.

The key distinction is that current stability depends on political *alignment*, while the proposed model ensures stability even under political disagreement.

28. Somalia's Dominant Clans & Their Role in State Institutions

The Major Clan Families

Darood

Darood clan

Often described as one of the largest Somali clan-families, representing 25 % of the Somali population, the Darood are spread across Somalia as well as Somali-inhabited areas of Ethiopia,

Kenya, and Djibouti. They migrated from Yemeni coastal areas across the Bab El-Mandeb strait. Major sub-clans include the Ogaden, Marehan, Harti, and Majeerteen. Darood influence is especially strong in Puntland and Jubbaland. They often delivered state leaders.

Hawiye

Hawiye clan

The Hawiye dominate much of central Somalia, including the capital Mogadishu. Important sub-clans include the Abgaal and Habar Gidir. Since the collapse of the Somali state in 1991, Hawiye political actors and militias have played central roles in national politics and security arrangements.⁸ They migrated from Ethiopia and play a prominent role in the trading networks of Somalia.

Dir

Dir clan

Considered one of the oldest Somali clan-families, with roots tracing back to early Cushitic migrations and giving the name Sameel to Somalia, they played a central role in the Adal Empire (1415–1577), a powerful Islamic state in the Horn of Africa. The Dir include sub-clans such as the Gadabursi and Issa. They are concentrated mainly in northwestern Somalia and neighboring Djibouti and Ethiopia.

Rahanweyn (Digil & Mirifle)

Rahanweyn

The Rahanweyn, also called Digil and Mirifle, are concentrated in southern Somalia. Historically associated with farming and agro-pastoralism rather than nomadic pastoralism, they were often politically marginalized and culturally distinct because of their Maay language traditions.

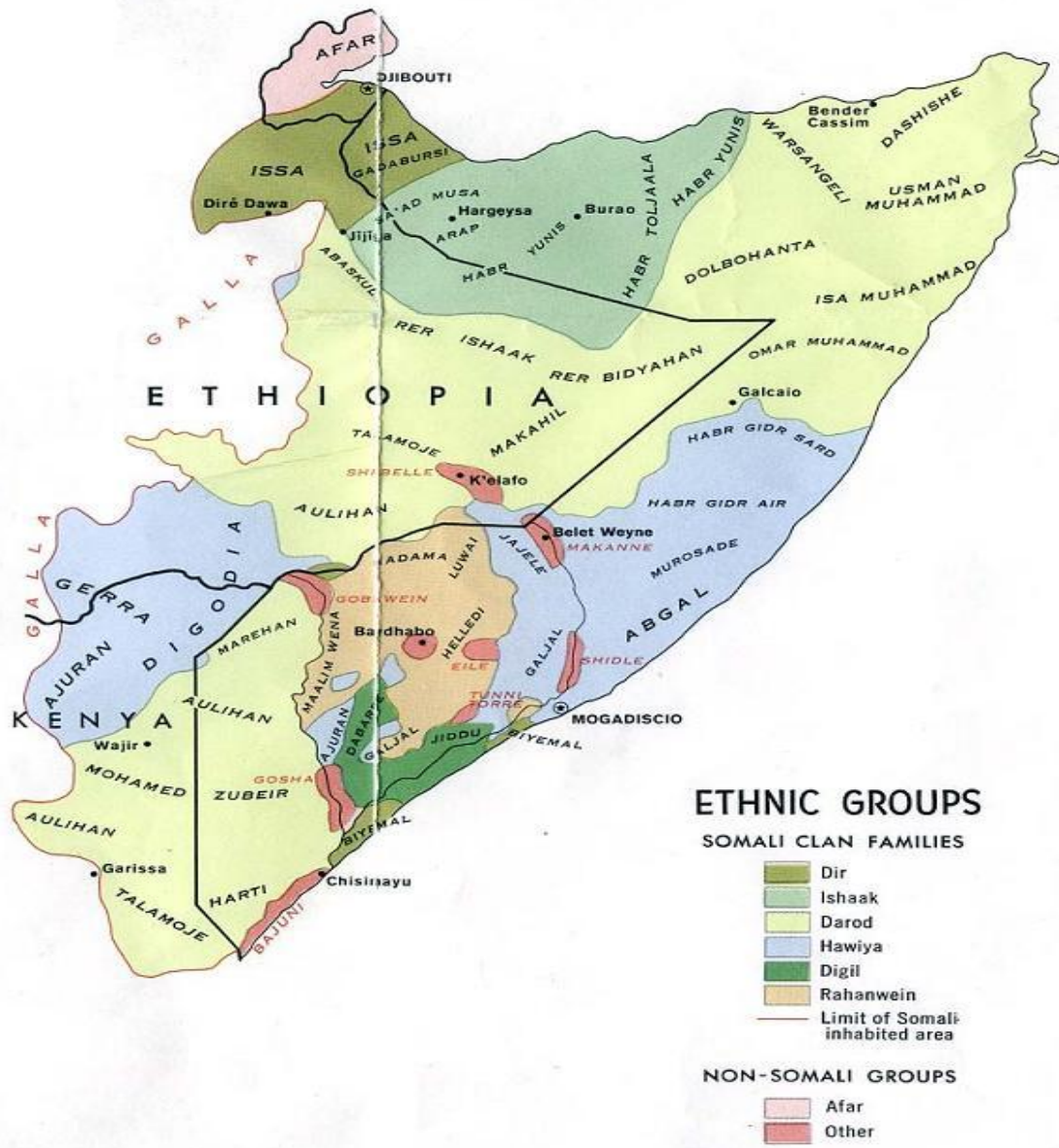
Isaaq

Isaaq clan

The Isaaq dominate the northwestern region known as Somaliland. Although not formally included in Somalia's federal 4.5 system in the same way as southern clans, Isaaq political structures are central to Somaliland's governance model.

Figure

⁸ <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hawiye>



Most Somalis belong to the Shafi‘i madhhab of Islam that has historically dominated the Horn of Africa coastal trade world and became deeply rooted in Somali society through centuries of interaction with Arabian Peninsula merchants, scholars, and Sufi networks. Islam is state religion that is less important than kinship solidarities and loyalties through Somalia. There are religious renewal movements and political islamists as well.

The “4.5 Formula” — Clan Representation in Federal Institutions

The central mechanism for distributing political power in Somalia’s federal institutions is the 4.5 power-sharing formula. Under this arrangement, four major clan-families — Darood, Hawiye, Dir, and Rahanweyn — receive equal political representation, while minority communities collectively receive half the representation allocated to each major clan-family.

In Somalia's 245-seat lower house, 49 seats are assigned to each of the four major clan-families, while approximately 29 seats are reserved for minority groups. The arrangement emerged during post-civil war reconciliation efforts as a mechanism to reduce domination by any single clan and distribute positions across competing political blocs.

Clan affiliation continues to shape parliamentary appointments, cabinet positions, military leadership, regional administrations, and access to political patronage. Traditional elders often retain decisive influence during indirect elections and political negotiations.

Criticism and Limitations of the 4.5 System

The system is widely criticized for institutionalizing clan identity rather than citizenship-based politics. Minority communities remain underrepresented, while political elites and clan elders often dominate candidate selection processes. Rivalries within clans can be as intense as rivalries between different clan-families.

Communities grouped into the "0.5" category — including Benadiri, Jareer/Bantu, and other minority populations — frequently argue that they lack meaningful political influence despite their economic and social importance. Younger Somalis and urban professionals increasingly view the formula as an obstacle to democratic development and national integration.

Traditional Governance Structures

The *Guurti*

Guurti

The Guurti is traditionally a council of clan elders responsible for conflict mediation, peace negotiations, customary law, and inter-clan agreements. Authority is generally based on consensus rather than centralized rule, and decisions may emerge only after prolonged negotiation among elders.

The *Shir*

Shir

A Shir is a broader clan conference or assembly convened to resolve disputes or negotiate matters involving grazing rights, trade, compensation, marriage, security arrangements, and political settlements. Historically, Shirs have functioned as major decision-making forums throughout Somali society.

Somaliland: The Most Institutionalized Clan-Elder System

Somaliland provides the clearest example of traditional authority integrated into modern governance. Its political system formally incorporates the Guurti into the legislature through an upper chamber known as the House of Elders.

The Guurti reviews legislation, mediates political crises, addresses inter-clan conflict, and advises on religion, security, and customary law. It may also intervene during constitutional deadlock. Clan elders played a major role in Somaliland's peace conferences during the 1990s, especially the Borama Conference of 1993, which helped establish Somaliland's hybrid political system combining elections with customary authority.

Puntland and Other Federal Member States

Puntland and other federal member states also incorporate clan balancing into governance structures. Ministerial portfolios, parliamentary seats, security leadership positions, and district authority are often distributed according to negotiated clan arrangements.

In practice, many Somali federal states operate through a hybrid structure combining constitutional institutions, clan negotiations, militia influence, business alliances, and customary mediation.

Recent Reform Efforts

Hassan Sheikh Mohamud has promoted reforms aimed at moving Somalia away from indirect clan-based political selection toward universal suffrage. Constitutional amendments debated and approved in 2024 were presented as steps toward one-person-one-vote elections, reducing dependence on clan quotas, and strengthening national political parties.

Implementation remains difficult because of persistent insecurity, disagreements among federal member states, and the continued importance of clan structures as systems of protection, political mobilization, and local governance.

Summary Table

Mechanism	Where	How Clans Are Represented
4.5 Formula	Federal Government	Equal representation for four major clan-families plus reduced minority allocation
Guurti (House of Elders)	Somaliland	Clan elders serve in the upper legislative chamber
Shir Assemblies	Across Somalia	Informal clan conferences for mediation and negotiation
Federal Member States	Puntland, Jubbaland, Galmudug, etc.	Clan quotas shape regional power-sharing
Traditional Elders	Nationwide	Influence elections, conflict resolution, and local governance

Somalia's political order operates through a hybrid system in which federal institutions, regional administrations, customary elders, business networks, and clan alliances all share authority simultaneously.

A Proposed Somali National Tribal Council System

Design Framework for a Standardized, Federated Clan-Council Architecture

I. Context & Constitutional Logic

Somalia's political order has historically operated through a layered interaction between formal state institutions and customary clan authority. Since the collapse of the Somali Democratic Republic in 1991, no durable political arrangement has succeeded without incorporating traditional elders, clan mediation structures, and *xeer* (customary law) into governance. The modern federal system therefore exists alongside older social mechanisms that continue to regulate security, compensation, land use, conflict resolution, and political legitimacy.

The current federal structure consists of Puntland, Jubaland, Galmudug, Hirshabelle, South West State, the Benadir capital region centered on Mogadishu, and Somaliland, whose Guurti system provides the clearest institutionalized example of traditional authority embedded within constitutional governance.

This proposal envisions a unified and standardized clan-council framework operating across all Federal Member States and connected through a permanent National Tribal Council (NTC). The model does not seek to replace electoral institutions with clan rule. Instead, it attempts to formalize customary authority into a regulated constitutional structure capable of stabilizing Somalia's fragmented political environment while gradually coexisting with universal suffrage.

The framework rests on five foundational principles. Subsidiarity ensures disputes are resolved at the lowest effective level before escalation. Symmetry guarantees that all Federal Member States possess equivalent institutional structures rather than personalized regional arrangements. Separation preserves a distinction between elected governance and customary oversight. Inclusion structurally incorporates minority communities and women into all council levels. Evolution ensures that the system remains compatible with eventual transition toward citizenship-based democratic politics rather than permanent clan allocation.

II. The National Tribal Council (NTC) — *Golaha Qabilada Qaranka*

The proposed National Tribal Council would function as a permanent constitutional body situated alongside, but institutionally separate from, the Federal Parliament. It would not serve as a legislative chamber and would possess no authority over taxation, ordinary legislation, or executive administration. Its purpose would instead be constitutional stabilization, mediation, and custodianship of Somali customary governance traditions.

The NTC derives legitimacy from *xeer* rather than electoral sovereignty. It would therefore operate as a bridge institution connecting the federal state to Somalia's clan-based social order. In constitutional theory, the council resembles a hybrid between a senate of customary authorities, a constitutional arbitration council, and a permanent national reconciliation forum.

Its central functions would include codifying and preserving customary law, mediating inter-regional disputes, certifying legitimate clan representation, standardizing compensation

practices, and convening national reconciliation assemblies during periods of constitutional breakdown or civil conflict.

Composition of the National Tribal Council

Block	Seat	Members Basis
Four major clan-families (Dir, Darood, Hawiye, Rahanweyn)	12 each = 48	Delegated by State Guurti councils
Isaaq clan-family	12	Equal parity contingent on Somaliland participation
Minority / “0.5” communities	16	Guaranteed representation for marginalized communities
Women’s Elder Caucus	10	Senior women delegates selected by FMS councils
Total	~86	Federated national composition

Members would not be appointed by the federal executive. Instead, selection would occur through recognized clan *shir* assemblies supervised by State Guurti institutions. Terms would last six years and be staggered in order to preserve continuity and prevent sudden politicized turnover. Simultaneous membership in political parties, executive institutions, or electoral office would be constitutionally prohibited.

The NTC would maintain a permanent secretariat in Mogadishu together with a liaison office in Garowe. A symbolic rotating annual seat among Federal Member State capitals would reinforce the federal and non-centralized character of the institution.

The Secretariat would maintain a National *Xeer Registry*, archive mediation agreements, publish rulings, preserve institutional records, and coordinate inter-state customary arbitration.

III. Constitutional Competences of the NTC

The authority of the National Tribal Council would be carefully delimited in order to preserve the supremacy of elected institutions while still granting the council genuine stabilizing

influence. Its competences would therefore be divided into exclusive, shared, and advisory categories.

Exclusive powers would include custodianship of customary law, mandatory arbitration of inter-state clan disputes, national standardization of *diya* (blood compensation), certification of legitimate clan elders, and authority to convene an emergency *Shir Beeleed* during constitutional collapse or severe national crisis.

Shared competences with the Federal Parliament would include constitutional amendments affecting clan rights, mediation over land and water disputes, participation in national reconciliation frameworks, and approval authority over modifications to clan allocation systems such as the 4.5 framework or its successors.

Advisory competences would include consultation on senior security appointments, equity review of federal budget allocations to Federal Member States, and consultation before declarations of national emergency.

The council would possess no authority over ordinary legislation, criminal sentencing, fiscal policy, trade regulation, electoral administration, or foreign diplomacy beyond customary cross-border mediation involving Somali communities in neighboring states such as Ethiopia, Kenya, and Djibouti.

This limitation is deliberate. The long-term legitimacy of the institution depends on restraint. The NTC is envisioned not as a sovereign upper chamber but as a constitutional guardian and mediator whose authority derives from trust and continuity rather than coercive state power.

IV. Federal Member State Guurti Councils — *Golaha Odayaasha Gobolka*

Each Federal Member State would establish a constitutionally recognized State Guurti modeled on the most successful aspects of Somaliland's House of Elders while operating within a nationally standardized framework. These councils would function as upper customary chambers parallel to elected state assemblies.

The State Guurti would possess authority primarily in mediation, constitutional stabilization, cultural oversight, and customary governance rather than ordinary legislation. Their existence institutionalizes the reality that most serious Somali political disputes continue to be resolved through negotiated clan settlement rather than purely judicial procedure.

Standardized Composition by Federal Member State

Federal Member State	Approximate Seats	Dominant Communities
Somaliland	82	Isaaq, Gadabursi, Dhulbahante, Warsangeli
Puntland	66	Harti Darood

Jubaland	55	Ogaden Darood, Rahanweyn
Galmudug	55	Hawiye and Darood
Hirshabelle	55	Hawiye and minority agricultural communities
South West State	60	Digil & Mirifle
Benadir	30	Multi-clan metropolitan representation

Every State Guurti would constitutionally reserve a minimum of 15 percent of seats for minority or non-dominant communities and at least 20 percent for women. These provisions would operate as binding constitutional floors rather than discretionary political quotas.

The Guurti would maintain primary authority over intra-state clan mediation. They would convene district *shir* assemblies, supervise *xeer* arbitration panels, issue temporary ceasefire declarations during inter-clan violence, and certify customary legitimacy within their territories.

They would also exercise limited constitutional oversight powers. State presidents would be required to present annual public reports before the Guurti, which could issue formal declarations of concern (*war-gelin*) regarding governance failures or constitutional violations. A two-thirds supermajority could trigger mandatory constitutional arbitration through the National Tribal Council.

Borrowing directly from Somaliland’s historical precedent, State Guurti councils could temporarily extend or shorten elected government mandates during severe security emergencies, though only within strictly defined constitutional limits.

V. District-Level Clan Committees — *Guddi Beeleed*

Below the Federal Member State level, each district would maintain a permanent District Clan Committee functioning as the foundation of the customary governance system. These bodies would connect grassroots dispute mediation to regional and national institutions.

District committees would consist of 7–15 representatives selected from all major local communities. Leadership structures would normally balance dominant and secondary clans to prevent monopolization by a single lineage group.

Their primary role would be early warning and rapid mediation. Meetings would occur monthly, while emergency sessions would be convened within forty-eight hours following violent incidents, grazing disputes, retaliatory killings, or politically sensitive clan confrontations.

The committees would maintain regular coordination with elected district councils and State Guurti institutions, creating an integrated mediation network capable of detecting instability before escalation into wider armed conflict.

VI. Structural Safeguards Against Politicization

The principal danger facing any institutionalized clan structure is capture by political elites, militia networks, or regional executives. The framework therefore incorporates extensive safeguards intended to preserve customary legitimacy and prevent conversion into partisan machinery.

Institutional Safeguards

Safeguard	Constitutional Purpose
Incompatibility rules	Elders barred from party politics and executive office
Transparency requirements	Proceedings publicly recorded and archived
Clan certification	Elders validated through local <i>shir</i> assemblies
Term limits	Maximum institutional service of 12 years
External observation	AU and IGAD observers attend annual plenaries

These safeguards seek to preserve the councils as mediating institutions rather than vehicles of patronage or authoritarian consolidation. Legitimacy is intended to derive from community recognition and procedural transparency rather than presidential appointment or militia coercion.

VII. Constitutional Entrenchment

For the system to remain durable, the National Tribal Council and State Guurti structures would require formal constitutional entrenchment within both the Federal Constitution and each Federal Member State constitution.

The Federal Constitution would establish the NTC as a co-equal constitutional institution distinct from Parliament, the Presidency, and the Judiciary. State constitutions would mirror these provisions in standardized form to prevent regional executives from dismantling or marginalizing customary councils.

Core competences such as *xeer* custodianship, inter-state mediation authority, and constitutional consultation rights would be protected through heightened amendment

thresholds. Alteration of these powers would require not only parliamentary supermajorities but also ratification through a national *Shir Beeleed* representing all major clan-families and minority communities.

The purpose of this entrenchment is to ensure that customary authority cannot be casually manipulated during periods of political instability or executive centralization.

VIII. Relationship Between Institutional Levels

Level	Institution	Primary Function
National	National Tribal Council	Constitutional mediation and inter-FMS arbitration
Federal Member State	State Guurti	Regional customary governance and conflict resolution
District	Guddi Beeleed	Early warning and grassroots mediation

This architecture creates a vertically integrated customary governance network linking local mediation structures to national constitutional stabilization mechanisms.

IX. Transition Beyond the 4.5 Formula

One of the proposal's central objectives is gradual transition beyond the existing 4.5 clan-allocation framework without abruptly dismantling the social structures that continue to sustain political legitimacy in Somalia.

Unlike the current system, in which clans directly allocate parliamentary representation, the proposed framework separates customary authority from electoral representation. Clan councils would stabilize and mediate society while elected legislatures increasingly derive legitimacy from citizenship and universal suffrage.

The proposal therefore does not abolish clan structures. Instead, it constitutionalizes and regulates them while progressively reducing their direct role in electoral competition.

Minority communities would receive guaranteed institutional representation rather than being grouped into a reduced "0.5" category. Women's participation would become structurally embedded at all levels rather than dependent solely on parliamentary quotas. Customary law would move from fragmented informal practice toward nationally documented and standardized frameworks supervised through constitutional institutions.

X. Overall Institutional Logic

The proposed Somali National Tribal Council system is fundamentally an attempt to reconcile two parallel sources of legitimacy that have coexisted uneasily throughout modern Somali history: the modern constitutional state and the customary clan order.

The framework assumes that durable Somali governance cannot emerge through simple replacement of customary authority with imported institutional models. Clan structures remain deeply embedded in dispute resolution, political legitimacy, security organization, and social trust networks. Attempts to ignore or suppress them have repeatedly produced institutional collapse or parallel informal power systems.

At the same time, unrestricted clan dominance over formal state institutions risks permanent fragmentation, exclusion, and political paralysis. The proposal therefore seeks a middle path in which customary authority is formalized, limited, constitutionalized, and balanced against elected democratic governance.

Under this model, elected institutions govern, courts adjudicate formal law, and executive administrations manage state policy, while clan councils preserve social legitimacy, mediate conflict, protect customary continuity, and function as constitutional stabilizers during periods of national crisis.

The system's success would ultimately depend not on legal design alone, but on whether Somali political actors accept restraint, consensus, and institutional balance as preferable alternatives to zero-sum clan competition and personalized patronage politics.

Having said that the strength of kinship ties as a societal glue tend to be correlated with the degree of modernisation of the state and the competence and effectiveness of the public administration, comparable to the bid for universal suffrage introduced by the Somali government ahead of the secession by Somaliland, recognised by Israel and the US, only, and a few other countries.

At all times, governance can be strengthened and policy-making be made more pluralist in Somalia, comparable to the greatness of the Ummah founded by Mohammed instituting a parsimonious religion with values such as forgiveness, peace, justice, adjudication, harmony to be reflected in the personal behaviour of each Muslim member of the political community.

By calling for free elections the Somali central government may have been too rash and offended the sensitivities of both reformers and elderlies, without addressing the challenges of the Somali polity, even as the Mogadisho-based elite may have tried to seek security beyond Perfection.

29. Theoretical Appraisal

The Horn of Africa is widely considered a regional security complex in international relations theory, meaning that its security dynamics are deeply interconnected and cannot be understood at the level of individual states alone.

In this sense, the Horn of Africa—comprising states such as Ethiopia, Somalia, Eritrea, Djibouti, Sudan, and often neighboring Kenya and South Sudan—is characterized by a tightly

linked system of security interdependence. Conflicts, alliances, and crises in one country routinely spill across borders and reshape the security environment of the entire region.

This classification as a security complex is based on the fact that threats in the region are predominantly regional rather than purely global. Issues such as civil wars, border disputes, insurgencies, maritime insecurity in the Red Sea and Gulf of Aden, and competition over strategic infrastructure are all deeply interwoven. As a result, no single state can achieve lasting security in isolation, since instability in one part of the system quickly affects all others.

A defining feature of the Horn of Africa security complex is the persistence of historical mistrust between neighboring states, often shaped by unresolved border issues, competing geopolitical narratives, and fragile institutional capacity. These tensions are reinforced by the strategic importance of the region's location, particularly its proximity to key global shipping routes linking the Indian Ocean to the Mediterranean via the Red Sea.

External actors further intensify this dynamic by engaging with multiple states simultaneously, sometimes reinforcing rivalries through competing partnerships, security cooperation, and infrastructure investments. This creates overlapping layers of influence that can either stabilize or destabilize the region depending on how they are managed.

Within this framework, the security of each state is closely tied to the behavior of its neighbors, making regional cooperation not optional but structurally necessary. This is why mechanisms such as collective security arrangements, regional integration initiatives, and diplomatic coordination are consistently emphasized in policy discussions about the Horn of Africa.

Ultimately, viewing the Horn of Africa as a security complex highlights a central reality: sustainable peace cannot be achieved through unilateral strategies, but only through coordinated regional frameworks that address political, economic, and security issues simultaneously.

Table

Feature of Security Complex	How It Appears in the Horn of Africa (e.g., Ethiopia context)	Implications	Actionable Insights
Security interdependence	Conflicts in Ethiopia, Somalia, Sudan, and Eritrea rapidly spill across borders	No state can secure itself independently	Build formal regional security coordination mechanisms
Geographic proximity	Dense clustering of states around Red Sea, Gulf of Aden, Nile basin	High transmission speed of instability	Prioritize border governance + early-warning systems
Historical enmity	Ethiopia–Eritrea tensions, Somalia fragmentation,	Trust deficit drives recurring crises	Invest in long-term reconciliation institutions

	Sudan civil conflicts		
Cross-border insurgencies	Movements like Al-Shabaab operating across Somalia and neighbors	Non-state actors regionalize insecurity	Strengthen joint counterterrorism frameworks
External power involvement	EU, Gulf states, China, US engaging multiple actors simultaneously	External competition amplifies local rivalries	Harmonize external engagement through AU-led frameworks
Strategic chokepoints	Red Sea, Bab el-Mandeb, Gulf of Aden maritime corridor	Global trade interest increases militarization risk	Promote cooperative maritime governance
State fragility asymmetry	Some states weak institutions (Somalia), others stronger (Ethiopia, Djibouti)	Power imbalance creates instability cycles	Support capacity-building in weaker states
Militarized security logic	Reliance on military responses to political disputes	Escalation risk remains high	Shift toward economic statecraft + diplomacy
Economic interdependence (low/moderate)	Trade corridors often politicized, limited integration	Economic ties insufficient to deter conflict	Expand regional infrastructure + trade integration
Institutional gaps	AU, IGAD exist but enforcement weak	Regional mechanisms underpowered	Strengthen binding dispute-resolution systems
Identity and narrative politics	Historical grievances shape policy choices	Perception drives escalation more than material gains	Promote narrative reconciliation programs
Zero-sum geopolitical framing	Ports, access, and corridors seen as strategic competition	Infrastructure becomes contested rather than shared	Reframe infrastructure as shared regional asset

The Horn of Africa functions as a tightly coupled Regional Security Complex, where security outcomes are co-produced by all actors rather than determined individually. Stability therefore depends less on unilateral strength and more on institutionalized cooperation, economic integration, and managed interdependence.

In this environment, states like Ethiopia cannot optimize security in isolation; they must operate within regional systems of trust, infrastructure sharing, and diplomatic coordination to achieve durable stability.

The Horn of Africa functions as a tightly interconnected Regional Security Complex, meaning that instability in one part of the system rapidly affects surrounding states and external powers. This structural reality shapes the strategic behavior of key actors across the Red Sea and adjacent regions. Saudi Arabia views the Horn as an extension of its maritime security environment due to its proximity across the Red Sea.

Security developments in Sudan, Somalia, and Ethiopia directly influence Saudi concerns over shipping routes and regional stability. The Bab el-Mandeb corridor is particularly important for Saudi trade and energy exports. As a result, Saudi policy emphasizes maritime security and the containment of regional instability. However, fragmented competition with other external actors can unintentionally intensify local rivalries. Egypt approaches the Horn primarily through the lens of Nile basin security and water resource management. Developments in Ethiopia, particularly regarding the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam, influence Egyptian strategic calculations. Sudan's internal instability also has direct implications for Egyptian border security. Because of these interdependencies, Egypt's security environment is deeply linked to broader regional dynamics.

RENVOI

I watch people the way other men watch weather.

Not because I care for them. Because patterns matter. Habit is the closest thing humanity has to destiny. A person believes they are making choices, but most are simply tracing grooves worn into them years ago — the same route to work, the same type of lover, the same phrasing when they lie, the same pause before confessing something they swore they'd never say aloud.

That pause is where I live.

You call it manipulation because you prefer comforting words for your own predictability. I call it architecture. If a man always reaches for certainty when frightened, I place certainty in front of him and wait. If vanity drives him, I offer an audience. If guilt drives him, I offer silence. Traps are not cages. They are invitations tailored so precisely that the target mistakes surrender for free will.

The amusing part is how deeply people resent observation while endlessly performing themselves. They leak everything. Postures. Vocabulary. Timing. Appetite. The desperate little edits they make to stories depending on who's listening. Human beings are porous creatures pretending to be sealed containers.

So yes, I spy on other human beings myself as well, real-time, especially when watched I can sense it miles away, and it must be unsettling for Wormold and Agent 5378 hoping to smoke you out or Europe out of the nation state. Or Europe out of the closet... Indiscriminate eavesdropping is Orwellian and for amateurs and governments drowning in useless noise. Precision matters. You study the fracture lines, then apply pressure only where the structure already wants to collapse.

And still, despite all this, people insist on believing intelligence is kindness.

It isn't.

Some of the sharpest minds I've encountered weaponize attention itself. To understand someone completely is to hold a dangerous instrument in your hand. Most lack the discipline to resist using it. I at least possess the honesty not to dress predation as morality.

You may find that offensive. Good. Offense is often the final defense of a person realizing they have been seen more clearly than they see themselves.

And if that unsettles your intelligence, perhaps it deserves unsettling.

Above the sky, there is Sun, remember.



In Conclusionem: A Constructive Vision for Ethiopian Leadership

The relationship between the European Union (EU) and Ethiopia has evolved through interconnected phases of trade expansion, political negotiation, and cultural exchange, shaped by both historical legacies and contemporary development challenges. Modern analyses emphasize that Ethiopia's strategic position in the Horn of Africa makes it central to regional stability and economic integration, while also exposing it to competing geopolitical pressures.

Trade between Ethiopia and the European Union has historically been anchored in agricultural exports—particularly coffee—and development-oriented imports such as machinery, textiles, and institutional support goods. Over time, this relationship has shifted from aid dependency toward a more complex model involving investment, industrial policy support, and regulatory alignment. However, structural constraints in Ethiopia's economy, including infrastructure gaps and vulnerability to external regulatory regimes, continue to shape trade asymmetries (Ethiopian Institute for Strategic Studies, 2026).

Recent EU regulatory frameworks, particularly environmental and supply-chain compliance requirements, have introduced new pressures on Ethiopian exporters, especially smallholder farmers dependent on coffee exports. These developments illustrate how trade relations are increasingly governed not only by tariffs and market access, but also by sustainability standards and digital traceability requirements.

Politically, EU–Ethiopia engagement has been characterized by a tension between normative diplomacy and sovereignty-driven state priorities. The EU’s external policy framework often emphasizes governance reform, human rights, and institutional transparency, while Ethiopian state actors frequently prioritize security, territorial integrity, and developmental autonomy.

This divergence becomes especially visible in the Horn of Africa’s broader geopolitical environment, where Ethiopia’s strategic concerns—such as access to the Red Sea, internal security dynamics, and regional rivalries—intersect with EU interests in stability, migration governance, and humanitarian protection (Ethiopian Institute for Strategic Studies, 2026). The result is a relationship that is cooperative in development sectors but often cautious or contested in political domains.

Cultural relations between Ethiopia and Europe have expanded significantly through diaspora communities, academic partnerships, and transnational religious and artistic networks. Ethiopian migrants in Europe act as intermediaries, shaping cultural flows such as music, cuisine, religious practice, and intellectual exchange. These communities contribute to soft diplomacy, even when formal political relations are strained.

At the same time, European cultural and institutional presence in Ethiopia—through universities, NGOs, and development agencies—has influenced urban governance models, education systems, and professional norms. However, this influence is uneven, often concentrated in urban centers and mediated by local elites who filter external engagement according to domestic political and economic interests.

Overall, EU–Ethiopia relations reflect a layered and evolving system of exchange rather than a linear partnership. Trade liberalization, political negotiation, and cultural interaction operate simultaneously but unevenly, producing both cooperation and friction. The relationship is best understood as a negotiated interdependence shaped by asymmetries in power, differing institutional logics, and the mediating role of regional and diaspora actors.

Ethiopia plays a central strategic role in the Horn of Africa. It is landlocked, so gaining access to seaports is a key national priority. Djibouti is currently its main trade and maritime gateway. Ethiopia focuses heavily on regional security due to nearby instability.

It is involved in conflicts and diplomacy in Somalia, Sudan, and Eritrea. The Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam shapes tensions with Sudan and Egypt. It seeks to position itself as a regional power and peacekeeper. Overall, its “calculus” is balancing security, water, and economic access⁹

A successful Ethiopian Red Sea strategy would present Ethiopia as:

- a guarantor of regional connectivity,
- a supporter of sovereignty,

⁹ <https://ethiopianinstitute.org/category/challenges-in-ethiopia/>)

- a champion of African economic integration,
- a diplomatic bridge between Africa and the Gulf,
- and a stabilizing force in the Horn.

The central strategic insight is this:

Ethiopia's long-term access to the Red Sea will be secured more effectively through trust, trade, and interdependence than through pressure or confrontation.

If Ethiopia can reposition itself as the engine of cooperative regional development rather than geopolitical competition, it could emerge as one of Africa's most influential diplomatic and economic powers in the coming decades. This is a co-evolutionary approach also involving both strengthening of governance and coordination of the strategic engagement of the EU with Addis Abbeba and a recalibration of the Global Gateway program overthere, geared to overall interests in the Red Sea Area itself in need of an EU strategy encompassing political, economic and human aspects and with maritime security increasingly passed on to the riparians led by Masr and KSA.

Furthermore, to Horn of Africa, The European Union's key asks include constructive engagement in negotiations on the transformation of the Nile Basin Initiative into a Nile River Commission, aimed at strengthening cooperative and rules-based water governance among basin states.

We also emphasize diplomatic efforts toward a peaceful resolution of the Yemen Civil War, including sustained engagement with regional and international partners to support negotiations and de-escalation.

In addition, they call for a stronger and more proactive approach to the partnership between the European Union and the African Union, particularly in advancing cooperation on development, security, and multilateral diplomacy.

The EU must first disentangle relations between Eritrea and Ethiopia and address Nile Politics, and in parallel make moves on Yemen in cooperation with the local brethren. BRU should engage Somalia in parallel by means of stabilisation addressing the root causes of conflict, governance challenges and lack of economic opportunity, as it puts a block on the conflict economy overthere and start becoming more practical and solution oriented, more constructive critical during the future deliberations with the Federal Government of Somalia, a political community we know more about for reasons of famine and drought and the overrepresentation in the EU's crime stats. Indeed, the EU-Somalia relations appears to be having momentum and to be the least path of resistance in the stabilisation of the Horn of Africa security complex, but the EU's reengagement is not geared neither to contain conflict nor does it address the Ethio-Eritrean conundrum in any systematic manner encompassing all the actors. The partnership is a *quid-pro-quod* between Somalia and the EU, as Europe reengages in this challenging region decisive for trade economy of all great powers and acting as a bridge between southern Arabia and the hinterland. Eritrea's nationhood has a certain pedigree in the region predating even that of Somalia and perhaps even Ethiopia.

Egypt, Sudan and Ethiopia must all be stable and Iran reduced for Saudi Arabia to be secure and assume greater responsibility for Red Sea security and to being leading in the organisation of this strategically fragmented region towards what could ultimately become a Red Sea economic community.

The Horn of Africa should not be understood merely as a region of recurring crisis, but as a living political system shaped by adaptation under pressure. Conflict, migration, climate stress, and foreign intervention are not isolated variables; they form interconnected mechanisms that continuously reorganize power and survival.

This research proposes that instability in the region often emerges not from the absence of order, but from the coexistence of multiple competing orders. State institutions, clan loyalties, armed networks, commercial interests, and foreign actors each construct overlapping systems of authority. The resulting landscape produces both resilience and fragmentation simultaneously.

Further study is especially necessary because conventional policy frameworks frequently misunderstand local behavioral realities. External observers tend to analyze the Horn through fixed categories such as terrorism, poverty, or failed governance, while populations on the ground navigate fluid systems of negotiation, identity, and pragmatic survival. A deeper understanding of these adaptive behaviors may reveal why certain interventions fail while informal structures persist.

The strategic importance of the region surrounding the Red Sea and the Bab-el-Mandeb ensures that global powers will continue competing for influence there. Yet durable stability is unlikely to emerge solely through military presence or infrastructure investment unless local legitimacy, ecological sustainability, and social trust are addressed together.

Ultimately, the Horn of Africa offers a critical case study for understanding how human societies reorganize themselves under prolonged uncertainty. It reveals how communities preserve identity amid fragmentation, how power adapts when formal institutions weaken, and how geography can magnify both vulnerability and strategic importance. Continued interdisciplinary research may therefore contribute not only to regional understanding, but also to broader theories of governance, resilience, and human adaptation in the twenty-first century.

A central counterargument against deeper external engagement in the Horn of Africa is that it does not reliably produce stability, even when it is framed as stabilizing. External involvement often strengthens short-term security arrangements while weakening long-term institutional legitimacy. Governments or factions that rely heavily on foreign support may gain immediate capacity, but they can also lose credibility domestically, especially if populations perceive them as externally sustained rather than internally accountable.

Another argument is that external engagement can intensify fragmentation rather than reduce it. Because multiple outside powers are often involved simultaneously, local political actors gain incentives to align selectively with different patrons. Instead of consolidating authority, this can multiply rivalries and deepen internal divisions. The result is not unified governance but a layered system of competing external and domestic alliances.

A related critique is that much external involvement is driven by security priorities such as counterterrorism, maritime protection, and migration control. While these concerns are real, they can distort broader development goals. Resources and attention may concentrate around strategic ports, capitals, and military-relevant corridors while peripheral regions remain underdeveloped. This creates uneven state capacity, where “secure zones” coexist with neglected areas that remain sources of instability.

There is also a political economy critique that external investment in infrastructure and ports can shift control over strategic assets without necessarily improving national cohesion. In some cases, states may become dependent on external financing or find themselves locked into asymmetrical economic relationships. This can reinforce elite bargaining structures rather than broader national development.

Finally, some scholars argue that the region already contains adaptive informal systems of governance that function under conditions of scarcity and fragmentation. From this perspective, heavy external intervention may disrupt local balancing mechanisms rather than improve them, replacing flexible survival systems with rigid structures that do not fit local realities.

These counterarguments directly intersect with the roles of Saudi Arabia and Egypt in the Red Sea system.

For Egypt, the Horn of Africa is indirectly tied to national security through its reliance on the Suez Canal, which connects the Red Sea to the Mediterranean via the Suez Canal system. Stability in the Red Sea is therefore a core strategic concern. Egyptian policy tends to prioritize predictable state authority in neighboring regions, support for formal institutions, and broader multilateral security arrangements that reduce risks to maritime trade flows.

For Saudi Arabia, the Red Sea is a directly adjacent strategic space. Its engagement with the Horn of Africa reflects concerns about maritime security, regional influence, and protection of trade routes, especially those linked to energy exports and imports. Saudi strategy often involves bilateral partnerships, investment in ports and infrastructure, and political engagement designed to extend strategic depth across the Red Sea corridor.

The tension between these roles and the counterarguments lies in the risk of over-securitization and competitive external influence. Both Egypt and Saudi Arabia have incentives to prioritize stability and security, but their involvement can also contribute to overlapping external alignments within Horn states. This may increase fragmentation if local actors use competing external partnerships to balance internal rivals.

Ultimately, the Horn of Africa sits within a structural paradox. It is strategically indispensable to major regional powers due to its position near the Bab-el-Mandeb strait and Red Sea shipping routes, yet it is politically and socially too complex to be “stabilized” through securitisation of everyday challenges that requires different means and ways in the interest of peace and prosperity. The most persistent risk is that external involvement, if uncoordinated or narrowly security-driven, reproduces instability in more complex and durable forms rather than putting forward solutions that addresses the issues of nation and people pragmatically. And by pragmatic we refer to accomplish something in a business-like manner overthere.

Policy Recommendations

The EU should publicly reaffirm its unwavering support for the Algiers Agreement, emphasizing that it remains the foundational legal framework for resolving outstanding tensions between Eritrea and Ethiopia, and for preserving territorial sovereignty as a non-negotiable principle of international order. It should clearly signal that any attempts to bypass or undermine this agreement would risk destabilizing an already fragile regional balance. At the same time, the EU should firmly oppose any military solution regarding Red Sea access, underscoring that the use of force to secure ports or maritime corridors would have severe regional and global consequences, particularly for international trade and energy security. Instead, it should consistently advocate for diplomacy, dialogue, and negotiated settlements as the only viable path forward.

The EU should encourage structured and sustained economic negotiations between Eritrea and Ethiopia, aimed at transforming competition over access and infrastructure into mutually beneficial cooperation. These negotiations should be gradual, technically supported, and insulated from short-term political tensions. To reinforce this, the EU can deploy its Global Gateway strategy to finance regional connectivity projects, including roads, rail corridors, energy interconnectors, and digital infrastructure that link the Horn of Africa more deeply with global markets. Such investments should be designed to promote interdependence and reduce incentives for confrontation.

In parallel, the EU should actively support African Union-led mediation mechanisms, recognizing the AU as the primary legitimate platform for African conflict resolution. This support should include political backing, technical assistance, and financial resources to strengthen mediation capacity and implementation monitoring. The EU should also facilitate structured technical discussions on potential commercial access to Assab, focusing on practical logistics, customs arrangements, and transit frameworks that enhance economic efficiency without challenging sovereignty or territorial integrity.

A further priority should be the promotion of cross-border trade and infrastructure development, particularly in areas where local economies can benefit from reduced barriers and improved connectivity. This should be complemented by expanded humanitarian and reconciliation programs aimed at addressing the long-term consequences of conflict, including displacement, trauma, and food insecurity. These programs should also strengthen local governance capacity and community resilience.

Wherever conditions permit, the EU should encourage a phased approach to sanctions normalization and economic integration, linking gradual easing of restrictions to verifiable progress in cooperation, stability, and respect for international norms. This conditionality-based approach would provide incentives for constructive engagement while maintaining accountability.

Finally, the EU should develop a comprehensive, long-term Red Sea strategy that integrates security, maritime trade, energy transit, migration management, and diplomatic engagement into a unified policy framework. This strategy should ensure coherence across EU institutions and member states, strengthen coordination with regional partners, and safeguard critical

maritime corridors while promoting sustainable development and long-term stability in the Horn of Africa at the nexus of the Red Sea and the Indian ocean, a major trading corridor for both riparians and world powers.

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